

Central oxygen supply elusive

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which have the system and of those which are viable [where the system can be installed]. We will send the list to the ministry tomorrow," Aminur told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said on Wednesday they sent a letter to the ministry seeking permission to install central oxygen supply systems at three hospitals. Upon approval, it would take 15 days to complete the work.

The three hospitals are: Kurmitola General Hospital, Kuwait-Bangladesh Maitree Government Hospital and Shaheed Suhrawardi Medical College Hospital, he said.

Doctors and health officials said government hospitals use gas cylinders, in many cases interconnected large cylinders, to supply oxygen to patients. Cylinder gas supply system is relatively expensive and requires frequent refilling and constant monitoring by doctors or nurses to ensure that the stock is enough.

The government move to install central oxygen supply system comes at a time when allegations are rife that patients, especially those at dedicated Covid-19 hospitals, were suffering due to insufficient oxygen supplies, which in some cases resulted in deaths.

The health ministry's letter also admitted as most of the 39 hospitals do not have liquid oxygen tanks, Covid-19 patients were being deprived of uninterrupted oxygen supply.

Of the 39 hospitals mentioned in the letter, 18 have medical colleges. Those include Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Sir Salimullah Medical College and Mitford Hospital; 16 are 250-bed hospitals, and five specialised hospitals.

The ministry asked (the NEMEMW and TC) to install liquid oxygen tanks on an emergency basis at hospitals that do not have them, and if necessary, take steps to expand gas system lines.

Among government hospitals in Dhaka, DMCH, Sir Salimullah Medical College, National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) and National Institute of Neurosciences & Hospital, Dhaka, have central oxygen systems, said Aminur Rahman.

However, a doctor of the DMCH said they have central oxygen systems only at their new building and ICU, operation theatre and post-operative rooms.

WHY CENTRAL OXYGEN SYSTEM IS CRUCIAL?

Infectious diseases specialist Prof Ridwanur Rahman said the main reason behind the death of any Covid-19 patient is the shortage of oxygen.

When the lung gets infected, many patients gasp for oxygen. The urgency

of the requirement, however, varies from patient to patient, he said.

Using a cylinder, a patient can be given oxygen at a maximum rate of six litres per minute, he said, adding that many need more oxygen and the central system can provide even 40 litres of oxygen per minute.

"It's possible to save lives of many [Covid-19] patients with the central oxygen system," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the central system should be immediately installed at all the dedicated Covid-19 hospitals.

"We have been asking for the installation for long, but the authorities paid little heed to it," he lamented.

Talking to The Daily Star late last month, at least three doctors at the Kurmitola General Hospital, one of the dedicated Covid-19 facilities, said patients at their wards get between six to 10 litres of oxygen per minute. This means a 2000-litre cylinder lasts between 3.5 and 5.5 hours, depending on the patients.

With increased number of Covid-19 patients, the cylinders were running out fast, they said.

In addition, the hospital staff was divided into three groups. While one group works, the others stay in quarantine. It means the hospital was running with a third of its staff members. So, it was impossible for them to monitor the cylinders of each patient all the time, they said.

Aminur Rahman said a central oxygen system can reserve more than 5,000 litres of oxygen, whereas an oxygen cylinder can contain 38.7 litres. In that case, 20 to 50 such cylinders were made interconnected to supply oxygen to patients.

That's why the cylinders need to be refilled after every two to three days, he said.

Asked why the central oxygen system has not been installed in all the 39 hospitals yet, Aminur said all of them were not viable.

Hospitals having 500 beds or more are usually eligible for the central oxygen supply system, but oxygen demand has increased sharply as Covid-19 patients need more oxygen, he said.

"So, a dedicated Covid-19 hospital with only 150 beds is also viable."

The chief technical manager said only two companies -- one local and one multinational -- can supply and install the central oxygen supply system and it takes around 15 days.

These companies have already brought some liquid oxygen tanks and if the number of hospitals is more than 10, they might have to import tanks. "It may take some more time".

Poor awareness

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"Lockdown has been eased before the government ensured an environment where people maintain the minimum level of hygiene," he said.

The government has made it compulsory to wear face masks outdoors. "But before this, people should have been motivated enough to wear masks."

The government also failed to engage elected representatives in motivating and persuading people to follow the rules, he added.

The daily numbers would not have spiked if the councilors of Dhaka city's 127 wards monitored public movement and restricted unnecessary gatherings, he said.

President of Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council Prof Md Shahidullah said people's lack of awareness was a major cause for the spread of the outbreak.

"We see people on the streets not following any coronavirus rules. This has a cumulative impact on the outbreak," he said, adding that the mass travelling before and after the Eid was another reason why the cases surged.

He is a member of the national committee formed by the government in April to monitor the coronavirus

response.

