



The Daily Star



REGD. NO. DA 781 | VOL. XXX No. 138 | JAISHTHA 24, 1427 BS | **Your Right to Know** | SHAWWAL 14, 1441 HURI | 16 PAGES PRICE : Tk12.00

BANGLADESH UPDATE	2,635 New cases in 24hrs	63,026 Total cases	846 Deaths	13,325 Recoveries	GLOBAL UPDATE	399,542 Deaths	6,906,343 Total cases
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Some hotspots go into total lockdown

Govt today starts zone-wise containment on pilot basis in Dhaka, 3 others dists; city's Rajabazar, Wari marked red in first phase

- Zoning systems to be introduced from today on pilot basis
- Rajabazar, Wari in Dhaka to be locked down
- "Several areas" in N'ganj, Gazipur, Narsingdi to come under the system

- "RED ZONE" WILL BE WHERE POSITIVE CASES ARE MORE THAN 40
- "YELLOW ZONE" WILL BE WHERE POSITIVE CASES ARE LESS THAN 40
- "GREEN ZONE" WILL BE AREAS WITH NO RECORDED COVID-19 CASE

RASHIDUL HASAN, PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

In the wake of rising Covid-19 deaths and infections across the country, the government today starts enforcing containment zones on a pilot basis in some areas of four districts, including Dhaka.

The aim is to stem the spread of the virus by putting all those infected in isolation centres and conducting contact tracing effectively, said officials.

In the first phase, two areas of the capital -- Rajabazar and Wari -- would be placed in the "red zone" with severe restrictions as the city remains to be the worst hit.

Some urban areas of Narayanganj, Gazipur and Narsingdi would also be put under strict lockdown, said the officials,

adding that these districts are the most affected after Dhaka.

The decision came in a high-profile meeting held at the secretariat yesterday. The meeting was attended by health, home, LGRD ministers, two mayors of Dhaka and top officials of different ministries concerned, one of the meeting participants told The Daily Star last night.

Earlier in the day, Habibur Rahman Khan, additional secretary (administration) of Health Service Division, told this daily that the containment zones would be introduced from today on a pilot basis. "If it proves to be successful, we will implement it elsewhere."

Based on the severity of infections and
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STARING AT UNCERTAINTY: Eighty-one-year-old Zayeda Begum, who gets by on alms, gazes blankly into the distance from her wheelchair at the capital's Kamalapur Railway Station. Most people do not go near her because of fears of coronavirus and her income has drastically fallen these days, she said after the photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

COVID-19 SYMPTOMS Some 900 dead in three months

Says report based on data gathered from news portals
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 900 people died after showing coronavirus symptoms across the country between March 8 and May 31. Of them, 72 people died in March, 319 in April and 509 in May, according to a report.

A team of Bangladeshi students of local and foreign universities, researchers, IT developers and freelancers prepared the report, analysing contents of news portals and online versions of different national dailies. A copy of the report was sent to this newspaper yesterday.

The report said the media outlets reported about "coronavirus symptoms" in case of 390 deaths without mentioning any specific symptoms.

As many as 382 had at least two of the symptoms; fever, cough, respiratory problem, and cold. Besides, 214 people showed at least three of the symptoms, it said.

The report also said samples of 497 were collected for the coronavirus test while samples from 96 were not. There was no mention of sample collection in case of the others.

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Rapid test kits the only answer

Experts say as daily testing figure is not increasing

MOUJID AHMED SUJAN

With people struggling to get tested in time and new cases rising sharply, experts said rapid test kits are now the only answer to the testing crunch.

As the deadly disease has spread to all districts, the 50 Covid-19 testing laboratories have been struggling to ramp up daily tests.

The number of tests taken every day has been stuck at a little more than 12,000.

After testing 12,486 individuals' samples, the Directorate General of Health Services yesterday reported 2,635 new coronavirus cases, taking the total to 63,026.

Experts said daily testing needs immediate ramping up, and rapid testing is the only way to ease the pressure on the pathology services.

"Due to inadequate PCR testing facilities, almost 90 percent of the people who need testing are being deprived of the service. Now, rapid testing is the only solution to immediately detect and isolate patients. A delayed decision will lead to things getting out of control," Prof Ridwanur Rahman, a medicine and infectious disease specialist, told The Daily Star.

