

Cop, rickshaw puller die after showing symptoms

STAR REPORT

A rickshaw-puller and policeman died in Shariatpur and Barishal with Covid-19 like symptoms since Monday night.

In Barishal, the policeman, who was a resident of Bakerganj upazila, was serving duties as sub-inspector of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

He had been suffering from a cough and fever for a couple of days and was admitted to the Corona Isolation Unit (CIU) of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) on Sunday. After his physical condition kept deteriorating, he died around 8:00pm on Monday. His sample was collected for a coronavirus test, said Dr Bakir Hossain, director of SBMCH.

In Shariatpur, a 50-year-old rickshaw puller died after suffering from coronavirus-like symptoms at the isolation ward of Naria Upazila Health Complex yesterday morning.

The man, from Kedarpur union, was admitted to the isolation ward of the hospital with a fever, cold, sore throat, and breathing problems on Monday evening. He died around 7:30am yesterday, said Dr Md Safikul Islam, Naria upazila health and family planning officer.

"We collected samples from the deceased's body and his family members for coronavirus tests," he added.

(Our Barisal correspondent contributed to the story.)

Twitter to label 'misleading' virus content

AFP, Washington

Twitter said Monday it began tagging "misleading" and "disputed" claims about the coronavirus pandemic in a stepped-up effort to label potentially harmful content.

The move by Twitter comes with social networks struggling to deal with a wave of misinformation and unverified claims about the disease outbreak.

"Serving the public conversation remains our overarching mission, and we'll keep working to build tools and offer context so that people can find credible and authentic information on Twitter," said a blog post by Twitter's site integrity chief Yoel Roth and public policy director Nick Pickles.

The initiative comes following previous actions by Twitter to remove content posing a specific threat to health or safety.

Virus death toll

FROM PAGE 1

Among other regions, Chattogram tops the list with 6.38 percent positive cases followed by Mymensingh with 3.68 percent.

Besides, Rangpur division has 2.63 percent of the cases, Khulna division has 1.87 percent, Barishal 1.23 percent, Rajshahi 1.43 percent and Sylhet 1.50 percent.

ACC sues 20 over

FROM PAGE 1

Hafiz Sohag of Bogura's Majhihata union, Jarjid Mollah of Narail's Perli union, Alauddin Chowdhury of Narail's Joynogor union, BM Nasir Uddin Swapan of Shariatpur's Kuchaipotti union and Samsuddoha alias Dr Ratan of Shariatpur's Arshi Nagar union.

Alauddin, Golam Hafiz and Samsuddoha are behind the bar while the rest are at large.

Seven accused UP members are Sekendar Mia of Nayanresr union in Dhaka's Nawabganj, Shamim Bepari and Mofachhar Bepari of Shariatpur's Kuchaipotti union, Sultan Member of Sherpur's Moddhopovag union, Minara Begum of Sherpur's Malijhikandi union, Minhajuddin of Tangail's Jadavpur union and Ismail Fakir of Madaripur's Bashkandi union.

All of them have been arrested except Shamim Bepari.

Analysing the case statements, it has been found poor fishermen in different districts suffered the most due to the misappropriation.

For example, UP chairman Alauddin of Barguna's Kakrachira union got rice to allocate among 550 fishermen families in the union. He was supposed to provide 80kg rice to a family whereas he provided only 30kg.

In this way, he allegedly misappropriated about 27,500kg rice worth around Tk 12 lakh. Alauddin is now in jail.

UP Chairman Shahidul of Barishal's Andharmanik union embezzled about 3,840kg rice allocated for 384 fishermen.

Apart from UP chairmen and members, three rice dealers - Moshir Rahman from Bogura's Shiganj upazila and Abu Bakkar Siddiqui and Rafikul Islam from Manikganj's Singair upazila -- were accused in three separate cases filed over similar allegations.



Maintaining social distancing, people from low income families sit on chairs on the playground of Ujanchar KN High School in Brahmanbaria's Bancharampur upazila yesterday. Local lawmaker AB Tajul Islam handed them relief materials to ease their sufferings caused by the Covid-19 outbreak.

PHOTO: MASUK HRIDOY

Stalked by hunger in foreign lands

FROM PAGE 1

In its WhatsApp and email accounts plea for food from at least 4,200 migrants, said Sheikh Mohammed Tauhidul Islam, labour welfare counsellor at the embassy.

The mission last week handed out food parcels to 2,800 and the rest were likely to get the support soon, he said.