At yesterday's briefing, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general at the DGHS, urged people to wear masks at public places.

"Wearing a mask and regularly washing your hands will reduce the risks of infection," she said.

There is no evidence supporting that the novel coronavirus spreads from a dead body, she said.

"The novel coronavirus can live up to three to four hours in a human body after death. And it usually takes over four hours to complete the burial.

"Besides public graveyards, you can bury the bodies at family graveyards too. But the body must be wrapped in bags or polythene and personal hygiene should be ensured," she added.

She urged people to hold funerals as per their religion.

Of those reported dead yesterday, 28 were males and nine females. The largest number of victims were from Dhaka division, followed by Chattogram.

One of them was aged between 21 and 30, three between 31 and 40, five between 41 and 50, 12 between 51 and 60, 12 others between 61 and 70 and four between 71 and 80.

Over 50 involved

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on Tuesday. They are Sheikh Mahbubur Rahman, chairman of a recruiting agency; his brother Sheikh Shahidur Rahman, managing director of the agency; and Baharul Islam Bachchu, a broker. They were placed on four-day remand, said a CID official seeking anonymity.

The official said they also got the names of some Bangladeshis who are involved with human trafficking gangs in Libya. They are now staying in the North African country.

Of them, three are from Kishoreganj's Bhaibrab Upazila, added the official.

Early yesterday, a team of Rab-14 arrested three more accused in the case from Bhaibrab upazila. They are Helal Mia alias Helu, 45, Khabir Uddin, 42, and Shahid Mia, 61.

Rab sources said six of the 26 victims were from Bhaibrab upazila. They are Mohammad Ali, 25; Mahbubur Rahman, 21; Rajan Chandra Das, 27; Sakib Mia, 18; Saddam Hossain Akash, 25; and Shakil, 20.

Ali and Mahbubur had given two of the arrestees -- Helal and Khabir -- Tk

3 lakh each to go to Libya, Roffiuddin Muhammad Jobaer, company commander of Rab-14, told The Daily Star.

In Faridpur, a man was arrested in connection with the trafficking and killing of the 26 Bangladeshis.

Police arrested Enamul Haque Gazi from Muksudpur upazila's Gohala Bazar area after the father of one of the victims filed a murder case with Saltha Police Station against Enamul and five others.

Kabir Sheikh, the father of Kamrul Sheikh killed in Libya on May 28, filed the case, said Sub-inspector Mominur Rahman of the police station.

During primary interrogation, Enamul admitted that he took money from Kamrul for sending him to Libya, added the police officer.

Earlier on May 29, a Rab team arrested Kamal Uddin alias Haji Kamal, 55, an alleged leader of a human trafficking gang, from the capital's Shahjadpur area. He was later made an accused in the human trafficking case.

Our Mymensingh and Faridpur correspondents contributed to this report.



Fatema Akhter arrived at the gate of Mugda General Hospital around 5:00pm on Tuesday to get tested for coronavirus which would not begin until 9:00am the next day. The photo was taken over 12 hours after she started waiting there. Many people have to go through this ordeal just to be able to give their samples for testing.

Overlooked otherwise

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"The dream that the traffickers sell is there [the jobseekers] will be taken to Europe," said the embassy official, requesting anonymity.

The May 27 killings took place when the migrants, 38 Bangladeshis and several Africans, were being transported from Benghazi to Tripoli on way to Europe via the Mediterranean.

According to the UN Refugee Agency, between January and April 30 this year, a total of 693 Bangladeshis out of 23,658 migrants made it to Europe illegally through land and sea routes.

The number of Bangladeshis who reached Italy through the Mediterranean was 8,131 in 2016, 5,040 in 2015 and 4,386 in 2014, according to the UN Migration Agency.

Law enforcers say vulnerable migrant workers in the Middle East are also the targets of human traffickers.

"Traffickers sell dreams of Europe to the jobless or low-paid migrants in countries like Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Iraq. They smuggle them to Europe via Iran and Turkey," said a CID official who was involved in probing human trafficking cases of Bangladeshis in Iran recently.

In Iran and Turkey, they are held hostage for ransom. Those who can pay are sent to Europe, while others face inhumane torture, he said.

Brac Migration Programme Head Shariful Hasan said those going abroad with valid work visas also fall victim to human trafficking when they pay very high fees and don't get jobs or salaries as per the job contract.

Many a time, job contracts are prepared against non-existent companies. Also, the migrants' passports are confiscated by the employers or agents, preventing them from changing jobs even when they don't get proper salaries or work excessive hours, he said.

"In many cases, our migrants work under duress and remain indebted. These are all elements of human

trafficking."

This is the situation for long but there has not been any coordinated and effective mechanism to punish the human traffickers, Shariful said, adding that not much has been done since the deaths of the Bangladeshis in the Mediterranean in May last year.

