



The Daily Star



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"Please come help us in New York now. We need relief."
NY GOVERNOR ANDREW CUOMO PLEADS



"There is no specific evidence to suggest that the wearing of masks by the mass population has any potential benefit."
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE WHO HEALTH EMERGENCIES PROGRAMME MIKE RYAN



"We want to cooperate with the government instead of criticising them. Let's work together to fight the coronavirus."
BNP SECRETARY GENERAL MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM ALAMGIR



CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Low test rate may be belying reality

Fear experts; govt moves, though late, to scale up tests

WASIM BIN HABIB and MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

"We have a simple message for all countries: test, test, test."

These were the words Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organisation, said at a press briefing in Geneva in mid-March while expressing concern over the actions some nations have taken on detecting and containing the novel coronavirus.

With 51 reported infections and five deaths so far, is Bangladesh conducting enough tests?

The available data gives a grim picture. The country tested 1,602 people from late January until yesterday, which hardly gives a clear idea about the real situation in the entire country. And the reason is limited testing.

Until now, Bangladesh has a restrictive testing policy -- it tests only those with recent travel history to affected countries or those known to have come into contact with confirmed cases and have Covid-19 symptoms. And Bangladesh is now among the countries with very low testing rates.

Three weeks elapsed since the country recorded its first coronavirus case on March 8, but the authorities are still struggling to get a handle on the extent of the spread of

the virus. The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) maintains that there has been community transmission on a limited scale.

Experts, however, fear the number of infected people could be higher as many carriers of the virus could be off the radar due to limited testing.

They said widespread testing makes a big difference because, in many cases, coronavirus patients can be asymptomatic. Unless those are detected, the risk of virus transmission will be high.

Till last week, the IEDCR was the sole Covid-19 testing authority in the country. Only a couple of days ago, six other organisations -- five in the capital and one in Chattogram -- got the government nod to conduct tests.

People with coronavirus-like symptoms found it difficult to get tested after making phone calls on the hotlines provided by the IEDCR and Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The IEDCR and the DGHS received more than 70,000 coronavirus-related phone calls in 24 hours till 3:00pm yesterday. Of those, only 140 suspected cases were tested and

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Many city dwellers have started using their vehicles for essential travels in the capital over the last couple of days. The city had gone quiet since the 10-day closure began on March 26. The photo was taken from Mohakhali Flyover.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Shutdown to be stretched to Apr 9

Says PM in video conference with field-level govt officials

- » Educational institutions to remain closed
- » Transport movement could be limited
- » All requested to stay indoors
- » Warning against graft in food distribution
- » Curbs on Pahela Baishakh celebrations

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government decided to extend the ongoing nationwide holidays for five more days till April 9 to contain the spread of deadly coronavirus.

"We had earlier announced a 10-day general holiday from March 26 and it'll be extended for five more days till April 9," she said.

The premier made the announcement while exchanging views on the country's coronavirus situation with public representatives and field-level government officials through videoconferencing from the Gono Bhaban.

When the cabinet secretary drew the PM's attention to the extension of holidays till April 9, she said it could be extended till April 9, but it would not be a complete shutdown.

"It can be done on a limited scale, and a scope will have to be created for the movement of some people," she said.

The movement of transport could be limited, she said, adding that the government would review the situation after completion of the 14-day (quarantine period).

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OMS rice for Tk 10 a kg in cities from next week

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and JAMIL MAHMUD

The government is going to launch a special open market sale (OMS) of coarse rice at Tk 10 a kg in all city corporation areas to ensure food for the urban poor amid the countrywide shutdown.

The shutdown is being enforced as part of the efforts to slow down the spread of novel coronavirus, which has so far claimed five lives in the country.

The food ministry yesterday got the government approval in this regard, said the ministry officials.

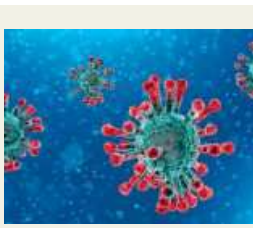
"We are trying to start selling rice from Saturday or Sunday," Nazmanara Khanum, secretary of the ministry, told The Daily Star.

