



The Daily Star



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BANGLADESH UPDATE 503 New cases in 24hrs | 4,689 Total cases | 131 Deaths | 112 Recoveries | **GLOBAL UPDATE** 192,125 Deaths | 2,744,511 Total cases

Exposed to virus risk

Healthcare providers at 14,000 community clinics treat patients without adequate protective gear

STAR REPORT

Shafiqul Islam Rony is more worried than ever. The health assistant at Mougram community clinic in Pabna feels unprotected every time he goes to work amid a wave of Covid-19 cases in the country. On an average, he comes in contact with 40 to 50 patients a day. The number of people at the clinic has gone up since most other local healthcare institutions are turning away patients to avoid coronavirus transmission. The man in his mid-30s is also frequently visiting the homes of those who returned from abroad to collect information from them. He is doing all these without having adequate protective gears. Only on 16 April, he received a set of personal protective equipment (PPE) from the district civil surgeon's office. "Though I don't have enough safety gears, I have to go to patients every day. Even the mask and hand gloves I'm using are bought with my own money. I have my family and children. They are extremely worried," he said. Shafiqul's anxiety is shared by thousands of other healthcare providers at community clinics across the country. These health workers are providing services in rural Bangladesh despite being equipped with insufficient protective gears, which makes them and their families exposed to the deadly virus. The country has 13,850 community clinics under the Community-based Healthcare Project. Some are, however, closed due to a shortage of manpower and other issues, according to officials.

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Shadhon Chowdhury, a share cropper, holds a bunch of tomatoes in Futnagar village of Dhaka's Dhamrai upazila on Thursday. He has so far managed to sell only a small portion of his produce as it cannot be transported due to the countrywide Covid-19 shutdown. He estimates a loss of Tk 2 lakh this year.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

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Iftar with no gathering this time

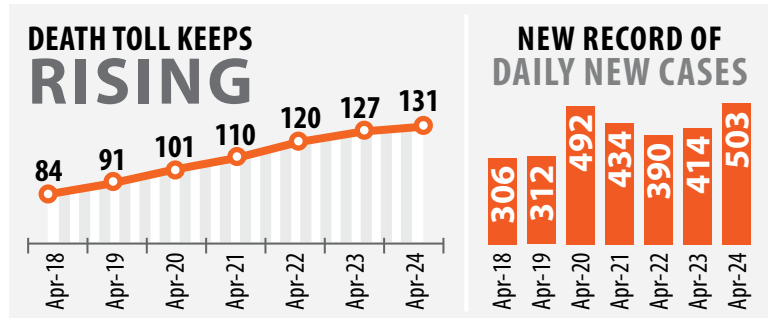
Ramadan begins amid virus scare

ZYMA ISLAM

Iftar is never meant to be had alone. But this year, as Ramadan begins after the new crescent moon was sighted last night, that is precisely what has to happen if this country is to beat the coronavirus pandemic. Year after year, offices have closed early to give their staff time to rush back home in the nick of time for the evening meal to break the daylong fast. And for many, even that has never been a solitary nuclear family affair. Ramadan has always been the rare time of year when extended family spread across different neighbourhoods come together at the same table to pray and eat. How else would one justify preparing 10 or twelve different kinds of dishes in the month of restraint and moderation? For those who cannot go back home for iftar -- like

Big jump in new Covid-19 cases

4 more die, 503 infected; experts for stepping up testing outside Dhaka



MOUJIBUDDIN AHMED SUJAN

The country yesterday recorded 503 confirmed cases of Covid-19 -- the highest in a single day since the first case was reported more than a month and a half ago -- with four deaths due to the disease. The total number of infected patients rose to 4,689 while the death toll reached 131, said Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of Directorate General of Health Services, during a briefing. Dhaka remains the worst affected region with 437 infected patients -- which is 86 percent of the total Covid-positive cases found in the last 24 hours until 2:30pm yesterday. In the previous four days, the numbers of daily cases were stagnant

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Nothing but loss

Hard times for vegetables farmers in Bogura, Thakurgaon and Jashore as sales drop