Following a High Court order, an inter-ministerial committee was formed with the expatriates' welfare ministry's additional secretary as its convener. The committee was asked to submit a report on the actions taken against those involved in human trafficking.

Contacted, Ahmed Munir Saleheen, secretary of expatriates' welfare ministry, said the committee had submitted a report, including findings and recommendations, to the High Court.

"Human trafficking to Libya is happening by using tourist visas. These people know that it is illegal to go to Libya for work, but still they are going there," he told The Daily Star.

"Awareness is needed to stop human trafficking," he added.

Asked why the conviction rate of human trafficking cases is low, he said it was the responsibility of the home ministry to look into the matter.

According to the Police Headquarters, between 2012 and 2019, a total of 5,088 cases were filed under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act-2012, but only 111 persons were convicted.

Last year alone, 1,557 got arrested in human trafficking cases.

The Act says any case under it should be investigated in 90 days and disposed in 180 days.

Rights activist Noor Khan Liton said there have been numerous incidents of human trafficking over the last few years, but no exemplary punishment was given to the criminals.

He recalled that mass graves of Rohingya and Bangladeshis were discovered in Thai and Malaysian

jungles, unfolding harrowing tales of torture and death.

"Every time a big incident happens, we see some arrests and cases. We haven't seen any drastic measures or any exemplary punishment to the human traffickers," Noor Khan told The Daily Star.

The criminals get rid of the cases because of their political influence and negligence of law enforcers, he said. For the last three consecutive years, the US has ranked Bangladesh in the bracket of Tier 2 Watch List in its Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report.

As per the US law, Bangladesh is not eligible to remain in Tier 2 Watch List this year. Either Bangladesh must show significant and increased efforts to meet the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking in persons and achieve a Tier 2 ranking or risk an automatic downgrade to Tier 3, the US Embassy in Dhaka earlier told The Daily Star.

Contacted, Abu Bakar Siddique, chief of the counter-trafficking cell under the home ministry, said it is true that case disposal and conviction rates are low.

"In many cases, the complainants settle through arbitration. In some others, appropriate evidence is not found," he told The Daily Star on Monday.

He added that the government published a gazette in mid-March this year to establish seven specialised tribunals to deal with human trafficking cases.

Once these courts are physically established, the trafficking cases will see more and quick disposal, he added.

Shariful Hasan of Brac said the country has a national plan of action to combat trafficking. As per the plan, there should be committees at the district, upazila and union levels to create awareness, but these are largely ineffective.

"One ministry passes responsibility to another ministry. That's how things are going and thus we see our image tarnished globally," he added.

'My long road to recovery'

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to go here and there in search of news, I limited my movement between office, home and the kitchen market, particularly after the government announced the nationwide shutdown in late March.

From mid-April, I, like all other staffers of The Daily Star, started working from home. My wife, a homemaker, never came out of our rented house in the last three months save the one time she needed to go out to give a sample for the Covid-19 test.

I, however, had to go to the kitchen market and grocery shop twice or thrice during the second fortnight of April.

Near the end of that month, I began feeling discomfort inside my throat. I also had a light cough. On May 1st, my wife began feeling feverish -- her temperature rose to 100 degrees and she developed a broken voice.

On the same day, my temperature was 98.5 degrees. We started to take medicine for our fever and cough from the following day after consulting a doctor.

We started doing some exercises, especially those for the lungs, knowing that it may turn out helpful. We took tea with cinnamon, cloves, black pepper, ginger and basil leaves regularly.

After recovery, we think those were what helped us heal fast. We had stored a good amount of food, which proved helpful.

After three days, my wife recovered from fever and my light cough subsided. But then two days later, my wife and began coughing again.

We consulted the doctor again and he prescribed antibiotics for me and normal cough medicine for my wife. As there was no improvement over the next five days, we consulted my brother-in-law and decided to test ourselves.

In the meantime, we started taking vapour with warm water and gargled with lukewarm water and salt twice a day. We both had lost our appetites, while my wife was beginning to lose her sense of smell.

After giving our samples to test on May 10, we got the result two days later. This was when our fight started.

When I received the email from the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research and talked to my wife about the result, we were both speechless for a few moments. We panicked for a while but tried to take it easily and began to come to terms with it. It was tough but we tried.

I called a relative of mine who we both depend on. He had also earlier taken a test and his result was negative. He was the one who informed us of the best possible testing facilities. Such dependable relatives or friends were crucial at a time when we had to lock ourselves up inside our two-bedroom apartment.

My relative helped us get in touch with one of the best doctors in the country. While I got some privilege due to my status as a journalist, it was evident that it would be difficult for other to be able to go to a renowned doctor at this time.

The doctor prescribed some medicines and also asked us to take vapour with warm water and do gargle with warm water several times a day.

