

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES				
DSEX	CSCX			MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY	As on Wednesday STANDARD CHARTERED BANK
Closed	Closed	Gold ▲	\$1,632.30 (per ounce)	▲ 4.94%	▼ 4.51%	▼ 0.71%	▼ 0.60%	BUY TK 83.95	89.67	98.12	11.69	
		Oil ▼	\$27.05 (per barrel)	29,946.77	18,664.60	2,487.56	2,764.91	SELL TK 84.95	93.47	101.92	12.29	



# BUSINESS




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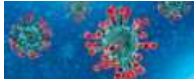
- ফান্ড ট্রান্সফার • মোবাইল উপ-আপ
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## TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

*Bangladesh's private healthcare setup has expanded manifold over the decade, attracting thousands of crores of taka in investment. Today, it is a perfect complement to the stretched public healthcare system. By Soheli Parvez*

# Private hospitals willing to join fight

Over the last few days, Health and Hope Hospital has put a restriction on the number of attendants with a patient to just one, at any time of the day.

It has pasted a guideline for proper hand washing and introduced hand rub just at the main entrance to ensure that everyone cleans their hands before entering the healthcare facility -- a measure the private hospital has taken to prevent the contagion of the exponentially communicable coronavirus.

At the time of writing, the lethal, pneumonia-like disease has affected 44 people and claimed the lives of five since it was first reported on March 7.

The 16-year hospital is not an isolated case. About one-fourth of a kilometre away is the sprawling Square Hospitals, which has also taken such measures. And so did the state-of-the-art Apollo Hospital in Bashundhara residential area.

"We are taking down the travel history of any patient coming to us for treatment," said Mahmud Hossain, senior manager of Health and Hope.

The 80-bed hospital is one of the 200-bed private hospitals and clinics that have cropped up on Panthapath, Green Road and greater Dhanmondi area of Dhaka city over the last three decades.

The inadequate number of public hospitals in comparison to the population and their lacking facilities and services have drawn private investors to the business of medicare since early 1980s.

Since then, private investors poured in thousands of crores of taka to set up state-of-the-art hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres.

The private healthcare sector is growing and attracting investment from home and abroad, thanks to the expanding income for steady growth of the Bangladesh's economy, rising health awareness and a burgeoning middle-class who are now demanding -- better and quality services.

For example, Impulse Hospital in Dhaka began operation in September 2017 and 33 more firms have got no objection certificate from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) to set up hospitals, clinic and diagnostic facilities.

Of late in February, Evercare and UK's CDC Group said it would take over majority stakes of Apollo Hospital Dhaka's owner STS Holdings.

The transaction value, which remains undisclosed, is said to be in the neighbourhood of thousand crores of taka.

The industry's annual turnover of would be \$6 billion -- which is double that of the annual pharmaceutical market -- and it is growing at 25 per cent every year at the very least, according to AM Shamim, managing director of Labaid Group, one of the biggest private sector healthcare providers.

Beginning in 1989 with a diagnostic centre in Dhaka, Labaid today operates 30 diagnostic centres, a 350-bed cardiac hospital and a



“The government should involve the private sector to fight the coronavirus pandemic holistically because they account for the majority of the healthcare system in Bangladesh.



specialised hospital. People's predisposition has evolved, he said.

"Once, many were desperate to get a cabin in Dhaka Medical College Hospital for caesarean delivery. Now, none of them go there."

People now head straight to the doctors' if they are unwell, which was not the case before. Self-consciousness and awareness have increased.

"So, there is a gap in the market," Shamim added.

So much that the Bangladesh Investment Development

Authority (BIDA) has put healthcare as a potential sector for investment.

It said Bangladesh has about \$2 billion of untapped healthcare market.

The demand for health care is growing 21 per cent annually, according to BIDA.

The reason being, the demand for healthcare services is accelerating because of increasing purchasing power of the growing middle and upper middle classes, it said.

Bangladeshis spend about \$2.04 billion in a year for medical treatment abroad, which is 1.94 per cent of the country's total GDP, according to BIDA.

Including Labaid's healthcare facilities, the country has 5,000 private hospitals and clinics,

according to Directorate General of Health Services' (DGHS) Health Bulletin 2018.

In 2007, the number of private clinics and hospitals was 1,000, and they had 16,000 beds, just half the total beds in public sector hospital, showed official data.

Sector insiders said the pace of establishment of medical centres by private sector rose at the turn of this century, facilitated by government's patronisation, particularly withdrawal of value-added tax on diagnostic services and duty benefit to import diagnostic and hospital equipment.

Today, because of expansion, private healthcare providers have treatment facilities for diseases such as heart, kidney and liver.

Once people used to go to India or Thailand for bypass surgeries, said Md Mainul Ahasan, secretary general of the Bangladesh Private Clinic and Diagnostic Owner's Association (BPCDOA).

Now, that surgery can easily be performed in Bangladesh.

