



# The Daily Star



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**BANGLADESH UPDATE** **786** New cases in 24hrs **10,929** Total cases **183** Deaths **1,403** Recoveries **GLOBAL UPDATE** **254,283** Deaths **3,680,210** Total cases

## Rethink reopening

Nat'l technical advisory committee on Covid-19 recommends, as the govt move could lead to further spread

WASIM BIN HABIB, MOUJUD AHMED SUJAN and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The national technical advisory committee on Covid-19 has recommended reconsidering the government's decision of reopening shopping malls and other businesses, saying such a move could lead to further transmission of the deadly coronavirus.

It also recommended that all decisions -- be it on reopening industries or relaxing the shutdown -- should be taken on the basis of opinions from epidemiologists.

The committee made the recommendations during a meeting with Health Minister Zahid Maleque at his office in the secretariat yesterday.

"Reopening of shopping malls in any place means a kind of easing of the lockdown. Our position is that the transmission will increase if the lockdown is relaxed," Prof Mohammad Shahidullah, who is leading the committee, told The Daily Star.

"We have recommended that the decision on easing the lockdown be made based on opinions of epidemiologists," he said.

The government on Monday issued a gazette announcing its decision to reopen shopping malls, all types of shops and other businesses from May 10 on a limited

"Normally, we can assume that the number of infection will go up after the reopening of markets, garments and shops. We have to try our best to keep it under control."

HEALTH MINISTER ZAHID MALEQUE

scale ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr. The move came around a week after it allowed readymade garment factories to resume production.

The decisions came when the virus is apparently having a tight grip on the country, infecting hundreds of people everyday.

The country reached the grim milestone of 10,000-plus coronavirus cases on Monday. The health authorities recorded the highest single-day cases -- 786 -- yesterday, which brought the total number of confirmed cases to 10,929.

One more Covid-19 patient died in the 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, taking the death toll to 183.

It is at this crucial juncture that the



The Mitford Road in Old Dhaka is packed with vehicles and people around 2:00pm yesterday. The country is under a shutdown to slow the spread of Covid-19 but nobody there seems to care about maintaining social distancing. Locals say traffic on the road has been almost normal in the last few days.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Schools, colleges to stay closed till May 30

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All educational institutions will remain closed until May 30 on the occasions of Ramadan, Jumatul Wida, Shab-e-Qadr, and Eid-ul-Fitr, said Mahbob Hossain, secondary and higher education division secretary.

"We will issue an order to this end soon," he told The Daily Star yesterday. All educational institutions have been closed since March 17, and the government has now extended the closure until May 16 to stem the further spread of Covid-19.

On April 27, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said all educational institutions may stay closed until September if the situation caused by the coronavirus outbreak does not improve.

Directorate of Primary Education sources said according to their academic calendar, all primary schools will remain closed until June 6 for Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr and summer vacations.

Educational activities of about four crore students are being hampered due to coronavirus crisis. Publishing of SSC exam results and holding of HSC exams have been deferred for an indefinite period. First-term exams of primary schools also

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## UNTAPPED when needed most

With no coordination, many labs and experts still unutilised in anti-coronavirus fight

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Due to a lack of coordination and support from the health ministry, a good number of laboratories and experts based in universities and government research institutions remain unutilised in the country's Covid-19 response.

At present, people are being screened for coronavirus in 33 designated centres equipped with real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) instruments. Over 3,000 samples can be tested in the span of 24 hours at these centres.

In addition, there are some 26 RT-PCR instruments in 17 public institutions and 46 in 37 private ones, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

At these institutions, there are hundreds of scientists and technicians who have specialised knowledge and expertise in handling highly contagious pathogens like Covid-19 and using the RT-PCR machines.

But so far, out of the 17 public institutions equipped with RT-PCR, only three have started Covid-19 screening. They are Jashore University of Science and Technology (JUST), Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU) and Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute.

And seven non-government hospitals and institutions are conducting the coronavirus tests. Experts point out the lack of coordination and support from the health ministry in underutilising available manpower and facilities.

