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**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**

1,602
New cases in 24hrs

23,870
Total cases

349
Deaths

4,585
Recoveries

317,662
Deaths

4,845,102
Total cases

Heedless of risks, people rush home

Amid lax enforcement of movement curbs, thousands leave Dhaka for Eid, raise fear of further spread of coronavirus

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and RASHIDUL HASAN

Thousands of people have begun to leave Dhaka for their village homes ahead of the Eid, ignoring the risks of contracting the coronavirus and spreading it to many others.

There were so many people on the ferries on the Padma yesterday that the authorities in a bid to prevent crowding suspended the services on Shimulia-Kathalbari and Paturi-Dauldia routes for hours.

In the absence of public transport because of the shutdown, the holiday makers travelled by pickups, motorcycles and battery-run three wheelers. Many had to spend two to three times the usual fare.

The Dhaka-Chattogram highway witnessed a 25km tailback in Daudkandi, caused mainly by thousands of cars leaving Dhaka.

The coronavirus had hit Dhaka and its adjacent areas the hardest in the country. Experts said this rush of thousands of people will further spread the deadly virus and delay the reopening process.

After observing the crowds that have been getting bigger for the last few days,



the Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity in a statement yesterday urged the government to announce a 10-day curfew around the Eid to slow the spread of the outbreak.

Around three crore people used to leave Dhaka and other major cities ahead of the Eid, it said. And many people have started leaving the cities for their hometowns this week.

The government announced the shutdown on March 26 and extended it six times. Most of the private and public offices will not open, and transport services will not resume before May 30.

In a circular on May 14, the cabinet division said movement of people will

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Crammed with people heading home to celebrate Eid, a ferry leaves Shimulia Ghat in Munshiganj's Louhajang upazila yesterday morning. There was not even the slightest room for maintaining social distance. Later in the day, the presence of passengers increased further, forcing the authorities to suspend ferry services on the Shimulia-Kathalbari route on the Padma. The move was taken to avoid coronavirus transmission.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Amphan may be as bad as Sidr

Met says about the cyclone that may hit coastal belts early tomorrow

PINAKI ROY

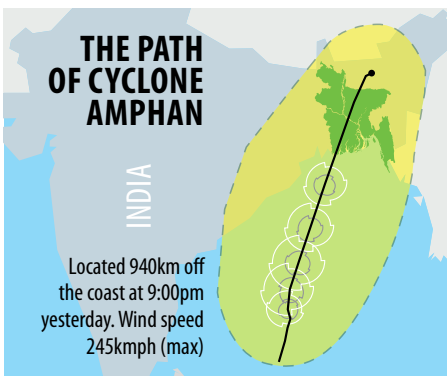
Cyclone Amphan was gaining pace in the Bay yesterday and may hit Bangladesh coast near the Sundarbans in the early hours of tomorrow, the met office warns.

With a wind speed of up to 245kmph, Amphan was located 940km off the coast at 9:00pm yesterday. It was formed in the Bay of Bengal on Saturday.

Weathermen fear that if it does not weaken before hitting the coast, it could be as devastating as Cyclone Sidr.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the cyclone may come as a double blow to disadvantaged people in the coastal regions. Many of them are reluctant to go to cyclone shelters as they are worried about protecting whatever little resources they have left.

"Along with the existing 4,071 permanent shelters, we have already prepared another 1,278, where around 51 lakh people could be accommodated. But with the coronavirus situation in mind, we will ensure maintaining social distance among



the people," Dr Md Enamur Rahman, state minister for disaster management and relief, told The Daily Star yesterday.

If somebody does not want to go to cyclone shelters, law enforcers will have to force them to leave vulnerable areas, he said.

These shelters are located in 19 coastal districts under Khulna, Barishal and Chattogram divisions. The ministry has allocated 3,100 metric tons of rice, Tk

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Cops grapple with Covid-19

Number of cases reaches 2,621; one more die

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

The numbers of Covid-19 infection in Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party are rising sharply on a daily basis.

In the 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, a member of police died in Dhaka and 64 more were found infected with coronavirus across the country. Ten Ansar members have also tested positive for the virus in that period, according to officials of the forces.

Till yesterday, the total number of infections in the police force rose to 2,621 and 222 in Ansar.

