



The Daily Star



REGD. No. DA 781

Vol. XXX No. 98

BAISHAKH 9, 1427 BS

Your Right to Know

SHABAN 27, 1441 HJRI

12 PAGES PRICE: Tk 12.00

BANGLADESH UPDATE

434
New cases in 24hrs

3,382
Total cases

110
Deaths

87
Recoveries

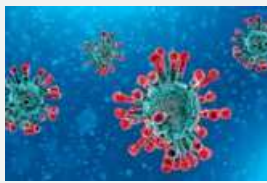
GLOBAL UPDATE

171,810
Deaths

2,501,156
Total cases

Make people stay at home

Police asked at high-profile meeting; shutdown may be extended by at least a week



- Bangladesh won't allow any Rohingya in
- No retail sales at Karwan Bazar
- Undocumented workers to be brought back in phases
- 250 beds ready at private hospitals for coronavirus patients

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and
TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Amid a sharp spike in coronavirus cases, the government may extend the ongoing shutdown by at least another week as part of its efforts to contain the outbreak.

If extended, the shutdown will then end on May 2. It would be the fourth extension since the government first announced the closure of all public and private offices from March 26 to April 4.

The matter was discussed at a high-profile meeting at the Cabinet Division yesterday.

At the meeting, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said people have to stay home at any cost, and law enforcers have to be as tough as needed to

ensure the shutdown, meeting sources said. Presided over by Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque, the meeting was attended also by the information and foreign ministers, and state ministers for disaster management and relief, and labour and employment.

The inspector general of police and cabinet secretary were also present. Officials of the Prime Minister's Office and the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) joined via video conferencing, the sources added.

"All the decisions [taken at the meeting] would be compiled now, and the health minister will communicate those to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her approval."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



The fish market in Gazipur's Abdullahpur is an example of how to violate social distancing guidelines during the ongoing coronavirus outbreak. Along with Dhaka and Narayanganj, Gazipur is one of the worst-affected areas in the country, but despite police officials being present and loud speakers communicating the need to maintain distance, the buyers and sellers paid no heed yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

4 die after showing Covid-19 symptoms

STAR REPORT

At least four people died in four districts with coronavirus symptoms yesterday.

Officials are testing their samples for Covid-19 and have placed their homes under lockdown.

In Khulna's Rupsha upazila, a 43-year-old man died yesterday morning after suffering from fever, cold, cough and breathing problems for five days, our district correspondent reported.

The man was brought to Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) around 7:45am. He died on the way to the hospital, said Dr Ashikur Rahman, emergency medical officer of KMCH.

We collected his sample for coronavirus test, the doctor said.

He was involved in

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Outbreak may be approaching peak

Hint experts, suggest rigorous testing, contact-tracing and isolation efforts

MOUIDUD AHMED SUJAN and WASIM BIN HABIB

As the country continues to grapple with coronavirus crisis amid a surge in deaths and infections, experts hint that the outbreak is gradually approaching its peak.

The authorities yesterday said nine more people died and 434 new cases of infection were detected in 24 hours till 2:30pm. With this, the death toll hit 110 and the total number of cases jumped to 3,382, according to data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

A total of 2,974 samples were tested in those 24 hours. The number is seven percent higher than that of the previous day, shows the data.

Speaking on the rising trend, experts warned that the coronavirus situation was likely to worsen further. They, however, suggested increasing the number of Covid-19 tests, ramping up contact tracing and enforcing lockdown more strictly to get "good results".

"We need more rigorous programmes -- rigorous testing, rigorous contact tracing and isolation efforts. These should end within two weeks. None should be allowed to move anywhere during this period. Only then, we will get good results," said Prof Ridwanur Rahman, a renowned medicine and infectious disease specialist.

Things will take a turn for the worse if these measures are not ensured strictly, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Every [Covid-19] patient represents a cluster of around 20 people. Have we traced all the contacts for each patient?" he asked.

Prof Ridwanur said the outbreak was gaining pace. Replying to a query, he said, "Under the current situation, it's difficult to say when the outbreak

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

31 Gazipur policemen infected

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

At least 31 police personnel have been infected with coronavirus in Gazipur.