Only a section of affluent people goes abroad for the surgery.

"We have had a lot of development and we are advancing," said Ahasan, also the managing director of Green Life Medical College & Hospital.

Before, diagnostic tests for a number of diseases were not available.

"Today, whole body scanning is possible here," he added.

Private healthcare providers cater to 64 per cent of the treatment in Bangladesh, said ABM Haroon, managing director of Samorita Hospital, one of the oldest private hospitals in the country.

"The rest is done by the public sector," said Haroon, also senior vice president of Bangladesh Private Clinic and Diagnostic Owner's Association (BPCDOA).

The Health Bulletin 2018 showed that private sector hospitals and clinics have 90,600 beds, whereas hospital beds under the DGHS were 53,000.

There is a need for the private sector to expand further to provide affordable healthcare to people in the low-income bracket, said Ahasan, who is a physician by training.

More hospitals are also needed to discourage people from going to India for treatment, he said.

"There is still enough opportunity in the market. The number of patients is huge. So, there will be no shortage of treatment seekers if big hospitals come with quality doctors," he added.

Haroon said investment is particularly necessary outside of the metropolitan cities such that residents can get better healthcare services.

Investment to develop more nursing institute is necessary as well, he said, while calling upon the government to declare it a thrust sector.

Despite the expansion of private medical care services, a large number of people still go outside for treatment because of confidence deficit.

"A section of the highly-affluent population will always go abroad in their quest for better treatment," said Rumana Huque, professor of the department of economics at the Dhaka University.

But the middle-income group will stay here for treatment if regulation and monitoring are strengthened to ensure quality care by the private sector.

Haque, who follows the healthcare system in Bangladesh, suggested the government to fix standards or certain criteria for hospitals and clinics to follow so that the authorities can monitor the quality of care.

"This will increase the confidence of people."

Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, kidney and heart diseases are increasing and treatment of the diseases cost quite a lot.

As the government does not have enough resources to ensure treatment for the country's huge number of population, the private sector will always plays an important role in this regard, according to Haque.

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## Business and ethics must go hand in hand for private hospitals

Private hospitals and clinics in Bangladesh should ensure high-class service, maintain ethics and win the confidence of patients to take the country's burgeoning healthcare system to the next level, said a top representative of private hospitals.

Bangladesh's healthcare sector has made impressive strides in the last two three decades: diagnosis and advanced-level treatment such as bypass surgery, kidney transplant and liver operation are locally available, an improvement that was unimaginable even two decades ago.

Yet, the outflow of patients to India, Singapore and Thailand for treatment continues, reflecting a confidence crisis among the healthcare-seekers and raising a question of what to do for the sector to ensure world-class standard.

Proper training of doctors and nurses and a change in mentality are necessary to improve the overall healthcare standard in the country, said Md Mainul Ahasan, secretary general of the Bangladesh Private Clinic Diagnostic Owners Association.



Mainul Ahasan

"If we only think of profit after establishing hospitals, we will not be able to make it. We have to think of both service and profit. We should not run after too much profit -- at least in the health sector."

Business-only attitude will enable only a section of people who have the means to get medical care in Bangladesh, depriving others.

Additionally, modern hospitals need to be built. Otherwise, people will go abroad, said Ahasan, also a physician.

According to him, government support is also necessary. The government should have a good hospital in every upazila and district so that patients don't have to travel far for treatment.

"Healthcare facilities at the district and upazila levels should be expanded."

In an interview with The Daily Star, he reflected upon the progress made in the country's healthcare setup, particularly by the private sector.

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## New law underway to improve healthcare quality at private hospitals

The government is framing a new law with the view to improving the quality of healthcare services in private hospitals and clinics in Bangladesh, said a top official of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

"We expect that there will be improvement in healthcare services after the enactment of the new law," said Md Aminul Hasan, director for hospital at the DGHS.

Standards of service delivery will be fixed and licences will not be issued unless the hospitals comply with the criteria. Licences will also not be renewed.

The move comes as the number of private hospitals and clinics in the country is increasing since public hospitals struggle to meet the growing demand for healthcare.

And the existing law, Medical Practice and Private Clinics and Laboratories (Regulation) Ordinance, 1982, falls short of expectations for quality medical care among treatment-seekers, a glaring example of that is reflected by



Md Aminul Hasan

the number of making patients' regular trips abroad, particularly to India, Thailand and Singapore.

"There is no shortage of equipment. There is, somehow, confidence crisis among people. We are trying so that the quality of healthcare improves and people get the belief that there is no need to go abroad for treatment."

In Bangladesh, private healthcare facilities have sprung up driven by demand as the number of public hospitals and the number of beds are not enough to provide healthcare to the growing population.

"Naturally, public hospitals are failing to accommodate. As a result, private organisations are automatically taking this opportunity and are trying to do business by operating commercially."

Despite the expansion of the sector, the law has remained unchanged although it faces limitations in ensuring better quality healthcare services.

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