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Eskayef first in the country to produce remdesivir

The leading pharmaceutical company successfully produces the drug to treat coronavirus

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT, Dhaka

Leading pharmaceuticals company Eskayef has successfully produced remdesivir, the drug used for treating Covid-19 patients, and preparations began yesterday morning for distributing the drug.

Simeen Hossain, managing director and chief executive officer of Eskayef Pharmaceuticals Ltd, said at this crucial time the company is happy to give the people the good news that it has successfully completed all the steps in the manufacturing of remdesivir, globally recognised as the only effective drug for treating Covid-19 patients.

This drug, manufactured by US company Gilead Sciences Inc, has created a sensation all over the world. Last week, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved remdesivir for treating Covid-19 patients. The drug administration in Japan gave its permission on Thursday. However, a Japanese health official informed Reuters



that it has not been determined as yet when Japan will begin the manufacture of this drug.

It has been learnt that Gilead Sciences is negotiating with large companies in India and Pakistan regarding the manufacture of remdesivir. Eskayef is the first drug manufacturing company in the world to successfully manufacture generic remdesivir. The brand name for remdesivir, manufactured by Eskayef, is Remivir.

Simeen Hossain told The Daily Star that the drug administration gave its approval in March to use this drug.

"Immediately after that, our formulation scientists started working on the development of remdesivir from mid-March. As this is an injection to be administered intravenously, the production process is extremely sensitive. The tireless and relentless efforts of the Eskayef personnel over the past two

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Wearing masks and maintaining social distancing, devotees offer Juma prayers at Jamiatul Falah Jame Masjid in Chattogram city yesterday, a day after the government withdrew a month-long partial restriction on offering prayers at mosques. The ban was imposed to slow the spread of coronavirus.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

BANGLADESH UPDATE



709 New cases in 24hrs



13,134 Total cases



206 Deaths



2,101 Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



266,995 Deaths

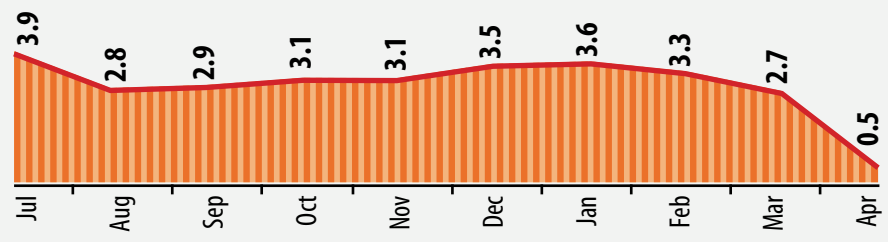


3,859,483 Total cases

Exports crash to a 40-year-low

EXPORT RECEIPTS SO FAR THIS FISCAL YEAR

(in \$b); SOURCE: EPB



REFAJET ULLAH MIRDHA

Incredible, is what one would sigh when chancing upon April's export receipts, which hit rock-bottom at \$520.01 million.

The earnings nosedived five times from the previous month and 82.9 percent from a year earlier, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau -- in what is the clearest harbinger of Bangladesh's export prospects in the near future as the rogue virus continues to ram the global economy towards its worst recession since the Great Depression.

Garment, which brings home as much as 84 percent of the export earnings, fetched just \$378.40 million, down from \$2.26

billion in March.

As the dust settles, April's export performance might not seem so shocking seeing that the country has been on a general shutdown since March 26, with factories shut and port activities pared down to the bare minimum.

And most importantly, the countries where the shipments are headed mostly -- the US and the EU -- have been on lockdown since February to flatten the curve on coronavirus, which has so far infected upwards of 3.9 million people around the globe and claimed more than 271,000 lives.

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Infections see sharp rise in second month

98pc of 13,134 Covid-19 cases recorded in last 30 days; death toll crosses 200-mark

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh recorded over 100 deaths from Covid-19 in the last 18 days of the second month since the detection of the first positive cases in the country.

It was this second month when the country reported the highest number of infections, around 98 percent, a picture quite similar to that of countries hit hard by the lethal virus.