Twenty-four of them work at Gacha Police Station under Gazipur Metropolitan Police (GMP) while the rest at Kaliganj Police Station under district police.

Of the infected, one tested positive on April 13, three on April 16 and the rest tested positive yesterday, said Khairuzzaman, civil surgeon of the district.

Health workers are collecting samples of other police personnel who came into contact with the infected ones. The samples will be sent to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) for tests, he added.

Of the 24 in GMP, 21 are men and have been kept in isolation inside Gacha Police Station. Three female officers have been

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

HAOR AREAS IN SYLHET DIVISION

Farmers upbeat on bumper Boro yield

MINTU DESHWARA and
DWOHA CHOWDHURY

Amid the coronavirus scare and threat of impending flash flood, farmers in the haor region of Sylhet Division are expecting a bumper Boro harvest this time.

Many of the farmers, who have been busy harvesting Boro paddy over the last one week, said they were happy with the market prices for their produce.

They, however, said a shortage of farm labourers made it difficult for them to harvest Boro, the main crop in the region.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension, Boro has been cultivated on 447,195 hectares of land in Sylhet Division with a production target of 23.71 lakh tonnes.

Srinibash Debnath, additional director of the department in Sylhet, said, "This year, the harvest seems very good. No disease hit the paddy. We are expecting a very good yield."

Till yesterday, 31 percent of the produce was harvested in the haor areas against 21 percent in the whole division, he mentioned, adding that the progress was satisfactory.

The official, however, voiced worry that flash flood may hit the region any time.

According to the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre of Bangladesh Water Development Board, flash flood may hit the haor region at the end of the week due to excessive rainfall in the north-eastern part of the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

5,400 schools to stay open for harvesters

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) has kept open over 5,400 primary schools in haor areas to accommodate labourers harvesting paddy.

Officials said doors of around 5,041 primary schools in four districts of Sylhet division and another 400 in Kishoreganj and 16 in Netrokona are open to the labourers.

Farmers grow paddy on the low-lying wetlands in those districts only once a year. But flashfloods during this period of the year damage crops at times.

Meanwhile, only about 10 percent of paddy harvesting was done in Sylhet division until Sunday, according to an estimate of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in the division.

Farmers have been complaining about a shortage of harvesting

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

HSC exams may begin in late May

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The postponed Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and its equivalent examinations may begin at the end of next month.

The exams slated for April 1 were postponed on March 22 in fear of coronavirus spread.

"We are considering to hold the HSC exams after Eid-ul-Fitr," Chairman of Dhaka Education Board Prof Ziaul Haque told The Daily Star yesterday.

He made the comments after all board chairmen and exam controllers held a virtual meeting with Mahbub Hossain, secondary and higher education division secretary.

Eid-ul-Fitr will be celebrated on May 24 or 25, said officials.

A board chairman, who was present at the meeting, said they discussed beginning of the HSC exams from May 31.

Over a million students are expected to sit for

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Workers setting up a 2,000-bed hospital at the International Convention City Bashundhara, which will be dedicated to treating Covid-19 patients. The hospital is expected to open by April 25. Inset, some beds for the hospital. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Antibody tests can be key

Some experts say it can paint a better picture; WHO warns it does not confirm immunity

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

As the country has been in the third stage of coronavirus transmission when the virus spreads quickly within the community, experts have called for the immediate launch of widespread antibody tests to clearly understand the extent of infection.

The government is also considering initiating the method. It is taking opinions from health experts and reviewing the outcomes in other countries who have already used antibody tests for Covid-19 diagnosis.

Several government officials said there were questions over the accuracy of this method which cast doubt over its usefulness.

Experts, on the flip side, said the error margin of this method was still not evident and many developed countries were using it for wide-scale testing.

The point on which both the parties seemed to have agreed is that the method is cheap, quick and easily accessible.

It would also help to detect those who are asymptomatic -- people who carry the virus but never develop any symptom.

Prof ABM Abdullah, the personal physician of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, said, "I think we should go for the antibody tests."

He said other countries have started it and pointed out that there was nothing to lose.

The experts said widespread antibody testing can be useful in identifying those who have recovered or become

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1