We started taking the medicines from May 12th.

Meanwhile, I informed the development to my bosses at the office and some close relatives. We didn't inform our house-owner or others fearing that it may cause some unwanted problems.

We started regularly took our medicines and followed the doctor's advice. We started taking our special teas, vapour and gargled four to five times every day. We continued exercising and took lemon juice with warm water twice or thrice every day.

We only drank warm water and we even bathed in slightly hot water.

We tried to have some fruits every day. We washed our clothes with detergent regularly and tried to keep our rooms and dining regularly disinfected.

But as the days passed, symptoms started to change. We started to feel pressure in our chests, especially

Police seize Ron Sikder's Range Rover

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police on Monday seized Ron Haque Sikder's Range Rover which was allegedly used during the attempted murder of Exim Bank Managing Director Mohammed Haider Ali Miah.

Ron shot Haider from inside the vehicle on May 7, according to a case filed with the Gulshan Police Station.

A team of Gulshan Division Police seized the white SUV from Sikder House on Banani Road-11 on Monday, said Assistant Commissioner Rafiqul Islam.

"We seized the car as evidence of the case," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

On May 19, Exim Bank Director Lt Col (ret'd) Serajul Islam filed the case accusing Ron and his brother Dipu Haque Sikder of torturing and trying to kill Haider and Mohammad Feroz Hossain, additional managing director of the bank over a loan.

The two top officials were attacked after they refused to falsely inflate the value of Sikder brothers property that would be mortgaged for a loan of Tk 500-crore, according to the case.

The Sikders also tortured the two officials while confining them to a house in Banani and forced them to sign on a blank paper at gunpoint, read the case.

On May 25, six days after the case was registered, the two brothers fled to Bangkok on an air ambulance that left Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport with government permission.

Mashiur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Detective Branch of Police, told The Daily Star yesterday that officers were collecting witness statements and evidence. "Whoever is involved and wherever they are staying -- Thailand or Bangkok-- we are working to ensure their punishment."

Noted doctor dies from Covid-19 in Chattogram

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Noted medicine specialist Dr Ahsanur Karim, who had been suffering from leukemia, died from the novel coronavirus at the Chattogram Medical College Hospital yesterday.

He was an associate professor at Marine City Medical College and Hospital in the port city. He was 56.

Dr Ahsanur breathed his last around 2:00pm. He contracted the deadly virus recently, Brigadier General SM Humayun Kabir, director of the CMCH, told The Daily Star.

"He was admitted to the CMCH four days ago and was receiving treatment at a cabin. We transferred him to the Intensive care unit today morning," mentioned the director.

US scrambles

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instead chanting slogans and peacefully walking the streets in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Hours after the curfew, mayor Bill de Blasio said it was a "very calm situation," a day after several Manhattan luxury stores were looted.

"So far, the curfew is certainly helping, based on everything I've seen in Brooklyn and Manhattan over the last three hours," he tweeted.

Minnesota took one of the first concrete actions to address the grievances behind the uprising, which began after Floyd's death on May 25 in the state's largest city Minneapolis.

The state launched a civil rights investigation of the Minneapolis Police Department, looking at possible "systemic discriminatory practices" going back 10 years, Governor Tim Walz tweeted.

Former president George W Bush called on the US to examine its "tragic failures" and to "listen to the voices of so many who are hurting and grieving."

And in Los Angeles, one of dozens of cities hit by unrest, police officers and Mayor Eric Garcetti dropped to their knees in a symbolic act of solidarity as they met marchers led by African-American Christian groups.

"A black face should not be a sentenced to die, nor to be homeless, nor to be sick, nor to be underemployed, nor to be under-educated," Garcetti told them, inviting the leaders into City Hall for a discussion about the issues.

But protesters gathered outside Garcetti's residence late into the evening. An AFP reporter witnessed a group of at least 200 refusing to disperse and subsequently arrested. 'PEOPLE LIKED MY WALK' In Washington DC, thousands returned to the streets Tuesday for a peaceful "Black Lives Matter" march.

Hours after the 7:00 pm curfew protesters could be heard chanting, as National Guard troops stood on the streets near the White House and helicopters hovered above. Broadcast footage showed police firing tear gas shortly after midnight, but the situation appeared to be calm overall.

"I'm just tired, essentially, of being scared of police, of not getting justice," said Jada Wallace, an 18-year-old protester outside the White House earlier who said she was ready to risk arrest.

But Trump, who has rejected the traditional presidential role of healer, voiced glee on Twitter over the response in Washington and accused the leadership of New York -- led by the rival Democratic Party -- of succumbing to "Lowlife & Scum."

"Overwhelming force. Domination," he wrote, adding: "Washington, DC, was the safest place on earth last night!"