On March 7, the health authorities registered the first cases of infection, and the first fatality was reported on March 18. It took a little over a month, on April 20, when the fatalities crossed the 100 mark.

But in the last month, the number of deaths and infections kept surging. In the past 18 days, the country reported 100 more deaths from coronavirus infection, passing the 200 mark.

Yesterday too, the health authorities confirmed seven more deaths and 709 new cases of infection after testing 5,941 samples at 35 labs. With this, the death toll from the deadly virus rose to 206, and the number of infected people stood at 13,134.

According to the World Health Organisation, the

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ONLINE CLASSES AMID SHUTDOWN

A distant reality, still for many

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

One and a half months into the closure of in-person classes due to the coronavirus outbreak, the majority of schools, colleges and universities across the country have yet to introduce online education.

Some schools and colleges in the capital and other big cities have started to take online classes to minimise the academic loss due to the shutdown.

But the majority of schools located outside these cities are yet to have initiated virtual learning, according to officials of Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE).

The University Grants Commission (UGC) officials say 63 out of 151 public and private universities have been taking online classes.

A lack of infrastructure and uneven access to internet and devices such as a desktop computer, laptop, or smartphone for the students are the vital obstacles to introducing virtual learning.

"Online education could be a good alternative to in-person classes during a crisis," Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said.

"The corona crisis exposed the fact that nobody has taken education seriously. The majority of schools, colleges and universities are not equipped to take online classes. Most students do not have the devices and internet access," he added.

Professor M Kaykobad of computer science and engineering department at Buet said there are some challenges but still it is possible to introduce online classes, especially when many use smartphones nowadays.

Mahbub Hossain, secondary and higher education secretary, said infrastructures and financial condition of educational institutions and students' access to device and internet are some major issues for online education.

"Some educational institutions have come forward to introduce online learning. We are also looking for options besides providing education through television to keep students engaged."

He added, "We cannot solve the problem overnight."

Some four crore students are now out of in-person classes as all the educational institutions have been closed since March 17.

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HEALTH SAFETY

DGHS gives guidelines on reopening

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has recently issued a set of guidelines on health safety measures that have to be strictly followed after the reopening of industries, businesses, educational institutions and services amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) prepared the guidelines on May 2 for the institutions, establishments and various professionals to prevent further spread of the deadly virus that has claimed more than 200 lives in Bangladesh.

Signed by DGHS Director General Abul Kalam Azad, the guidelines have identified 43 types of establishments and arranged them in different categories.

The guidelines asked the government, non-government organisations and individuals to cooperate until the pandemic ends.

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BWTC steamers sit idle in the Buriganga at Shoari Ghat terminal in the capital yesterday as operation of passenger vessels remain suspended for an indefinite period since March 24 due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

CASE AGAINST 11 UNDER DSA

Charges appear to be puzzling

ZYMA ISLAM and MUNTAKIM SAAD

The charges under Digital Security Act brought against 11 people, including two journalists, on May 6 are broadly described as "knowingly posting rumours against the Father of the Nation, the Liberation War and the coronavirus pandemic to negatively affect the nation's image and to create confusion among the public through social media and to cause the law and order situation to deteriorate."

But what does this even mean? They were charged under four sections of the law -- Section 21, Section 25(1) (b), Section 31 and Section 35.

Section 21 of the law prosecutes anyone who runs propaganda or campaign, "against the Liberation War of Bangladesh, the cognition of the Liberation War, Father of the Nation, National Anthem or National Flag".

The offence described in Section 25(1) (b) is "tarnishing the image of the nation or spread confusions" while Section 31 refers to contents that "create hostility, hatred or adversity among people or destroy any communal harmony or create unrest or disorder or deteriorates or threatens to deteriorate law and order."

Finally, Section 35 prosecutes anyone "aiding" in the above-mentioned offences.

An analysis of the social media links included as evidence by Rab in the First Information Report (FIR) may leave one puzzled as to the vague nature of the charges.

Six of the accused -- Ahmed Kishore, Mushtaq Ahmed, Saer Zulkarnain, Ashik Imran, Shapan Wahed and Philip Schuhmacher -- were named in the FIR for being the administrators of a Facebook page called "I am Bangladeshi".

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