



The Daily Star



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35 infected in 24 hours | **123** Total cases | **33** Total recovery | **12** Death | **70,590** Total deaths | **270,372** Total recoveries | **1,289,380** Total cases

Put hotspots on 'total lockdown'

PM asks officials to cut off the capital, Narayanganj, Gaibandha, Madaripur to slow spread of coronavirus; law enforcers asked to strictly enforce social distancing

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday ordered total lockdown of Dhaka and Narayanganj cities, and Madaripur and Gaibandha districts to fight the spread of coronavirus.

She also asked for lockdown of areas where Covid-19 patients have been found, officials said.

The PM directed all garment factories, except the ones making personal protective equipment, to remain closed until further notice.

Hasina gave the directives during the weekly cabinet meeting held at the Gono Bhaban with just seven ministers.

Twelve people, who tested positive for Covid-19, have died and 123 cases have been confirmed, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

At least 64 of the infected are in Dhaka, 23 in Narayanganj, 11 in Madaripur, and five in Gaibandha.

Since Sunday night, police had been restricting people's entry to and exit from Dhaka. Emergency service providers were outside the purview of the restrictions.

- Lockdown may be extended further
- Situation may deteriorate in mid-April
- PM annoyed with owners' indecision over closure of RMG factories
- Shops other than pharmacies to close by 7pm every day

Narayanganj City Mayor Selina Hayat Ivy on Sunday requested the prime minister to lockdown her city or impose a curfew there to curb the spread of novel coronavirus.

Sources said Hasina during yesterday's cabinet meeting was furious at garment factory owners who caused thousands of workers to trudge to Dhaka and then leave, increasing the chances of spreading the virus.

Division among influential owners over the closure of RMG factories and an absence of specific instructions from the government had sent thousands of workers into a dangerous scramble to get back to Dhaka. But when they arrived, many found that the owners had changed their minds.

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Showing disregard for social distancing, dozens queue up in front of a truck of the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) to buy daily essentials at cheaper prices. On-duty policemen requested them to stand apart but it was not heeded. The photo was taken in the capital's Lalbagh Beribandh area around noon yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION IN CLUSTERS Draw up strategy to contain it

Experts urge the authorities

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

While the authorities maintain that community transmission is happening only in clusters and that there is nothing to worry, experts say unless the government draws up a cluster containment strategy immediately, the situation will remain worrisome.

The implementation of the strategy will help contain Covid-19 within a defined geographic area by detecting cases early and breaking the transmission chain, preventing further spread of the highly contagious virus, they said.

The term "cluster transmission" is used to identify infections that are largely concentrated in a limited locality, often within a family and its extended circle.

Experts said discovering a cluster is akin to a fire alarm going off and every moment wasted will increase the chances that the fire may spread. The faster the infected individuals are identified and sent into quarantine, the lesser are the chances of future cases.

On Sunday, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) said that community transmission of coronavirus was indeed happening, but it was limited to five clusters across the country.

But nothing about the size of the clusters was mentioned -- whether those were consisted of a few individuals, a few households or an entire community which is potentially at risk of contracting and spreading the coronavirus.

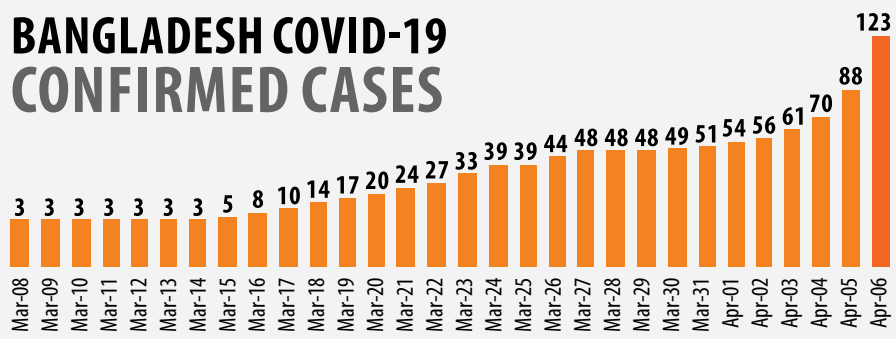
The experts said the government must take strict actions, including enforcing lockdown of the clusters, and that any delay in doing so would only make things worse and the situation might get out of hand.

