

POSSIBLE CHINESE CORONAVIRUS VACCINE
Phase-2 human trial begins
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নিরাপদ থাকুন

BANGLADESH UPDATE **3,531** New cases in 24hrs **1,12,306** Total cases **1,464** Deaths **45,077** Recoveries **GLOBAL UPDATE** **467,699** Deaths **8,970,449** Total cases

Masses left by the wayside

Professional bodies scramble for preferential treatment at pvt hospitals

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

With the public hospitals grappling with a rising number of Covid-19 patients, different professional bodies have moved to ensure that their members get preferential treatment at private hospitals, limiting people's access to healthcare.

Such a move by professional bodies will further reduce people's access to healthcare facilities which is a fundamental right, say health experts and human rights activists.

Referring to reports of patients being denied treatment by private hospitals and clinics, they say the government must make sure that everyone can get treatment at private healthcare facilities during this pandemic.

A number of professional bodies have already reserved beds for their members at private hospitals. Bangladesh Police even "hired" an entire private hospital for treating its members while the association of judges signed a deal with another private hospital to get preferential treatment for its members.

Besides, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) recently asked three private hospitals in the capital to

provide treatment to the members of Supreme Court Bar Association and their family members infected with Covid-19.

Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) also sought similar arrangements. On Saturday, it wrote to the health minister for dedicating Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) or any other hospital for treating doctors infected with the virus.

In a strongly-worded letter, the association asked the health minister to do so within three days or else the ministry or the DGHS will be held responsible for "any situation that may arise".

As the number of Covid-19 cases is increasing sharply and healthcare services at public hospitals are not satisfactory, these groups want to get their sick members admitted to private hospitals, say the experts.

It has become difficult for Covid-19 patients to get beds, especially in ICUs, at private hospitals as a handful of those provide treatment to such patients. This is why these organisations have moved to make arrangements with private hospitals dedicated for coronavirus patients, they point out.

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Nasima Akhter waiting on a pavement in front of Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Memorial Hospital in Gazipur to get tested for Covid-19 around 5:00am yesterday. She has been fighting breast cancer for the last six months and was due to undergo radio therapy at the National Institute of Cancer Research & Hospital in Mohakhali. But she was told that she would not be treated without documents certifying that she is Covid-19 negative. She gave her samples to be tested on June 2 at a Kaliarkoir clinic but is yet to get the result, causing her to miss out on potentially life-saving treatment.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Ministry reluctant to protect doctors

Alleges BMA in letter to health ministry; demands hospital for doctors in 72hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) has accused the health ministry of reluctance to ensuring safety and security of doctors at workplace during coronavirus pandemic.

In a letter to Health Minister Zahid Maleque, BMA also mentioned that doctors were mostly infected with the virus because of "substandard protective gears, ICUs and lack of training".

Around 3,500 healthcare staffers, including 1,100 doctors, have so far been infected with Covid-19. At least 44 doctors and nurses and eight other healthcare staffers died of the virus, according to BMA.

"The ministry cannot avoid liability for such a national loss," members of BMA said in the letter which was sent to the minister on Saturday. The Daily Star obtained a copy of it. In the letter, BMA also demanded for a separate hospital dedicated to the healthcare professionals within 72 hours. "Unless your [Zahid Maleque] ministry will be liable for any situation," they warned.

The association of medical professionals also blamed the health ministry and DGHS for their "irresponsiveness, reluctance, lack of farsightedness and coordination" in tackling the Covid-19 outbreak.

"We are offended and shocked at such behaviour of the ministry and the directorate general [DGHS]," they said.

RELATED STORY ON PAGE 12

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2nd-time infections not being counted

Experts claim; 3,531 cases, 39 deaths reported

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The rate of Covid-19 infections has slightly decreased, as the authorities reported 3,531 confirmed cases in the 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday.

Experts, however, said the rate of positive cases may be higher as a good number of people who are testing positive for the second time are being included in the tally. After testing 15,585 samples in 60 labs across the country yesterday, the rate was 22.66 per cent as the total number of cases was 112,306.

On Saturday, the rate was 23.09 and 21.56 on Friday. The Directorate General of Health Services also reported 39 more Covid-19

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Health, agriculture passed over

Ecneec approves Tk 20cr for each MP from rural areas for infrastructure development

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and RASHIDUL HASAN

Amid talks of prioritising the health and farming sectors, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council yesterday approved giving lawmakers from rural areas Tk 20 crore each for infrastructure development in the next five years.