About one-fourth of nearly two lakh Bangladeshi migrant workers in Bahrain are facing financial hardship after completely or partially losing their earnings, he said, adding most of those employed as cleaners became unemployed.

In Malaysia, Bangladeshi migrant rights activist Harun-ur-Rashid told The Daily Star that undocumented migrant workers were being detained en masse recently.

Besides running short of food, many undocumented workers are in fear now, Harun said, adding that the

detentions during the pandemic were "inhumane".

Malaysian government made it mandatory for each foreign worker to get tested for coronavirus. Although the authorities said that the employers must pay for the tests, it is the workers who will end up paying for them, he said.

"It is an additional burden on the workers," he said.

There is a Malaysian government directive to pay the basic wages to employees unable to work due to the coronavirus restrictions, but many workers received only 12 days' basic salary for March, he said.

Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur is trying to deliver food aid to those in need, said Zahirul Islam, labour welfare counsellor at the commission.

Syeda Farhana Nur Chowdhury, labour welfare counsellor at

Treat patients or be shut down

FROM PAGE 1

the heels of numerous allegations that hospitals and clinics are refusing to admit or treat patients with ailments, suspecting that they could be Covid-19 positive.

Even, a number of cases surfaced that the patients with other complications died for not getting treatment at hospitals.

They are asked to show certificates that they are Covid-19 negative, but that is not being possible for them because of lack of coronavirus testing facilities in the country.

Presently, nearly 7,000 tests can be conducted a day in Bangladesh, while South Korea tests up to 20,000 a day.

In its circular, the ministry mentioned that since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, non-Covid-19 patients, including the ones suffering from chronic kidney diseases, have been facing problems in receiving treatment at private hospitals and clinics.

The health ministry, on several occasions, requested the associations of Bangladesh private clinics and diagnostic owners and Bangladesh medical college owners to continue treating the non-Covid-19 patients.

The Directorate General of Health Services also issued orders and made

it public through advertisements, but the problem still continues, it said.

Ministry officials said all the public hospitals were also asked to set up isolation units for suspected Covid-19 patients.

Public hospitals will have to collect samples and take steps to test the samples. If the patients are positive, they can refer them to the hospitals treating coronavirus patients after consulting the Covid-19 hospital control room of the health directorate, they said.

Presently, public medical colleges have Covid-19 test facilities and district Sadar hospitals have isolation units.

Asked about the order, Prof Rashid-E Mahbub, chairman of the National Health Rights Movement, said the intention of the circular is good to ensure that no patient is deprived of healthcare.

"However, there is a question of protection. All private hospitals don't have protection equipment to deal with suspected Covid-19 patients," he told The Daily Star.

There are two ways out, he said. First is that the government has to ensure quick tests of patients going to private hospitals, but currently it doesn't seem to conduct tests quickly

Flights may resume with empty seats

FROM PAGE 1

increase. "But if the airlines can carry 70 percent passengers against their capacity, they will be able to make profit or reach the break-even point financially," he said. The break-even point is the production level where total revenues equal total expenses.

He also said, "At this time, we have no alternative than to remain more careful about people's safety. The profit of the airlines comes after that."

"We are preparing to resume domestic and international flight operations after May 16 if the coronavirus situation improves by that time. But we will open airport operation partially, not fully."

Asked to elaborate, the CAAB chairman said, "We will allow local and foreign airlines to operate flights on a limited scale."

For example, he said, the local airlines would be asked to operate one or two flights to and from Dhaka daily.

"We are also working on ensuring health safety of all concerned, including passengers, officials and other employees at airports, pilots and crew members," said Mafidur.

School feeding finally resumes at homes

FROM PAGE 1

The biscuit distribution programme had been on hold since March 17, when the government closed down all schools in a bid to curb the spread of Covid-19.

The government then extended the closure of all educational institutions till May 30. But Directorate of Primary Education sources said according to their academic calendar, all primary schools will remain closed until June 6 for Ramadan, Eid-ul-Fitr and summer vacations.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on April 27 said all educational institutions would remain closed till September if the coronavirus situation did not improve.

The project officials sent a letter on April 25 to the DPE director general requesting him to take steps to enable the distribution of 50 packets of biscuits at a time to each student in the project area through upazila nirbahi officers and upazila primary education officers and teachers.

On one hand, the expiry dates of many biscuits are fast approaching and on the other, students are being deprived of nutrition as the schools are closed, said the letter.

