



# The Daily Star



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## Know true extent, know it now

Public health experts once again raise alarm as country enters crucial fourth week; say authorities must scale up tests immediately

WASIM BIN HABIB and MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

As Bangladesh enters fourth week since it reported the first Covid-19 case, public health experts now call for expanding and speeding up the testing process immediately to understand the scale of the outbreak.

Though the country didn't report any new cases for two consecutive days, the low count is the result of limited testing, and the situation could change quickly like it did in several countries, including Italy, Spain, France, Germany and the US, they say.

These badly affected countries had also reported a low number of cases in the initial weeks but saw a spike in the number of infections from fourth week, the experts mentioned.

Without widespread testing, it's not possible to gauge the spread of coronavirus in the country with a population of 16.5 crore. Widespread testing can give the authorities a clearer picture of the scale of virus transmission, they point out.

The country recorded its first coronavirus case on March 8. Three weeks later, the number stood at 48. So far, five people have died from the virus.

The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) claimed to have carried out enough tests. It said there has been community transmission on a limited scale.

The World Health Organization has urged countries to test as many people as possible to curb the pandemic, but Bangladesh has one of the lowest testing rates compared to many other Asian countries that have been successful so far in containing the spread of the virus.

From January 21 till yesterday, Bangladesh tested 1,185 people for the virus, which is far below South Korea's daily testing capacity of around 20,000.

The IEDCR has been testing only those who have returned from the affected countries or come in contact with an infected person or shown symptoms after two weeks of quarantine. It, however, is now expanding the scope of testing.

Over the last two months, more than eight lakh people called the IEDCR hotlines for virus-related issues.

According to official records, 802,580 corona-related calls were made to the hotlines from January 21 till yesterday. Yesterday, 73,134 such calls were made on

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**TEST, TEST, TEST:** People are tested at a community centre in Dearborn, Michigan. Right, a health worker conducts a swab test in Bronx, New York City; a German doctor takes a sample from a car driver in Halle, eastern Germany; medical professionals wait to administer a COVID-19 test in Daly City, California.

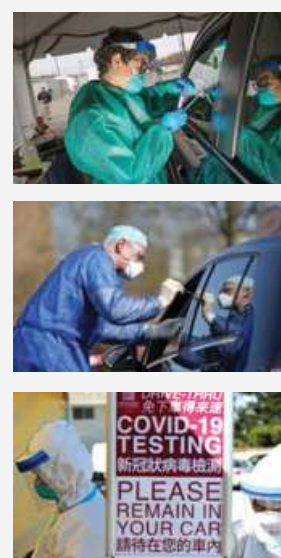


PHOTO: AFP

### COVID-19 IN BANGLADESH

**8,02,580** coronavirus-related calls received since January 21

**1,076** tests done so far; 4.47% of them coronavirus positive

**73,134** calls on three different hotlines in 24 hours

- 109** Tests in 24 hours
- 0** Infected in 24 hours
- 48** Total cases
- 28** under treatment
- 5** Total deaths
- 15** Total recoveries

### GLOBAL UPDATE

- 31,734** Total Deaths
- 145,696** Total Recovered
- 679,977** Total Confirmed

IEDCR, DGHS: SOURCE OF PHONE CALLS, TESTS  
LAST UPDATE: YESTERDAY EVENING

## 'Don't worry, be prepared to face any situation'

PM urges people

BSS, DHAKA



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the people not to worry about the Covid-19 and to be prepared to face any situation that may occur in the wake of the virus outbreak.

She also said that it was necessary to ensure supply of food to the day-labourers and working class people during the crisis period.

"I'll tell all that they shouldn't worry, rather they'll have to remain prepared for tackling any situation that may rise due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus," she said.

Sheikh Hasina added, "We've to take measures in such a way that we can protect every person of the country [from the deadly disease]."

The prime minister said this while receiving

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## Four die with Covid-19-like symptoms

STAR REPORT

At least four people with coronavirus symptoms died in three districts yesterday while a patient with Covid-19 symptoms ran away from a hospital in Kishoreganj.

In Barishal, two patients undergoing treatment at the isolation unit of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) died yesterday morning.

One of the patients, aged about 40, was suffering from fever, cough and breathing issues, said Bakir Hossain, director of the hospital.

He had received treatment at Patuakhali Medical College Hospital for four days and was taken to SBMCH on Saturday, the doctor said.

Another 45-year-old woman died at the hospital with coronavirus symptoms, including fever, breathing difficulties and diarrhoea, said Bakir.

Blood samples of the two deceased and four other suspected patients, who are undergoing treatment at the hospital, will be sent to IEDCR, he added.

Meanwhile, in Khulna, a 70-year-old man, who was receiving treatment at the isolation unit of Khulna Medical College Hospital with flu-like symptoms since

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### CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

## Global toll 31,000

World braces for long-term lockdowns; patient-surge overwhelms the hospitals in the US, Europe

AFP, Madrid

Spain yesterday reported a national daily record of 838 coronavirus deaths in a fresh warning to the world that long-term lockdowns may be needed to halt the deadly march of a disease that has claimed more than 31,000 lives.

