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**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**

636
New cases in 24hrs

13,770
Total cases

214
Deaths

2,414
Recoveries

**GLOBAL
UPDATE**

277,503
Deaths

4,051,089
Total cases

Peak in 3rd or last week

Predicts govt's expert panel, says number of cases may cross 50,000 during that phase this month

RASHIDUL HASAN and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

A government-appointed committee has said the Covid-19 outbreak may peak in the third or fourth week of this month, but independent experts said it is too early to predict such a thing.

Predictions at this point will not mean much because of the very low number of tests and lax coronavirus restrictions, they said.

The expert committee also agreed that too few tests were being done for any predictions to be correct.

The health ministry in late March formed the eight-member committee to supervise, monitor and support the government's coronavirus response.

The team includes public health experts MA Foyez, Prof Shah Monir Hossain, Liaquat Ali, and Iqbal Anwar.

In a report last week, the committee said the outbreak might peak in the third or fourth week of this month and the situation would remain unchanged for almost two weeks. Then the number of cases is likely to come down to a "tolerable level" by the end of June, unless the government relaxes the restrictions.

The report submitted to the Directorate General of Health Services contains what officials call an exit plan with recommendations to relax the restrictions after June 25, according to Prof Shah Monir Hossain.

"Our team forecasts... that during the peak COVID-19 cases may cross the 50,000 mark," said Monir, senior consultant of the World Health Organization.

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Policemen fire tear gas canisters from an armoured vehicle at demonstrating garment factory workers on Nabinagar-Chandra road in Gazipur's Kashimpur area. The workers of Doreen Apparels Ltd blockaded the road yesterday morning after they were told that the factory was closed for an indefinite period.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

RMG workers demonstrate demanding full wages

STAR REPORT

At least 10,000 workers of 14 garment factories in Savar and Gazipur industrial belts yesterday demonstrated demanding full payment of their gross salaries for April as opposed to 60 percent.

The workers said they did not agree with the government's decision to cut the pay of those who could not join work amid the shutdown as many factories were closed and there was an acute crisis of transport as well.

In Gazipur, at least 6,000 workers of six factories took to the streets in Gazipur's Kashimpur area and blocked the Dhaka-Tangail highway around 8:00am when the factory managements started distributing payslips among the workers.

The agitators vandalised several vehicles and hurled bricks at police.

Police used tear gas water cannon to disperse the protesters as the

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Epidemiological surveillance yet to be in place

Experts say it's crucial in fight against epidemics

MOHAMMAD AL MASUM MOLLA

Bangladesh is yet to conduct an epidemiological surveillance which experts say is very important to understand the gravity of the coronavirus situation and will help take any policy decision in this regard.

They said such surveillance would have allowed health officials to suggest the government about the next course of action like when and how the ongoing shutdown should be relaxed or withdrawn, which area is highly vulnerable and what measures to be taken.

Epidemiological surveillance is the discipline of continuously gathering, analysing, and interpreting data about diseases, and disseminating conclusions of the analyses to relevant organisations.

In Bangladesh, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) was supposed to do the surveillance on Covid-19.

Contacted, IEDCR officials said they had started the surveillance and it would be completed in about three weeks.

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Most city malls opt not to open

Spread of virus prompts decision; govt announced markets may reopen today

RASHIDUL HASAN

Although the government had announced that shopping centres and malls could reopen today ahead of Eid, most owners in Dhaka and Chattogram cities have decided to keep the establishments closed as the number of Covid-19 cases keeps surging in the country.

Top leaders of Dokan Malik Samity, a platform of shop owners, in Dhaka said the decision was made also as an untoward situation could arise when shop employees, as instructed by the authorities, including the police, would force shoppers to follow health guidelines.

On May 4, the government said it decided to reopen shopping malls, all types of shops and other businesses from May 10 on a limited scale ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr. Those would remain open from 10:00am to 4:00pm every day, according to a gazette from the Cabinet Division.

The shopping malls and centres were closed on March 25, a day before the ongoing nationwide shutdown was enforced to stem the coronavirus outbreak.

But on May 6, the authorities of Bashundhara City Shopping Complex and Jamuna Future Park -- the country's two largest shopping malls -- decided not to reopen them, fearing that the coronavirus might spread to their customers, shop owners and employees.

On Friday, another popular shopping destination in the capital -- Dhaka New Market -- also decided not to reopen before the Eid on the same ground, Dewan Aminul Islam Shahin, president of Dhaka New Market Business Association, told The Daily Star.