Project officials said they have at least 7,212 tonnes of biscuits in stock.

Officials said in order to ensure nutrition, reduce hunger, dropout rates and increase attendance in

Bangladesh embassy in Athens, said during a recent food distribution event, many Bangladeshi migrant workers asked for cash support.

Some 30,000 Bangladeshi workers live in Greece and at least 1,085 received the food aid, she said.

The Greek government recently allowed reopening of some economic activities on a limited scale, bringing relief to thousands of migrant workers, she added.

Arfanul Hoque, labour welfare counsellor at Bangladesh embassy in Rome, said many workers were asking for financial support to pay the rents.

The mission has not been able to help them financially because the funds provided by the government were inadequate, he said, adding that a worker usually needs between 300 and 400 euros to pay the monthly rent in an Italian city.

as required, he said.

On the other hand, the government can allow private hospitals to buy PCR machines to conduct Covid-19 tests. In that case, these hospitals can test and treat the patients and that will largely reduce the burden on the public hospitals. Those who can avail will go to private hospitals, Mahbub said.

Health experts globally have been suggesting large-scale tests and isolation of Covid-19 patients -- the best way to prevent coronavirus spread.

However, the test rate in Bangladesh is significantly low.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra Founder and Trustee Dr Zafurullah said the home-grown rapid test kit could be a way out, but the government is not considering its validation as an emergency issue.

He said Gonoshasthaya Kendra scientists developed the rapid test kit that can test both antibody and antigen and has the accuracy level over 90 percent.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University has formed a committee to independently conduct its performance trial on May 2, but the trial is yet to start.

head caps while dealing with passengers at the check-in counters, shows the Caab website.

Crew members will avoid close contact with passengers and provide only the necessary in-flight services to them.

The operators will not serve food and drinks on flights with a travel time of less than one and a half hours.

For medium and long-haul flights, a normal meal should be served to passengers. All types of baby foods are exempted from restrictions.

In case any passenger is found with Covid-19 symptoms, crew members should immediately contact the destination airport and hand the passenger to them after landing taking support from the local authorities.

Passengers will stand in queues in front of the check-in counters maintaining social distancing. Their body temperature will be measured.

Flight crew will wear surgical masks or masks of higher standard and caps.

Cabin crew will wear N95 or equivalent protection facial masks, goggles, disposable rubber gloves and change facial masks every four hours, according to the guidelines.

the classroom, the government was carrying out the programme in 104 upazilas in poverty-prone regions.

Under this project, the government gives packets of fortified biscuits, each weighing 75 grams, to nearly 30 lakh children at about 15,800 primary schools in those 104 upazilas.

The government introduced the programme in 2010, following in the footsteps of the World Food Programme, which ran a project to feed primary schoolchildren from 2001 to 2009.

Project officials said that the rate of attendance at school has increased by five to 13 percent in schools that fall under the programme.

Show 'extreme vigilance' while easing curbs

WHO urges countries, hails dwindling infection rates, deaths in some nations

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization on Monday hailed dwindling Covid-19 infection rates and deaths in some countries, but called on nations to show "extreme vigilance" as they begin loosening their restrictions.

Swathes of Europe began the long process of reopening from coronavirus lockdowns on Monday, with officials in countries like France and Spain emboldened by declining death rates.

"The good news is that there has been a great deal of success in slowing the virus and ultimately saving lives," WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a virtual briefing.

WHO emergencies chief Michael Ryan meanwhile hailed the gradual lifting of the lockdowns as a sign of "hope".

But he cautioned that "extreme vigilance is required."

More than 280,000 people have died out of the more than four million known Covid-19 infections worldwide.

And while the drastic measures implemented by many countries have allowed them to get a tentative handle on the virus, there are widespread fears that there could be fresh waves of intense transmission.

Ryan urged countries to boost their public health responses, ensuring they can identify fresh cases, and trace and isolate all contacts, which he said could help "avoid a major second wave".

But he warned that while "many countries have made very systematic investments in building up their public health capacities during the lockdowns, others have not."

NO 'HERD IMMUNITY'

"If disease persists in countries at a low level without the capacity to investigate clusters, identify clusters, there is always the risk that the disease will take off again," he said.

Without naming names, Ryan

decried that some countries were choosing to "drive through this blind" by not dramatically ramping up their capacity to test and trace cases while they have the chance.

The WHO warned against the notion in some countries that even if they do not take the measures needed to halt the spread of the virus, their populations will quickly build so-called "herd immunity".