A deluge of patients are overwhelming hospitals in Europe and the United States, now the focal points of a pandemic that is upending the global economy in unprecedented ways.

In the US, an about-face by President Donald Trump on quarantining New York highlighted the panic and confusion unfurling across many parts of the world trying to contain the virus.

In Spain, where the 24-hour death toll rose for the third consecutive day, lockdown measures have been tightened as officials cling to hope that slowing growth rates mean they are nearing the peak of the crisis.

COVID-19's relentless spread has infected nearly every sphere of life, from wiping out millions of jobs to postponing elections and putting a pause on the world's sporting scene.

It has also spurred a worldwide scramble

for medical gear as exhausted doctors and nurses in some of the world's wealthiest cities struggle to dole out limited stocks of face masks and life-saving respirators.

From snorkel masks to 3D-printed face shields, creative solutions have popped up around the globe in efforts to plug the gap as factories rush to keep up with international demand.

But frontline medical workers in places like Italy, Spain and New York, where the crisis is already-biting hard, don't have time to spare.

"Everybody is scared," said Diana Torres, a mother of three who works in a rehabilitation centre at New York's Mount Sinai hospital group, where a 48-year-old nurse manager recently died from COVID-19.

"I have nothing for my head, nothing for my shoes," she said, explaining how it took significant effort to acquire one face shield, one N-95 respirator mask and one gown -- all of which she said she must reuse.

Cities around the world have fallen eerily quiet as a third of humanity adjusts to life confined within the walls of their own homes.

Some leaders warn the worst is yet

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## Six held for 'spreading rumours'

100 social media accounts under watch, 50 blocked

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and RAHUL ISLAM

Police yesterday arrested six people for "spreading rumours" and claimed to have kept over 100 social media accounts under surveillance for their involvement in spreading misleading information and rumours regarding the coronavirus outbreak.

As a part of taking action, police have already blocked 50 other social media accounts and arrested around 12 people from different districts of the country, including Dhaka, in the last two weeks, a high official of police, involved with social media monitoring, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are keeping close contact with all police units across the country and have arrested six

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## Hope battles despair on Dhaka streets

Wealthy people, community-based voluntary organisations stepping forward to support the needy

RASHIDUL HASAN and MUNTAKIM SAAD

Dhaka is eerie quiet, much like most capitals and countries around the world as they grapple with a common enemy -- the spread of the coronavirus. Bangladesh is currently in the midst of a country-wide shut down that has been in force from March 26 and will extend till April 4.

Daily income of rickshaw-puller Aminul, who operates in Farmgate, in normal times the capital's busiest area, has almost dwindled to nothing. Like millions who depend on their labour and the city being the vibrant one it was less than a month ago, anxiety has gripped him about how he will provide even the basic necessities to his family of four.

But a pleasant surprise was in store for him. A passenger eventually came by, headed for Mohammadpur. After reaching the destination, the passenger gave him a bag full of groceries -- rice, lentils, oil, eggs, potato, biscuits, soap and washing powder -- that would support Aminul and his family for at least two days.

The despair on the streets and in homes seem to have bred an attitude that is breaking down barriers between classes and producing tales of fellowship and humanity. The effort has been undertaken at an individual level as well as from community-based voluntary organisation across the city and they have stepped forward to distribute daily needs to the poor.

Talking to this newspaper, the passenger, who is an employee of a private organisation, said he and his relatives have undertaken an initiative to support day labourers every day on their way to work.

"If you are going to office or if you come out for daily needs, at least help a day labourer with groceries," he said.

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## ICCB to be turned into Covid-19 hospital

Bashundhara offers govt amid outbreak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

