



The Daily Star



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BANGLADESH UPDATE 1,764 New cases in 24hrs | 44,608 Total cases | 610 Deaths | 9,375 Recoveries | **GLOBAL UPDATE** 367,715 Deaths | 6,071,825 Total cases

Flattening the curve a far cry now

Say experts as govt eases Covid clampdown ignoring their warnings

ZYMA ISLAM and MAHABUBUR RAHMAN

On the same day the Cabinet Division issued a circular on relaxing the shutdown, the government's very own National Technical Advisory Committee on May 28 warned of an explosion of cases if health and safety measures were not implemented strictly.

In mid-April, the government formed the 17-member advisory committee to tackle the outbreak of novel coronavirus in the country. Since then, it has been giving advice on different issues on fighting Covid-19.

"It has been seen that countries that lifted the lockdown before experiencing a definite reduction in the infection rate, experienced a rise in the infection rate," said a statement signed by its Chairperson Prof Dr Md Shahidullah and Member Secretary Prof Dr Meerjady Sabrina Flora.

Dr Shahidullah is a senior child specialist and president of Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council while Dr Flora is the director of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

"Lifting the lockdown before strictly implementing the rules and requirements of preventing transmission will increase the number of positive patients and create pressure on the healthcare system," warned the statement.

The statement mentioned that the committee had previously given a similar advice to the government on May 7.

"I see no possibility of the curve flattening," said Dr Iqbal Arsalan, a member of the committee.

"This is still unpredictable. People are going around without masks for

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An employee of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport sitting on a chair at a terminal. The chairs have been marked to make sure that people do not sit next to each other but they are apparently not three feet apart. Inset, an airplane being readied yesterday as domestic flights are set to take to the sky after remaining grounded for over two months due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Engage local public reps in Covid-19 fight

PM directs authorities UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the authorities concerned to engage the local public representatives in a greater way to contain the spread of novel coronavirus.

"The prime minister issued the directive while addressing a meeting of the National Technical Advisory Committee, formed to fight Covid-19 in the country," PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told UNB.

Hasina also directed the authorities to check the spread of novel coronavirus and provide proper healthcare services to the infected patients.

The three-hour meeting

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Death count doubles in two weeks

28 more die; 1,764 new cases recorded

MAHABUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

The government has relaxed the nationwide shutdown at a time when the number of Covid-19 patients is increasing at a faster rate than ever.

The death toll has doubled in the past fortnight, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With 28 deaths reported yesterday, death toll in the country has risen to 610, up from 298 on May 15.

The country recorded its first death from Covid-19 on March 18.

Experts had suggested that antigen and antibody tests be carried out on people before reopening the businesses and official activities.

They termed the easing of the shutdown without ensuring a proper safety plan a "dangerous decision".

ANTIGEN AND ANTIBODY TEST Talking to The Daily Star, Prof Muzaherul Huq, former adviser (Southeast Asia Region) of the World Health Organization (WHO), had recently suggested that the

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Public plight set to worsen

Govt panel recommends 80pc hike in bus fare; air fare may rise by at least Tk 300

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and RASHIDUL HASAN

The government is going to significantly raise bus fares, making travelling costlier for people already struggling with unemployment and reduced income amid the coronavirus outbreak.

A committee yesterday recommended an 80 percent hike in the fares because maintaining proper distance among passengers would reduce a bus's capacity to 50 percent of normal levels.

"We will send our recommendations to the Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges for approval. They will decide," said Yousub Ali Mollah, acting chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

The new fares will be a major blow for people struggling amid the shutdown since March 26, economists and passengers' rights activists said. Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity yesterday urged the government to give incentives to transport companies to keep travelling costs stable.

80 PERCENT HIKE On Friday, a meeting decided that buses will carry 50 percent of normal level passengers when the services resume from tomorrow.

Transport associations then demanded that the fares be doubled. The special committee to fix bus fares yesterday held a meeting at BRTA head office in the capital, which was attended by representatives of transport owners and workers, Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC), and Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA).

"We have recommended raising bus fares by 80 percent," Yousub told The Daily Star.

If approved by the ministry, the new fares would be applicable during the Covid-19 crisis only, he added.