"Early serological studies reflect that a relatively low percentage of the population has antibodies to Covid-19," Tedros said, pointing out that this means "most of the population is still susceptible to the virus".

More than 90 so-called serological studies, which reveal the presence of antibodies in the blood to determine whether a person has had a past infection, were being conducted in several countries.

The WHO's Covid-19 technical lead Maria Van Kerkhove said that while the UN agency has not yet been able to critically evaluate the studies, initial data released showed that between one and 10 percent of people had antibodies.

"There seems to be a consistent pattern so far that a low proportion of people have these antibodies," she said.

Ryan agreed, saying the early results belied the widely-held assumption that most cases of the virus were mild and going undetected.

Preliminary results were "showing the opposite... that the proportion of people with significant clinical illness is actually a higher proportion" than previously thought, he said, stressing that "this is a serious disease".

"This idea that maybe countries that have lax measures... will all of a sudden magically reach some herd immunity, and so what if we lose a few old people along the way... is a really dangerous, dangerous calculation," he said.

Virus-hit Iran to reopen mosques for holy nights

AFP, Tehran

Virus-hit Iran will reopen its mosques for three nights over the next week so that worshippers can pray during one of the holiest times of year, a minister said yesterday.

The Islamic republic shut its mosques and shrines in March as part of its efforts to contain the Middle East's deadliest outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

The reopening was granted for Laylat al-Qadr -- a high point during the fasting month of Ramadan that marks when the Koran was revealed to Prophet Mohammed.

But Health Minister Saeed Namaki sounded a note of caution as he announced that worshippers would be allowed to attend mosques and ceremonies for three of the next five nights.

"The biggest strategic mistake is to think that coronavirus is finished," he said in remarks broadcast on state television.

"At any time, we can go back to bad circumstances" due to "negligence", said Namaki.

"Our priority is to hold ceremonies outdoors" such as "in stadiums", he said, "so that social distancing is properly observed."

Namaki said his ministry agreed in a meeting to help "organise

ceremonies from midnight to 2:00 am during the nights of Qadr".

- Supreme leader 'concern' -

He said the move came in response to "concern" expressed by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, but stressed the supreme leader "always supports all measures" to contain the virus.

All gatherings would need to respect "sanitary protocols to the maximum", he added.

But he warned: "They shouldn't blame the health ministry and say they wanted to open mosques but didn't care about people's health".

Iran has struggled to contain its outbreak of the virus that causes COVID-19 since announcing its first cases in the Shiite holy city of Qom on February 19.

The government closed schools, postponed major events and banned inter-city travel but it has eased restrictions gradually since April 11.

It allowed mosques to reopen on May 4 in 132 counties where the virus was deemed to be under control.

And on Friday last week worshippers were able to attend the main weekly prayers for the first time in more than two months, except for in the capital.

The government warned on Monday of a setback in its efforts to contain the virus as the official death toll hit 6,685.

Shutdown likely to stay

FROM PAGE 1

The following day, the 17-member National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 recommended reconsidering the government decision to reopen shopping malls and other businesses, saying such a move could lead to further transmission of the novel coronavirus.

Besides, in a report last week, the eight-member technical committee, formed by the government, said the Covid-19 outbreak may peak in the third or fourth week of this month.

However, several independent experts said it is too early to make such a prediction.

A reliable prediction would have been possible had there been more testing and stricter coronavirus restrictions, they said.

Amid such a situation, many big shopping malls in the capital decided not to reopen before the Eid. However, many shops and business centres reopened and the number of people stepping out of homes has increased significantly.

Meanwhile, the number of factories resuming operation is going up every day.

Of the 7,602 export-oriented factories across the country, at least 3,916 reopened as of yesterday, according to the industrial police. The number was 1,427 on April 26 when garment factories started reopening after a one-month closure.

GUIDELINES FOR GOVT OFFICES

The health ministry on Monday sent to the Cabinet Division a 13-point guideline for reopening any government offices.

In the letter, it said the housing and public works ministry could set up the required number of disinfectant tunnels, and offices need to be disinfected before reopening.

It also called for setting up thermal scanners for checking body temperature of staffers while entering offices, disinfect transport facilities, and ensure social distancing and use of masks by all.

The health ministry also recommended monitoring whether all the staffers are following the health-safety directives properly.

If any of the staffers develop Covid-19 symptoms, he or she has to be put in isolation immediately, it mentioned.