He said rapid test kits will make detection easier, despite giving partially false results. "Such false results can later be validated through further PCR testing."

According to the World Health Organization, rapid test results are based either on detection of proteins in the Covid-19 virus from respiratory samples (e.g. sputum, throat swab), or detection in blood or serum of human antibodies generated in response to an infection.

Recently, the use of rapid test kits started in the US and the UK.

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Ride-hailing services not resuming soon

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The ride-sharing services are unlikely to resume anytime soon as the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) has taken a hard line on the vehicles that had been providing the popular service without having been enlisted with the BRTA.

According to the BRTA officials, although there are some 1.23 lakh vehicles registered with 12 ride-sharing companies, only 1,300 of them are enlisted with the BRTA.

Enlistment with the BRTA is a must for both the companies and the vehicles in order to operate the service.

Two major ride-sharing companies -- Uber and Pathao -- recently wrote to the BRTA, requesting it to allow them to resume operations like other public transports.

The BRTA, in a reply on Thursday, asked them to inform it the number of owners and riders of enlisted vehicles (with vehicle registration number and driving licence number) were interested to resume operation given the current situation and how they would ensure health safety

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GOVT'S INCREASED BORROWING

Interest payment may rise by 14pc

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Thanks to increased domestic borrowing in recent years, the government's interest payments will rise by 14 percent in the coming fiscal year.

Rising interest rates in the banks over the last one and a half years are also why the government will have to spend more in debt interest payments. Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal has plans to allocate Tk 65,000 crore for the purpose in the budget for 2020-21, said an official of his ministry. The current year's allocation was Tk 57,068.

About 94 percent of the amount might go to domestic lenders in the coming fiscal year and the rest to foreign ones.

Domestic lenders in the country are banks and saving certificate buyers. Interest payment expenditure has been steadily increasing for 10 years.

In the 2010-11 budget, the government earmarked Tk 14,578 crore and in 2015-16 Tk 33,113 crore.

The minister is set to unveil his second budget on June 11 in parliament. As of May this year, the government borrowed from banks Tk 82,000 crore, almost twice the amount it planned at the outset.

The coming year's borrowing from banks will be around Tk 80,000 crore, officials said.

Interest rate in banks almost doubled in the last one and a half years, thanks to rising demands. Now, the rates range between 7 and 9 percent, up from 3-4.5 percent in December 2018, according to Bangladesh Bank statistics.

In the current fiscal year, government borrowing from the savings certificate sales declined due to measures taken to reduce interest payments burden.

From July 2019 to January 2020, the government sold saving certificates worth around Tk 7,673 crore, a 76 percent drop compared to the sales in the same period the previous year.

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A policeman holding his baby talks to a colleague while waiting to be tested for coronavirus at Central Police Hospital in the capital's Rajarbagh. The man with his baby arrived at the hospital from Ashulia around 7:00am and was still waiting for his turn around 11:30am yesterday. What's worrying is that the man on the left has pulled down his mask while child has no face covering.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

ATTEMPTED BRIBERY DMP chief asks IGP to transfer joint commissioner

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Shafiqul Islam has sought transfer of a joint commissioner of the unit on charge of offering him bribe.

The DMP chief asked for transfer of Joint Commissioner (logistics) Md Imam Hossain in a letter send to Inspector General of Police (IGP) on May 30.

In his letter, the DMP commissioner termed the joint commissioner "a corrupt officer" and said that there were graft allegations against Imam Hossain over various purchases.

"Imam even offered the commissioner a percentage from procurement. And, that is why, he should not be working in DMP," the DMP chief said in the letter.

The DMP commissioner further requested the

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OBITUARY



Dr. Naseem K. Rahman (1943 - 2020)

Prof. Dr. Naseem K. Rahman was finally reunited with his beloved wife Guliana de Biasio - greatly missed for two decades - in the hereafter on 31st May in Treviso, Italy. A physicist of international repute with a Chair in the Dept. of Physics at Trieste University, his academic career spanned St. Gregory's, Notre Dame College, Dhaka University and a PhD in the U.S. His many publications include 'Photons, Continuum States and Molecules' and 'Universality and Diversity in Science'. He leaves behind his cherished daughter Michelle Rahman, granddaughter Victoria, family and friends in five continents to mourn his passing.

Faisal, Faruq's wife Khuku Saqi, Rita & Urmee.