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Your Right to Know

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BANGLADESH
UPDATE266
New cases in 24hrs1,838
Total cases75
Deaths58
RecoveriesGLOBAL
UPDATE147,337
Deaths2,181,508
Total cases

Surge in deaths rings alarm

15 Covid-19 deaths in a single day; expert fears high fatality as strain from Italy could have spread by returnees

MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN and WASIM BIN HABIB

Deaths from Covid-19 hit a new high as the authorities said another 15 people died in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, taking the official death toll to 75.

This is so far the highest number of deaths reported in a single day.

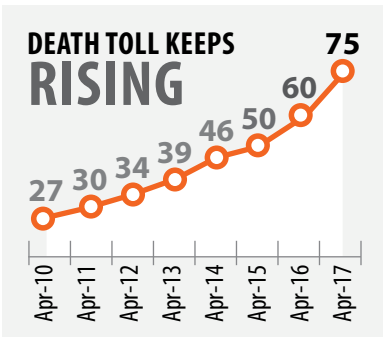
Besides, 266 new cases of infection were confirmed over the same period, bringing the total number of detected coronavirus cases in the country to 1,838.

Talking to The Daily Star on the rising number of deaths and infections, an infectious disease expert said the virus might have come to Bangladesh from Italy.

He feared the situation might worsen if effective measures, including strict enforcement of lockdown, were not ensured right away.

"Many Bangladeshis returned from the European country between late February and the end of last month. We've seen that the virus started to spread here following their arrival. So there is a possibility that the strain of the virus here predominantly came from Italy," said Prof Saif Ullah Munshi, chairman of virology at the capital's Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

"If it turns out to be true, we may face a situation similar to that in Italy," he told The Daily Star yesterday.



A woman goes through a spray arch on a street in Mirpur-6 in the capital yesterday. Local youth organisation Artana built the arch and set it up there so that everyone getting into their neighbourhood are disinfected first. *Inset*, Inside of the arch.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

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FRONTLINE LESSONS

From Ebola to Covid-19

OSAMA RAHMAN

On May 25 last year, Hasina Akhter, the then country director for Brac in Uganda, received a call from her colleagues alerting her to a possible outbreak of Ebola -- a rare but deadly virus -- in the landlocked East African country.

Hasina was in the US at the time to attend her daughter's graduation. But she set off for Uganda and reached two days later.

Hasina, with her years of experience, told The Daily Star over phone she saw some parallels between the current coronavirus situation in Bangladesh and the Ebola outbreak in Uganda last year.

Hasina, the area director at Brac's humanitarian crisis management currently stationed in Cox's Bazar, stressed on promptness.

SPEED, SPEED AND SPEED

"We must react to this with utmost speed. No time can be wasted," Hasina said, recounting how the Ugandan government took immediate steps, including focusing on comprehensive resource mapping, using lessons from the 2014 outbreak, promoting quarantine practices and working towards setting up the needed infrastructure.

"By the time I arrived, even before the first case was confirmed on June 3, I saw that the airport was already equipped with infrared and thermal scanners in place. The Ugandan government did not wait.

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BANGLADESHIS STRANDED IN INDIA

8 special flights to bring them home

Excessive airfare, inadequate number of seats, transport to Indian airports amid lockdown are major issues of concern

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN and RASHIDUL HASAN

The US-Bangla Airlines will operate eight special flights on Chennai-Dhaka and Kolkata-Dhaka routes from April 20 to bring back over 1,000 stranded Bangladeshis who went there for treatment.

Six of the flights will be operated from Chennai from April 20 to April 25 while two from Kolkata will be operated on April 21 and April 23, Kamrul Islam, general manager (public relations) of the airline, told The Daily Star.

He said they decided to operate the flights after the two governments had recently come to an understanding on this score.

Flights on Chennai-Dhaka route are scheduled to take off at 12:15pm (Bangladesh local time) every day from April 20 to April 25 and will land at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) at 3:15pm.

Flights on Kolkata-Dhaka route are scheduled to depart at 11:30am (Bangladesh local time).

All flights will be operated with Boeing 737-800 aircraft with a seating capacity of 164 passengers.

India has been under lockdown since March 25 and extended it up to May 3.