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CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC

Worrisome leap in deaths, infections

3 die, 35 test positive, highest in a single day



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities yesterday reported the highest number of deaths from the coronavirus and confirmed infections in 15 districts.

In 24 hours, three people died and 35 others tested positive for the virus, health department officials told a daily briefing.

The official death toll is now 12 and confirmed cases 123. Twelve of the new patients are residents of the capital.

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The new cases were confirmed after 468 tests. Since March 8, when the first case was reported, the authorities have tested 4,011 people.

More cases are being detected after multiple testing facilities started operation in different districts.

"The virus is no longer limited to one place. It is spreading gradually," Prof Abul Kalam Azad, DG of the Directorate General of Health Services, told yesterday's briefing from his office.

ONGOING SHUTDOWN

Press out of purview

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newspapers and other essential services will remain out of the purview of the ongoing shutdown, which was announced by the government to contain the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

A circular, issued by the public administration ministry on Sunday, said utility services such as water, electricity, gas, telephone, and internet will be operational during the shutdown.

Transportation of agricultural products, fertiliser, insecticides, gasoline, newspapers, food goods, medical equipment, and daily essentials will also be outside the purview of the suspension.

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DEMO FOR PAY

25 hurt as RMG workers, police clash in M'singh

STAR REPORT

At least 25 people were injured as police and garment workers clashed in Mymensingh's Bhaluka upazila yesterday.

The workers were demonstrating for their salaries for the month of March.

The injured include garment workers and three police personnel.

Meanwhile, over 100 garment units were open in Savar and Ashulia yesterday despite repeated calls for closure of garment factories by the BGMEA and the BKMEA to contain the spread of novel coronavirus.

In Bhaluka, hundreds of workers of Crown Wears (Pvt) Ltd came to the factory at Jamirdia Masterbari around 7:00am and found a notice hanging at the gate, said Nurun Nabi, assistant superintendent of police of Bhaluka industrial police.

The notice read, "The factory will remain closed until February 14, and the information regarding salary will be informed them later," he said.

Seeing the notice, the workers got incensed and gathered in front of the gate and started demonstrating. They blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway.

They also alleged that some 2,000

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Offer namaz at home

Govt issues instructions
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday said effective immediately, no one, except those employed by mosques, are allowed to offer daily or Juma prayers at mosques across the country.

The move was taken to contain the spread of coronavirus, says a circular.

In the circular, people were asked to offer their daily and the Juma prayers at home, instead of going to the mosques.

The government also asked people of other regions to offer prayers at home instead of congregating in their religious institutions.

Anyone violating the order will face measures as per the law, said the circular.

The religious affairs ministry yesterday finally came up with the order, saying the instruction was issued in light of the main principle of all religions and in the interest of protecting national security.

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Police stop vehicles at a checkpoint near Gabtoli bridge yesterday, a day after it said people would not be allowed to enter or leave Dhaka city except for emergencies. The move was taken as part of efforts to slow down coronavirus transmission.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Cases drop in EU hotspots

Italy, Austria eye easing lockdown; hospitalised UK PM in good spirit; Japan to declare emergency

AFP, London

The coronavirus pandemic death toll yesterday crossed 70,000 mark -- some 50,000 of them in Europe -- despite early signs that some of Europe's hardest-hit countries may be turning a corner.

Japan announced an imminent state of emergency and a trillion-dollar stimulus package, while the US surgeon general compared the likely impact of the epidemic in the week ahead to 9/11 or Pearl Harbor and France warned of the worst economic slump since World War II.

In London, Prime Minister Boris Johnson remained in hospital Monday but was in "good spirits" after being admitted for tests for "persistent" coronavirus symptoms. Johnson tested positive for the virus 10 days ago, and despite his hospitalisation his housing minister Robert Jenrick said the leader was still "in charge" of the government as the country grapples with the continuing crisis.

It was a mixed picture in Europe, where countries already ravaged by deadly COVID-19 outbreaks reported lower numbers of new infections and, in Austria and Italy, began thinking about easing lockdown restrictions.

The new coronavirus has reached almost every corner of the planet, confining nearly half of humanity to their homes and turning life upside down for billions.

The worldwide number of fatalities from the novel coronavirus rose to 70,590 on Monday, according to a tally

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