STAR REPORT

Vegetable farmers in Bogura, Thakurgaon, and Jashore are passing difficult days as sales have drastically fallen during the ongoing shutdown due to the coronavirus outbreak. Wholesale kitchen markets in these districts are getting very few buyers, forcing vegetable farmers to sell their produce at low prices. At Satmail Bazar in Jashore, one of the largest wholesale vegetable markets in the country, buyers and sellers gather each Sunday and Thursday for trading. Vegetable traders from across the country come here and buy vegetables in bulk to sell in their respective districts. "I cultivated pointed gourd in around 15 kathas of land. Now, I am selling these for only Tk 28 per kg," said Robiul Islam Robi, a vegetable farmer at Natuapara area under Jashore Sadar upazila. "I cultivated white radish, which we usually sell at Tk 35 per kg. This year, I am having to sell it at Tk 18," said Ahad Miah, a farmer from Bijoyanagar Churamonkathi. "We farmers are incurring huge losses this year. We are selling vegetables at such low prices that all our capital will

be exhausted this year," said Mohor Ali, a vegetable farmer from the area. Jashore farmers produced around eight lakh tonnes of vegetables each year by cultivating some 32,000 hectares of land in the district, said Emdad Hossain, district officer of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Jashore. In Bogura, one of the highest vegetable-producing districts, farmers are also bearing the brunt of the virus outbreak and shutdown as prices have reduced by more than half due to the lack of buyers. Bogura farmers cultivated vegetables on 12,810 hectares of land in the winter season and 41,500 hectares of land in the summer season, according to the district's DAE office. "I cultivated hybrid tomato in one bigha of land, investing Tk 1 lakh. But the price of tomato is so low that I have to incur a loss of over Tk 50,000," said 40-year-old Moksedul Islam, a vegetable farmer from Birkulla village in Shajahanpur upazila. Abdul Mannan Pramanik, 50, a farmer of the same village, cultivated coriander on 10 decimals of land. "Before the coronavirus outbreak, coriander leaf could be sold at Tk 5,000 per maund. Now, I am having to sell it at Tk 400 per maund," he said.

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Daily essentials get pricier

Traders blame 'lack of transports', intel report blames syndicate of importers, wholesalers for creating artificial crisis

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Soaring prices of essentials in Ramadan have become a major burden at a time when hundreds of thousands of people are struggling with reduced income due to the coronavirus restrictions. Prices of lentil, sugar, onion, ginger, garlic, dry chili, chickpeas, chicken and palm and soybean oils have increased by Tk 5-100 over the past week. Retailers said scarcity of transport is the main reason for the increase. Ginger and garlic prices have broken records last week mainly because of congestions at Chattogram port, traders said. However, an intelligence agency report last week warned the government that a group of importers and wholesalers would try to destabilise the kitchen market by creating an artificial crisis during the month of Ramadan, which starts today. The agency also pointed out that transport problems could be caused by the sudden demand for relief activities and scarcity of workers in the sector. Supply shortage is also a reason behind the price hike, it said. According to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB), the price of each kg of ginger was between Tk 100 and Tk 160 a month ago, when the government was about to impose the shutdown. Yesterday, a kg of ginger was sold for Tk 320-350 at a Jatrabari kitchen

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UN joins global push for virus remedies

AGENCIES

The UN yesterday joined forces with world leaders and the private sector on an initiative to speed up development of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments, and ensure equal access for all. "This is a landmark collaboration to accelerate the development, production and equitable distribution of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics for COVID-19," World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a virtual briefing. "Our shared commitment is to ensure all people have access to all the tools to defeat COVID-19," he said. The event was co-hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen and Melinda Gates of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

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Amena Begum, a mother of two, waits for handouts at the entrance to Sadarghat Launch Terminal on Thursday. A machine operator at a small garment factory in Keraniganj, she lost her job early this month after the factory was closed amid the countrywide coronavirus shutdown. She is seeking help as her sick husband cannot work either.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

SNAPSHOTS of life

April is cruel, May may be cruelest

SYED ASHFAQUL HAQUE

April in Dhaka is not what we know of. The month behaves almost like spring now. Hot and humid is not the weather that used to be. Air is cool and clean. Chirping of birds, yell of vegetable ferrials, tung-tang bell of rickshaws at times and occasional barking of dogs are all one can hear from empty roads. Looking at the window curtains being gently ruffled by pleasant breeze, one would almost tempt to savour the lockdown due to coronavirus pandemic. But, just step out of the safety of house to fetch emergency medicines or groceries, you would soon come to realise how radically things have changed on nearly deserted roads of Dhaka within a month into government's stay-home order. You're soon to be mobbed by people, who were our everyday helps only a few weeks back. Hunger is now written all over the faces you would come across. You would be shocked to find that these buas, cleaners, rickshawalas, vendors, transport mechanics, shop staffers, labourers and small garment workers

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