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IMF to lend \$732m for urgent needs

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

The optics look perfect. The global lender of last resort coming to the rescue of a not-too-well-endowed country struggling with the economic impact of the pandemic with no strings attached.

A couple of weeks back, Bangladesh requested for emergency funding to tackle the economic impact of the global coronavirus pandemic and the International Monetary Fund responded to that call just as swiftly, sanctioning \$732 million for the country -- without any conditions.

It is the last part that seems rather surprising as it is the idea of "conditionality" that underpins almost all of the IMF's lending relationships with member states.

Whenever it lends, it insists that the borrowing government tighten its belt and exercise restraint in public spending.

This helps to achieve three objectives. One is to stabilise the public debt burden, to ensure that the resources made available are not wasted. The second is to limit the whole economy's need for foreign exchange, a shortage of which had

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Trump cutting US ties with WHO

Moves toward ending HK privileges in volley on China

REUTERS, Washington

The United States will end its relationship with the World Health Organization over the body's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, US President Donald Trump said on Friday, accusing the UN agency of becoming a puppet of China.

The move to quit the Geneva-based body, which the United States formally joined in 1948, comes amid growing tensions between Washington and Beijing over the coronavirus outbreak. The virus first emerged in China's Wuhan city late last year.

Trump also ordered his administration to begin the process of eliminating special US treatment for Hong Kong to punish China, but stopped short of calling an immediate end to privileges that have helped the territory remain a global financial centre.

Speaking in the White House Rose Garden, the US president said Chinese officials "ignored their reporting obligations" to the WHO about the virus - that has killed hundreds of thousands of people globally - and pressured the agency to "mislead the world."

"China has total control over the World Health Organization despite only paying \$40 million per year compared to what the United States has been paying which is approximately \$450 million a year," he said.

Trump's decision follows a pledge last week by Chinese President Xi Jinping to give \$2 billion to the WHO over the next two years to help

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SSC results via websites, texts today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Results of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and equivalent exams will be published today.

Examinees would get their results online and via SMS this year as the authorities decided to avoid the traditional method due to coronavirus situation in the country, said education ministry officials.

Over 13.23 lakh examinees and their guardians who registered earlier would receive their results on their phones via SMS. Rest of them would be able to see their results online.

Prof Ziaul Haque, chairman of Dhaka Education Board, said those who pre-registered would get their results between 12:00 noon and 1:00pm.

All preparations for publishing the results have been completed, added Ziaul, who is also the head of the inter-board coordination committee.

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Encroachment and throwaway plastic goods make it seem like Segun Bagicha canal in the capital's Manda is a stream of garbage. The clogged canal may cause flooding in the area during monsoon. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

ABDUCTION, MURDER IN LIBYA

'Pay the money or else they die'

Agents of abductors in Bangladesh had demanded Tk 10 lakh ransom for each victim

MOKAMMEL SHUVO and SUZIT DAS

The Bangladeshi workers who were killed in Mizda town in Libya were kept hostage on the way to Tripoli from Benghazi by a group of international traffickers, comprising Libyans, Bangladeshis and Somalis, who demanded Tk 10 lakh from each of the hostages' families.

Some family members of the victims even paid ransom to the local agents of traffickers yet could not save their family members.

The Daily Star reached the family members of eight of the 26 dead migrant workers belonging to Kishoreganj, Jashore, Madaripur and Faridpur, and came to know that Bangladeshi members of traffickers group called the families last week and demanded USD 12,000 or Tk 10 lakh if they wanted their family member alive.

At least six of the migrant workers from Madaripur and Faridpur left Bangladesh for Libya in January while the two others from Kishoreganj and Jashore reached Benghazi a few months ago and were working there. But all of them were held hostage on the way to Tripoli.

The traffickers either called or sent voice messages demanding money from May 15 to May 26, said family members of the victims.

Kabul Mridha, father of a dead worker identified as Sujon Mridha from Gopalganj, said, a Bangladeshi member of the trafficker gang called them from an account called "Hamari" and gave them a bank account number of Ahmed Mohammed Adham Salama Bank in Somalia and

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