Before this, the ministry will have to formulate a special guideline, she said, adding that she would soon hold meetings with the food minister, relevant ministry officials, and

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Nearly half the world in lockdown

Spain sees deadliest day; World Bank says crisis may push 11m in Asia into poverty



Date	Global Death Toll
Mar-30	34,018
Mar-23	16,513
Mar-16	7,162
Mar-09	4,025
Mar-02	3,117

HOW GLOBAL DEATH TOLL MULTIPLIED EVERY WEEK

AGENCIES

Tightened lockdowns across the planet saw nearly half of humanity told to stay at home in a bid to stem the spiralling coronavirus pandemic, as Spain recorded its deadliest day yesterday and the United States braced for the full impact of the disease.

Meanwhile, the World Bank warned in a report released Monday that the economic fallout from the pandemic could drive an additional 11 million people into poverty in East Asia and the Pacific unless "urgent action" is taken.

And G20 finance ministers and central bankers yesterday pledged to address the debt burden of low-income countries and deliver aid to emerging markets as part of a plan to combat the pandemic.

The announcement followed a second round of virtual talks after G20 leaders pledged a "united front" last week and

said they were injecting \$5 trillion into the global economy to head off a feared deep recession.

The virus has claimed more than 38,000 lives worldwide in a health crisis that is rapidly reorganising political power, hampering the global economy and altering the daily existence of some 3.6 billion people.

Spain, whose outbreak is the world's second deadliest after Italy, reported another national record with 849 deaths in one day, dampening hopes it could have passed the peak of the crisis that has debilitated the country for weeks.

In battered Italy, flags flew at half-mast during a minute of silence to honour the more than 11,500 people who have perished from the virus, and the medical staff still working through nightmarish

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10-DAY SHUTDOWN Lax enforcement a cause of worry

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and RASHIDUL HASAN

As the authorities are set to extend the shutdown to contain the spread of coronavirus, experts have pointed out that lax enforcement of the ongoing nationwide closure has raised questions about the effectiveness of the government move. Amid a slack surveillance, many are still roaming on streets and alleyways in cities and other urban areas, ignoring the government advice to stay indoors.

Besides, a good number of people from the low income bracket, including day labourers and rickshaw pullers, have to go out to earn their living as they struggle to survive.

The situation in villages seemed even worse. A large number of the people, who went there from the capital after the government announced the shutdown, were showing least interest in following the government advice, The Daily Star correspondents reported.

These increased the risk of coronavirus transmission among people.

The experts said the government must ensure that all stay home at any cost and urged it to do everything possible to make them stay indoors, saying the country is now passing through a very crucial time in the fight against coronavirus.

They called for enforcing the shutdown very strictly. Prof Muzaherul Huq, a former adviser (Southeast Asia Region) of the World Health Organization, said the shutdown should be extended by up to two weeks and it must be enforced "effectively".

"Currently, the shutdown is being implemented loosely. Many people are roaming on the streets, posing risk. So the shutdown must be enforced effectively," he told The Daily Star on Monday.

He said, "Community transmission is going on. People with coronavirus symptoms should be segregated and

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With PPE and hand sanitisers in high demand, many set up shops on the pavement near Midford Hospital and are selling those with a high markup. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

ইউনিয়ন ব্যাংক লিমিটেড

সমৃদ্ধির ৮ বছর পদার্থনে সম্মানিত গ্রাহক, শুভাকাঙ্ক্ষী ও শুভাকাঙ্ক্ষীদের প্রতি আমাদের আন্তরিক কৃতজ্ঞতা। সেবা ব্যাংকিং সেবায় এবং পারস্পরিক দৃঢ় বন্ধনে আমরা নিশ্চিত করতে পেরেছি এই সাফল্য।

সমৃদ্ধির সর্বোচ্চ শিখরে পৌঁছে যেতে অব্যাহত থাকুক আপনার এই শ্রেণা। ভালবাসা আর আশ্রয় আমাদের পাশে থাকার জন্য সবাইকে আন্তরিক ধন্যবাদ।