



The Daily Star



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1 infected in 24 hours | **49** Total cases | **19** Total recovery | **5** Death | **35,114** Total deaths | **1,56,838** Total recoveries | **7,41,030** Total cases

Shutdown likely to be a week longer

PARITHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government is likely to extend the ongoing shutdown for at least a week as part of its efforts to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Public health experts are in favour of such a move as the country has entered the crucial fourth week since it reported the first Covid-19 case. The ongoing shutdown will end on April 4.

At first, the government may extend the shutdown for five days till April 9. In that case, offices will reopen on April 12 after weekly holidays on April 10 and 11, according to sources.

The next course of action would be decided considering the overall situation at that time, they added.

"The government is actively considering extending the holidays because we don't want any gathering in such a situation. You will get to know the decision within a day or two," a minister told this newspaper yesterday, seeking anonymity.

A secretary of the government said, "The decision [to extend the shutdown] has not been taken yet. However, it is now under discussion and there is a possibility of extending the holidays."

Replying to a query, the secretary said, "It may be extended up to 10 days."

Sources in the government said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would hold a video conference with the officials of all 64 districts today to ensure better coordination of the ongoing activities to prevent the spread of the virus.

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A 12-year-old boy and his four-month-old brother sleep on the central reservation of a street near Kamalapur Internal Container Depot in the capital. Their speech-impaired mother left them there to look for food when many who could help them have left the capital amid the coronavirus outbreak.

PHOTO: MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

US death toll could be one lakh or more

Says Trump
CNN ONLINE

President Donald Trump acknowledged Sunday for the first time that deaths in the United States from coronavirus could reach 1,00,000 or more, adding that if the death toll stays at or below 100,000, "we all together have done a very good job."

Trump's assertion came after he was asked about comments the nation's top infectious disease expert, Dr Anthony Fauci, made earlier Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union" that based on models, 1,00,000 Americans or more could die from the virus.

On Sunday, Trump said during an evening news conference at the White House that he'd decided to extend the nationwide social distancing guidelines -- which include suggested limits on large gatherings -- for another 30 days to April 30.

During his news conference, Trump said he

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Import 1,000 ventilators immediately

In interview with *Star*, Labaid MD also urges govt to loan pvt hospitals Tk 500cr to install 10,000 in phases

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government should help private hospitals procure ventilators because there could be an acute shortage of the key device in the fight against coronavirus, Labaid Limited Managing Director AM Shamim said.



Dr AM Shamim

Ventilator crisis is a pressing issue in different countries and if the government lends money immediately, the private hospitals will be able to install 1,000 ventilators in four to six weeks, he hoped.

"The government should provide us Tk 500 crore in interest-free loans to install around 10,000 ventilators in two months," Shamim told *The Daily Star* in an interview yesterday.

"The coming months are crucial because there could be an outbreak. We still have time, if we start working together now. We will be able to tackle the situation," he said.

He said the hospitals would be able to procure ventilators from China, spending Tk 6-8 lakh for each.

Bangladesh has so far reported 49 confirmed cases of Covid-19, with five deaths. Critically ill patients need ventilator support.

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COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Little souls left exposed

Orphans, street children now even more vulnerable for lack of hygiene products, basic medical services

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

As the coronavirus gains a foothold in the country, the increasing vulnerability of millions of orphaned and destitute children remains largely unaddressed.

Hundreds of thousands of street children lack awareness about hygiene practices and those living in orphanages don't have access to hygiene products and basic medical services.

According to an estimate by the non-governmental organisation SOS Children's Villages, there are around 4,400,000 orphaned children in Bangladesh.

However, the government's department of social services knows of around 2,00,000 kids who live in 85 government-run children's homes or "Shishu Paribar", and 4,000 private orphanages.

Homeless and orphaned children who live in the streets and in informal settlements remain beyond the purview of government monitoring during this health crisis.

Moreover, as the cities are increasingly deserted with movement restricted, these children -- who depend on busy streets for their survival -- are losing their source of income.

Young boys like Md Shujon Mia, a 13-year-old helper on a human haulier at Farmgate, collect fares from passengers and assist drivers. They earn between Tk 150 and Tk 200 a day.

As the human hauliers are off the roads amid the government-imposed public transport shutdown to curb the spread of the virus, the vehicle owners have told these children to go home.