For instance, on March 28, the University of Dhaka formed a technical

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## Govt recruits 2,000 docs to fight virus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has appointed 2,000 doctors as assistant surgeons in the BCS (Health) Cadre to fight the ongoing Covid-19 crisis.

The Ministry of Public Administration issued a gazette notification on Monday night appointing the doctors in keeping with the urgent needs of the state upon recommendation of the Public Service Commission (PSC).

The doctors have been asked to join the workplaces that the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) will assign them on May 12. If they do not get any instruction from the DGHS, they will have to join the directorate on May 12.

"If he or she does not join the job on the due date, s/he will be deemed as not agreeing to join the job and this temporary appointment will be

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## BATTLING COVID-19

# Are we leaving too much to chance?

AL-AMIN

In a desperate attempt to get the economy back on track, the government has reopened factories that remained closed for around a month in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

It has also decided to open shopping malls and markets on a limited scale from May 10 so that people can engage in economic activities centring the Eid-ul-Fitr to be celebrated later this month.

While reopening those key economic fronts, the government set out guidelines for social distancing and safety of workers and consumers alike.

Given that millions of workers are in economic hardship amid fears of job losses and businesses on the verge of collapse, it appears to be a pressing decision.

But is it a pragmatic decision when the virus cases are still on the rise in Bangladesh?

The country yesterday recorded 786 positive cases, the highest in a single day, as the total number of Covid-19 infections crossed the 10,000-mark on Monday.

In no certain terms do we know when

the pandemic, which has so far claimed over 2.5 lakh lives and infected over 3.5 million people worldwide, would reach its peak in Bangladesh.

With an ill-equipped healthcare set-up and very limited testing abilities, a country of 160 million people is still not sure where it stands at the moment in terms of combating Covid-19 and how to flatten the curve.

Ever since the first coronavirus patient was detected on March 7, the number grew slowly for a period. But now the country is seeing an explosion of cases and a fluctuating number of deaths on a daily basis.

Five Covid-19 patients died on Monday, taking the death toll to 182.

Quoting experts and health officials, this newspaper in yesterday's issue reported that it was difficult to predict the course of the pandemic.

"The virus is on course to reach the peak slowly. However, we cannot say exactly when it will peak," the report said quoting Mushtaq Hossain, epidemiologist and consultant at the Institute of Epidemiology,

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## CTTC wants Kajol arrested under DSA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police has filed a petition with Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court in Dhaka seeking its permission to show photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol arrested in a case filed under the Digital Security Act.

Motlubur Rahman, inspector at CTTC and also the investigation officer in the case, submitted the application on Monday.

In response, Metropolitan Magistrate Baki Billah asked the jail authorities in Jashore to produce Kajol before it on June 1 when the court would decide on the appeal.

The case in question was filed by Saifuzzaman Shikhor, a ruling party lawmaker from Magura-1, with Sher-E-Bangla Nagar Police Station on March 9.

Two more cases under the same act were subsequently filed on

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Holding food packets in their hands, two underprivileged children scale an iron fence of the High Court in the capital yesterday, risking injuries. Some, including the two, received food aid from a few city residents inside the court compound.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## 'Stepping down for sake of love'

Says Kishore Kumar Das about why he resigned as head of Bidyanando that faces torrents of abuse over his religious identity

SHARIFUL HASAN

In a surprising development, Bidyanondo Foundation founder chairperson Kishore Kumar Das announced his resignation yesterday. The notice of his resignation appeared on the organisation's official Facebook page.

But why did he do so all of a sudden?

Kishore, who is currently living in Peru, was contacted over phone and he gave an interview to The Daily Star about why he had left his position.

He said, "If anybody asks me what my most favourite thing in the world is at this moment, I would say that it is Bidyanondo Foundation. But sometimes a person needs to make sacrifices for the sake of people, for the sake of love. That is why I am resigning as the chairperson of the organisation."

A graduate of computer science from Chattogram University of Engineering Technology, Kishore is currently working as an entrepreneur in Peru.

Kishore informed that Bidyanondo was formed in 2013 with an aim to provide education to underprivileged children. Currently, more than 2,000 children receive basic literacy and food aid through its 12 branches. They

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