In this situation, many stranded Bangladeshis heaved sighs of relief at this arrangement while many are concerned about how effective the initiative would be.

Excessive airfare, inadequate number of seats, transport to Chennai and Kolkata airport amid lockdown, institutional quarantine in Dhaka are some of the many issues that made them wary of the arrangement.

Md Rashed, a Bangladeshi now stranded in Vellore, said, "The usual one-way airfare from Chennai to Dhaka is not more than Tk 14,000. However, the fare of these special flights is more than Tk 31,000. So, for the three members of my family, it would cost almost Tk 100,000. It's nothing but a daylight robbery."

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7 die after showing symptoms

STAR REPORT

Seven people have died after showing coronavirus-like symptoms in six districts in the last two days.

Health workers collected samples from the seven bodies for tests. The district administrations put the houses of the victims and those of their next door neighbours in lockdown, said officials.

Meanwhile, the authorities enforced lockdown of Madaripur and Pirojpur districts on Thursday night, report our district correspondents.

In Mymensingh, eight people, including a doctor, a nurse and a staffer of Gafargaon upazila health complex, tested positive for coronavirus yesterday.

In Khulna, two patients, aged 24 and 10, died at Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH), yesterday. The two were undergoing treatment at the isolation unit of the hospital.

The youth died around 10:00am, around an hour after being admitted to the hospital, said Dr Shailendranath Biswas,

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The Covid-19 crisis has affected the entire world and hit the developing countries like Bangladesh even harder -- a fact that calls for greater global cooperation and solidarity. How can that happen? UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh Mia Seppo shares her views on it with The Daily Star's diplomatic correspondent Porimol Palma.

Saving lives, helping the vulnerable vital

UN resident coordinator tells The Daily Star

TDS: What challenges are being posed by the coronavirus pandemic globally?

Mia Seppo: This is an unprecedented crisis in our modern world which both high income and low-income countries are facing simultaneously, and they are competing for the same supplies. At this point, the foremost challenge is trying to control the pandemic nationally and globally. To do so, it is priority to ensure humanitarian access and opening of corridors for safe and timely movement of goods and personnel. This is vital for saving lives and reducing the negative social and economic impacts of the pandemic.

TDS: What are the specific challenges for Bangladesh?

Mia Seppo: Bangladesh is a country with a very high population density which creates favourable conditions for the spread of Covid-19. Therefore, we welcome the government commitment to implement measures to ensure social distancing. We fully understand the consequences that these measures are generating, with deep



impact on the low-income segments of the society. We welcome the efforts by government, civil society groups and volunteers to help the vulnerable groups needing food and protection. During these particularly difficult moments, solidarity is put to a test.

With almost all countries impacted by Covid-19, there is a global shortage related to medical equipment and supplies, making it a challenge to identify and procure necessities. This calls for local solutions. Bangladesh is a nation with a lot of manufacturing and strong private sector capacity that can be mobilised to fill gaps in the production of essential supplies, including hygiene products. Health systems around the world have buckled under the pressure of a peak of Covid-19 cases. The present measures taken by the government offer a window to strengthen the readiness of the health care sector in Bangladesh.

TDS: How do you think Bangladesh government is tackling the pandemic? Do you have any suggestions?

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Police stop vehicles on Airport Road near the Balaka Bhaban yesterday and check to see if people entering deeper into the capital had legitimate reason to be out. The checkpoint caused unnecessary queues since the cops left an hour later withdrawing the checkpoint. The photo was taken around 11:30am. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

ASI arrested for murder, shooting another

Suspect a minister's security detail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A sub-inspector of police was arrested yesterday on charges of shooting a man dead and injuring another in Gazipur over what officers said were personal issues.

ASI Kishor Kumar, bodyguard of Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Moazzam Haque, shot the two men, who used to be his friends, in Kutubdia area of Kaliakoir upazila.

Shaheedul Islam Shaheed, 35, of Aijana area in Mirzapur, Tangail, died at the scene, said Alamgir Hossain Mazumder, officer-in-charge of Kaliakoir Police Station.

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Professionals at Work

Securing you for the last 25 years.
Heartfelt gratitude to all our valuable clients and patrons.
Working towards ensuring a safer Bangladesh.

We salute the front line fighters in our battle against Corona.

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