The police official who died yesterday was Mujibur Rahman Talukder, 56. He joined the force on January 1, 1983 and was working as a sub-inspector of Special Branch (City) of police, according to Police Headquarters.

Mujibur was admitted to Impulse Hospital on May 11 after he tested Covid-19 positive. As his condition deteriorated, he was shifted to the Intensive Care Unit of Central Police Hospital, where he breathed his last at 8:51am, said Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general of PHQ.

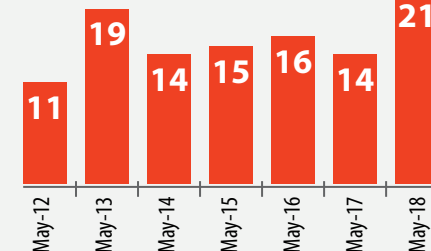
Hailing from Sirajganj, he left behind his wife, two sons and a daughter. The body was sent to Bogura, where his family lives. Mujibur's death brings the number of police personnel to have died with Covid-19 while discharging their duties to nine.

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Virus deaths surge, new cases too

21 more die, 1,602 test positive in 24 hrs; experts for further expansion of testing facilities, change in govt strategy

ANOTHER RECORD IN DAILY DEATHS



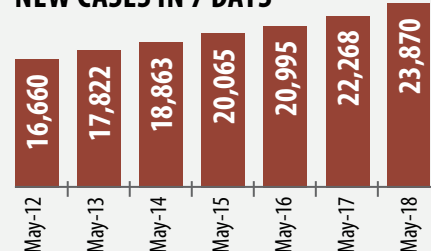
MAHIBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

The country yesterday saw the highest number of deaths from the novel coronavirus -- 21 in a single day -- with a record 1,602 positive cases.

With this, the death toll now stands at 349 and the number of Covid-19 cases rises to 23,836.

However, experts fear that the actual number of infected people is much higher than that, and the hidden Covid-19

7,000 NEW CASES IN 7 DAYS



cases continue to spread the virus. If the government fails to trace them, the situation will deteriorate further.

"Many are failing to avail themselves of the testing facility. On the other hand, the testing capacity is limited, which is why a good number of infected people have remained untraced," said Prof Muzaherul Huq, former regional director (Southeast Asia) of World Health Organisation.

Testing facilities should be expanded to

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FAILURE TO PAY WAGES BGMEA asks govt to close 46 factories

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has recommended that the ministry of labour and employment close down 46 garment factories that failed to pay the workers' salary for March despite repeated requests from the association.

BGMEA on April 30 sent a letter to Begum Monnujan Sufian, state minister for labour and employment, requesting her to allocate money for these factories from the Central Fund of the government.

The Central Fund came into being in 2017 and every garment exporters have been contributing 0.03 percent of their export receipts to this fund created mainly for the welfare of garment workers.

In the letter, BGMEA said about 99 percent of their members have paid

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Monir Hossain, an ambulance driver, sits on a stretcher on the pavement in front of the BSMMU as dawn breaks. He was waiting for his turn to be tested for coronavirus at the hospital. The man from Jatrabari said he went to Shahbagh on Sunday noon after people from his locality threatened to drive him out of the area if he failed to show them his Covid-19 test report.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Scientists, health officials in dark

Experts say they're making predictions on outbreak based on assumptions, not science

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Health officials in the country are making predictions about the coronavirus outbreak based mostly on assumptions, not scientific analyses, experts said.

Scientists and public health experts are still in the dark, because the R-naught, which is a representation of the number of new infections estimated to result from a single case, has not been measured in the country yet.

So, it is difficult to tell at what stage the outbreak is now and when it may peak and how lethal it might get, they said.

R-naught, also called R0, gives insightful information that helps policymakers decide when to enforce strict lockdowns and when to lift the restrictions, Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director of disease control at the Directorate General of Health Services, told The Daily Star.

"The government and health officials are predicting based on assumptions, not sufficient and authentic scientific evidence," he said.

"Our health officials' predictions are based on assumptions, not proper scientific data," he said.

Lower R-naught score means fewer new cases and higher score means the opposite, he added.

"So, R-naught is very crucial in understanding the current status and to predict the future and to take actions based on evidence," he added.

Experts said IEDCR was supposed to work out a plan to determine the R0 after the first case was recorded in the country on March 8.

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