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Countries must return to health surveillance

Says WHO, readies coronavirus app for checking symptoms

REUTERS, Zurich

Countries must return to "basic principles" of public health surveillance if they are to bring the coronavirus outbreak under control, the World Health Organization's (WHO) top emergency health expert said on Friday.

The WHO, which said it is facing a \$1.3 billion funding deficit for its effort to tackle Covid-19, issued the call for more surveillance as many countries including the United States, Switzerland, Mexico and Germany have turned their efforts toward re-opening economies battered by the pandemic.

Mike Ryan, head of the WHO's health emergencies programme, said during

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Nine out of 10 recovering

IEDCR says 8 more died from Covid-19, 636 newly infected

MOUJID AHMED SUJAN

Eight people died and 636 tested positive for Covid-19 across the country in the 24 hours until 2:30pm yesterday, said the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

While informing about the latest Covid-19 situation in the country through a bulletin yesterday, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of DGHS, said 5,465 samples were tested in 35 laboratories across the country in the 24 hours.

The eight people who died in the 24 hours were all male and aged between 40 and 80. With them, the total death toll of Covid-19 now stands at 214.

So far, a total of 116,919 individuals' samples were tested for Covid-19 and the total number of infections stood at 13,770.

Meanwhile, with four positive cases detected in Rangamati yesterday, people of all 64 districts in the country were now infected with the virus.

Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, recently told The Daily

Star that the number of positive cases would increase further as soon as the daily testing capacity goes up.

On April 28, the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 officially recommended to increase daily testing facility as early as possible.

Prof Mohammad Shahidullah, president of NTAC, recently told The Daily Star, "We have recommended to address the issues as early as possible to increase the number of daily tests."

In the last seven days until yesterday, the highest 6,260 individuals' samples were tested on Monday. Of them, 688 tested positive.

On Wednesday, the highest 790 cases were detected after testing 6,241 individuals' samples.

In the other days, it stayed stagnant near 5,500 on an average.

RECOVERY RATE AROUND 92 PERCENT In yesterday's press bulletin, Prof Nasima Sultana shared the recovery and death rate of the Covid-19 patients in the country.

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2,329 inmates are to be released

Govt takes step to minimise infections in prisons

MUNTAKIM SAAD

The prisons authorities are releasing another 2,329 convicted prisoners from jails in third phase to ease the accommodation crisis and minimise the risk of novel coronavirus transmission in overcrowded prisons.

"Most of the 2,329 inmates are supposed to be released by today [yesterday]. But a few of them have fine issues. They will be freed within two/three days," Col Abrar Hossain, additional inspector general (AIG) of prisons, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The prisoners, who were convicted of minor crimes, had been behind bars for less than three months.

Muhammad Monzur Hossain, AIG (admin) of prisons, said the prisons department sent release orders to the divisional offices on Friday.

The home ministry,

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A couple in personal protective equipment and their two children take a little rest after waiting for hours to get tested for coronavirus at Mugda General Hospital yesterday. The family came from Narayanganj's Siddhirganj after days of suffering from what the couple said were Covid-19 symptoms.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

BIRTHING LIFE IN A PANDEMIC Fear grips mothers-to-be

NILIMA JAHAN

Pregnancy is a stressful and overwhelming experience in itself. Add to that a global pandemic and the whole ordeal can become even more difficult and frightening.

Amidst the Covid-19 outbreak, 20-year old Ferdousi, a pregnant mother of one, was expecting to deliver her second child. However, she lives in an area that has become a "hotspot" for coronavirus.

While she wanted to deliver her baby at the local Upazila Health Complex, it has become impossible right now as the hospital currently has 33 coronavirus positive staffers.

"I'm having trouble breathing due to severe anxiety. I need to go to a doctor immediately but I don't know where to go in this situation. I don't feel the hospitals are safe," said Ferdousi.

"I'm very anxious about the whole thing as my husband lives abroad and I don't have any men in the family. My mother is old and sick," she added.

Ferdousi, who was married off at 16, gave birth to her first daughter via c-section two years ago.

In a situation so dire, she is not alone.

The coronavirus pandemic has uprooted the pregnancy plans of many and now, an overwhelming majority of them are going through both physical and psychological stress due to their antenatal appointments and finding a safe delivery place (hospitals or birthing centres) to welcome their newborns into this world.

Their fear is rational as some news reports have already said that hospitals are running out of medical staffers due to the current situation and people with emergencies are not being treated properly.

On April 24, a report went viral on social media about a 20-year old pregnant woman, Tania, being denied

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