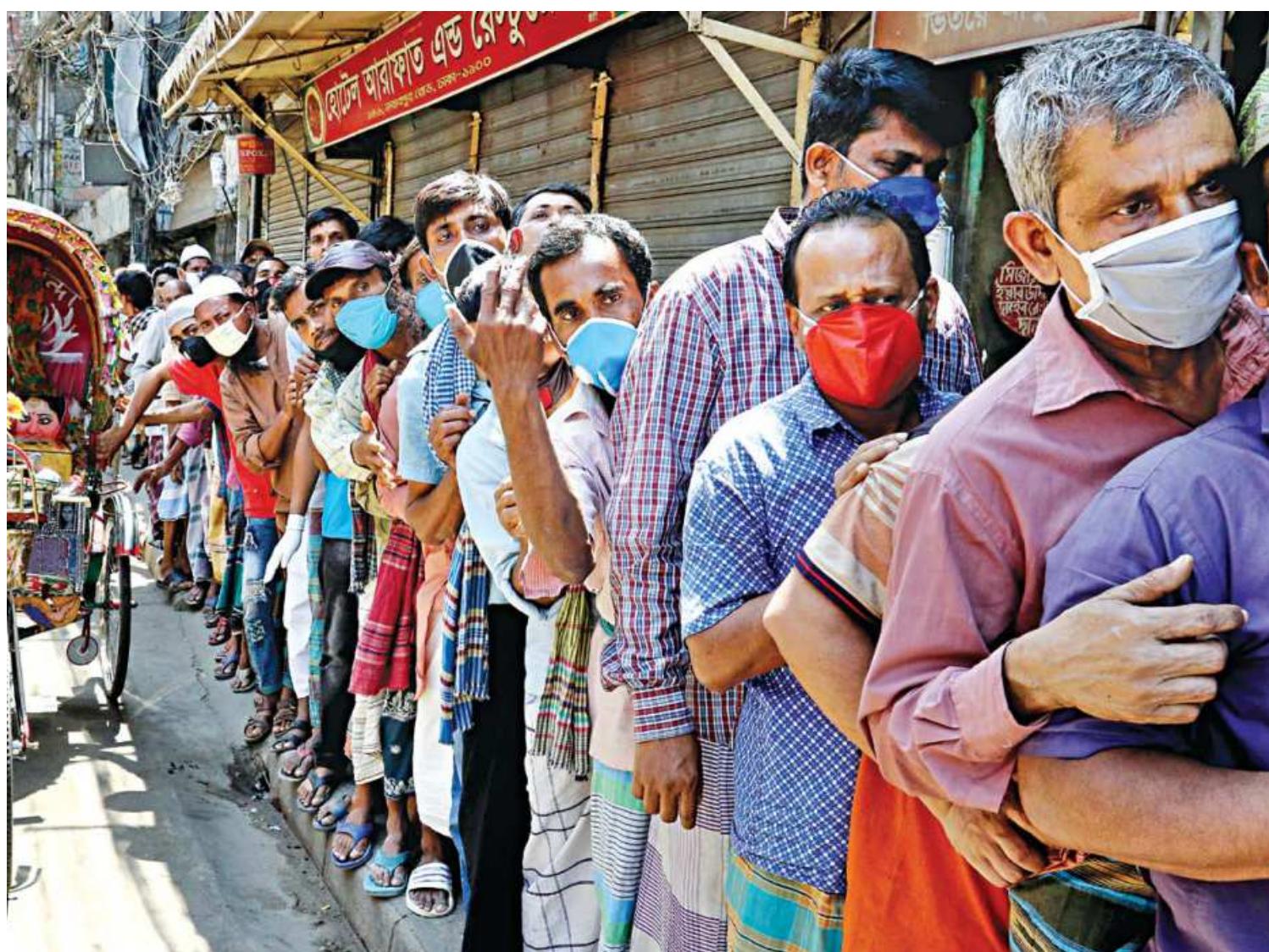
Bashundhara Group has given the government the International Convention City Bashundhara (ICCB) in the city's Kuril area to be converted into a hospital to treat Covid-19 patients.

The group, one of the country's largest conglomerates, handed over a letter to PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikus, who accepted it on behalf of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in this regard when its Managing Director Sayem Sobhan Anvir gave him a cheque of Tk 10 crore at the Prime Minister's Office to fight the spread of coronavirus in the country.

Mohammad Abu Tayeb, adviser (media) of the organisation, said Hasina joined the cheque-giving ceremony via video conferencing from the Gono Bhaban.

Tayeb told The Daily Star that the PM accepted

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Ignoring experts's advice for social distancing, people form a tight queue on Nabapur Road in Old Dhaka yesterday to collect relief materials a local business was offering there.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## 'Everything was good, then came coronavirus'

Low-income families in the city staring at bleak days

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARI and RASHIDUL HASAN

Mainul Islam was waiting by his rickshaw near an almost deserted Nakhhalpara Rail Gate in the capital for over 20 minutes.

The man, aged over 40, readily agreed when asked for a ride and did not even ask to know the fare.

"You are the first passenger I got after my lunch," he said around 4:00pm yesterday.

Only two weeks ago, he and his wife, a domestic staff, used to make enough to feed themselves and support his mother and two school-going sons in his village home in Gaibandha sadar.

"Everything was going fine. Then came something called corona and changed our lives," Mainul said.

He is among the thousands of people who are suddenly finding it difficult to make a living after the government began a 10-day shutdown to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Thousands of people left Dhaka ahead of the shutdown and most of those still in the city are barely leaving home.

Many day-labourers and low-income people like Mainul did not leave the city fearing that they would not be able to find work in the village.

Mainul, who owns his rickshaw, used to earn Tk 600-700 a day and his wife Tk 7,000-8,000 a month.

"I am earning about a third of what I used to while my wife has become unemployed with only half-a-month's salary.

"I have to pay Tk 3,000 to the landlord in a few days

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