The money is part of Tk 6,477 crore approved by the Ecneec for infrastructure outside the city corporations.

The MPs from city corporation areas will not get the funds.

The project for rural infrastructure development has been passed at a time when the country is suffering from a cash crunch due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Noted economist Zahid Hussain pointed out that among the fiscal management strategies outlined by the finance minister in his budget speech, expenditure prioritisation was number one.

"Health, social protection, agriculture and employment were identified as the top four priorities. We are looking at a large revenue shortfall. The government will need to find savings within the budget

to cope with the shortfall without cutting expenditures in the top priority areas," he said.

"Under such circumstances, it is difficult to understand the logic behind allocation of such a large sum for local infrastructure development," he added.

The rural infrastructure is important, but can be postponed, considering the circumstances, he said.

"Given that there are currently much more pressing needs to protect lives and livelihoods. The money would be better spent on health, social protection and agriculture."

However, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the funds should be given because people in the rural areas demand local roads and small bridges from their MPs. And such demands are justifiable, Planning Minister MA Mannan said quoting the PM.

According to the project factsheet, each MP will prepare a list of roads that need immediate development, construction, or maintenance.

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More ICUs a crying need

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

After 32-year-old Zaker Hossain from Cox's Bazar tested Covid-19 positive about a week ago, he was admitted to a private hospital in Chattogram.

As his health condition deteriorated on Friday, doctors advised the family to shift him to an intensive care unit (ICU) elsewhere. The four ICU beds for Covid-19 patients at the private hospital were all occupied.

Zaker's younger brother, Mohammad Sakib called about 15 other private hospitals in the port city but none had an empty ICU bed for Covid-19 patients.

He found the same situation in the port city's two public hospitals -- Chattogram General Hospital (CGH) and Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), Sakib told this correspondent yesterday afternoon.

"Now I don't know what will happen to my brother," Sakib said as his brother continued to fight for his life.

"We were advised to rush my brother to Dhaka but I don't know whether his health condition would allow this long [more than six hours by road] journey," he added.

Like Zaker, many critical Covid-19 patients in Chattogram are suffering due to the lack of ICU support while some have died.

Septuagenarian physician Nurul Haque, known as the doctor of the poor in Chattogram's Hathazari upazila, died on Thursday as he could not be given ICU support. Infected with Covid-19, he had been undergoing treatment

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MP SHAHID'S COMPANY Prosecution wants its accounts frozen