"I don't know where to go now. Most of us used to stay in the garage of our vehicles. I lost my parents a long time ago and many of my friends are just like me. We are requesting our landlords to allow us to continue staying in the garage."

Saiful Islam, a friend of Shujon, said, "With our meagre savings, we can eat for the next two to three days."

"If we cannot work on our vehicles after that, we will starve."

The boys have little idea of the virus. "We cannot afford a square meal, how can we buy soap or masks? Our ustads [drivers] told us that the coronavirus will affect only rich and bad people. So, we are not worried about it."

The mass awareness of hygiene practices is not reaching these children who cannot stay at "home", interact with a lot of people regularly, and don't have access to basic hygiene products.

"We have set up hand-washing booths in different areas of Dhaka such as Mirpur and Abdullahpur, and in Sholoshohor railway station in Chattogram," said Dr Asma Akhter, a volunteer of Bidyanondo Foundation, a non-profit organisation working for vulnerable children.

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Hunger, not virus, is their biggest worry

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

"Have you brought food for us?"

This was what 10-year-old Sohana asked these correspondents at the beginning of this conversation at Kamalapur Railway Station on Sunday noon.

"We had biriyani last night, given by some men. Since then, we haven't got anything to eat."

On a usual day, she and the other children sell bottled water, collect empty water bottles, and work as porters at the station.

From their meagre earnings, they would buy their food for the day.

As the government is enforcing a shutdown to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the country, street children are facing potential starvation.

Yasin Arafat, 11, said they sleep in a group on the footpath. His father is dead and his mother begs on the streets.

"Even if the tea shops remained open, we could get something to eat," said Yasin. Even if the stalls are open, they often have to fight with older vagrants for the food.

Near the AGB Colony kitchen market, 13-year-old Rajib was carrying a bag with

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BUSINESS



Walton to make ventilators

Bangladesh has just 1,250 ventilators to save the sickest of COVID-19 patients against the possible requirements for thousands of the respiratory equipment.

But ventilators are in short supply at the moment, given the rate at which the lethal, pneumonia-like virus is spreading across the globe. And in recent weeks, countries around the world have been scrambling to build and buy as many of them as possible.

So, the government has enlisted the service of local tech giant Walton to manufacture the life-saving equipment with support from Medtronic, a global supplier of the device.

READ MORE ON B1

Six die with Covid-19-like symptoms

IEDCR confirms 1 more case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After testing 153 samples, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research yesterday reported one Covid-19 case, bringing the tally of confirmed cases to 49.

The patient is a woman, aged between 20 and 30, IEDCR Director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora said.

Meanwhile, at least six people, including a child, have died in different districts yesterday from what looks like coronavirus, our correspondents report.

The IEDCR also said four more Covid-19 patients made recoveries, taking the total number of recovered patients to 19.

"Of them, some had hypertension and diabetes. One of them was over 80 years old. Despite their underlying health conditions, they have

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WORKING AS A FAMILY ... With masks donned, a man, his wife (behind the rickshaw van) and son take garbage to a Dhaka North City Corporation dumping station near Indira Road in the capital. The couple, who are private garbage persons, had to bring their child to work risking coronavirus infection as they have nobody to look after him.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Ambulance drivers fearful

Failing to get PPE, some private ambulances refuse to carry patients with Covid-19-like symptoms

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

An unknown fear grips Azizur Rahman every time he comes out of his home in the morning. An ambulance driver for years, Azizur feels he might contract coronavirus anytime as he has to come in contact with different patients every now and then.

"We need to carry patients all the time. We don't know who already has it [Covid-19] ... It's a scary time for us," said the man in his 50s. His voice cracked.

Employee of a private ambulance provider, Azizur wears mask and hand gloves and uses hand sanitiser while taking patients to hospitals and clinics in his vehicle. But he said these safety gears appear to be far from enough to protect him from the highly contagious coronavirus.

"We are in a grave risk. We too have families and children. They might be exposed to the virus as well. We are continuing to work even in this sensitive time. But if anything happens to us and our families, where will we go?" asked the father of three, urging the authorities to ensure their safety immediately.

Like Azizur, several thousand drivers and their assistants, who work at different private ambulance services, run the risk of getting infected as they don't have adequate safety gears.

The ambulance owners' association has requested the authorities to provide enough safety gears and necessary

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