Lawmaker's firm has 5 million dinars

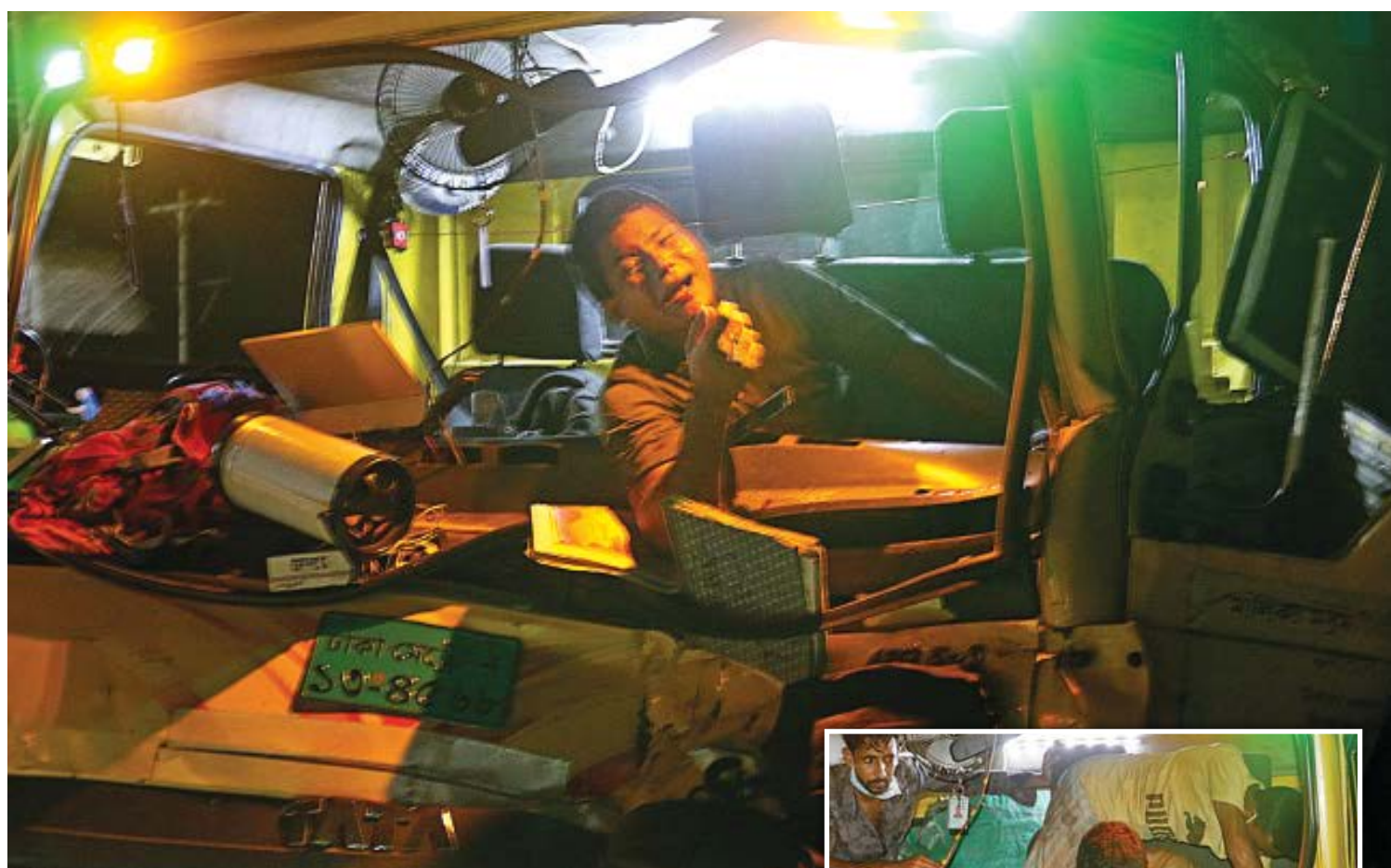
STAR REPORT

Kuwait public prosecution has approached the Central Bank to freeze the bank accounts of the Bangladeshi MP Mohammad Shahid Islam and his company, who were being held in connection with cases related to human trafficking, visa selling and money laundering, according to Arab Times.

Informed sources stated that the financial balance of the company, Marafie Kuwaitia Group, of which Shahid is managing director and CEO, amounts to about 5 million dinars, including 3 million as company's capital.

The prosecution has contacted the bank to freeze the accounts so that they do not withdraw as they have become suspicious and will be required to recover from

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A truck driver crying out in agony after his leg was crushed when his vehicle rear-ended another truck, near Mojar Mill bus stand in Gazipur. The accident happened around 2:30am yesterday and it took around an hour and a half for locals, inset, to rescue him and take him to a hospital.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



It's a curb on free speech

Academics, journos decry Digital Security Act

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the wake of the arrests of two university teachers and two students, prominent voices against the Digital Security Act (DSA) decry the law as a curb on free speech.

The online event, titled "Freedom of Expression, Citizen Laws and Digital Security Act - 2018" was organised by University Teachers' Network, a platform for private and public university teachers, and livestreamed on social media platforms.

The teachers and students were arrested for updating Facebook statuses criticising the health sector, following the death of former health minister Mohammed Nasim.

Faruq Faisal, regional director of Article 19 informed that 9 cases have been filed in total under DSA following the decease of the health minister.

"Something has been said about someone, but instead of that person filing a case, this law allows for another to lodge the case. This results in multiple people lodging several cases against a person for one act. How is this possible?" said Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua.

"A law's hidden agenda can be seen from what sections of the law are being used the most to prosecute people. The DSA has many sections pertaining to hacking, identity fraud, etc. but we never see any cases being lodged under those sections. Most of the cases filed under this law pertain to the sections that hamper free speech," he added.

Prof Fahmidul Haq, associate professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka, said, "When a case was filed against me there was an outrage. Nowadays there are so many cases against

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