

Follow health guidelines to avoid virus

Says PM

UNB, Dhaka

Mentioning that many people, including a cabinet member, a lawmaker, and a good number of Bangladeshi expatriates, have died from Covid-19, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged all to follow health guidelines properly to fight the pandemic.

"I would like to request the country's people so that all follow the health guidelines. Life will go on ... it can't remain halted," she said in her introductory speech at a virtual meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council from the Gono Bhavan.

Reiterating that the virus is hindering the development of Bangladesh, the PM said, "Even then



we're trying to keep up the pace of development maintaining its continuity."

"Because of the coronavirus, we've lost many people, including our cabinet member and MP, and Bangladeshi expatriates, at home and abroad," she said, seeking

salvation of the departed souls.

The PM prayed to the Almighty Allah to protect people from the pandemic. It is not a problem of Bangladesh alone but of the entire world. "So, we want to return to a normal life getting rid of it."

Hasina, also the Ecneec chairperson, presided over its 24th meeting of the outgoing fiscal year that started at NEC conference room in the morning.



A handcraft hawker in Savar's DEEPZ area almost has more products than he can handle. Due to the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, he can barely sell Tk 500 worth of wares, whereas that number was Tk 2,000 in pre-coronavirus times. This photo was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

UN accuses multiple countries of quietly sending arms to DR Congo

AFP, United Nations

DR Congo's military is receiving weapons and training from multiple countries without notifying the United Nations as required by a 2004 resolution, according to a recent report to the Security Council.

Some of the weapons have fallen into

5.1 magnitude earthquake jolts Dhaka

UNB, Dhaka

A 5.1 magnitude earthquake shook the capital and other parts of the country yesterday afternoon.

The epicentre of the moderate earthquake was in the India-Myanmar border region, about 279km east of capital Dhaka, said Abdul Hamid, meteorologist at the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

The tremor was felt at 4:46pm, said the official.

However, no casualties were reported yet.

the hands of armed groups operating in the east of the country, warns the confidential report by UN experts that was obtained by AFP on Thursday.

Prosecution wants

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it if the charges are proven before the courts, the sources told the daily.

Al Qabas, a Kuwaiti Arabic daily, quoted sources close to the investigation as saying that freezing of assets is part of a legal measure to prevent the Bangladeshi lawmaker from moving his assets beyond the jurisdiction of a court in Kuwait.

"It is variously construed as part of a court's inherent jurisdiction to restrain breaches of its process," the sources added.

It was further revealed that the residency investigation officers, acting on a warrant, had seized all the funds in the company's treasury, all documents, correspondence and footage from surveillance cameras to identify any potential accomplice of Shahid.

Shahid, independent lawmaker from Lakshimpur-2, was held by Kuwait's Criminal Investigation Department on June 6.

It's a curb on free speech

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freedom of expression, this has been normalised."

"One can perhaps say that the Facebook statuses may not have been tasteful, but how can they be arrested," said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star. "We are unable to even express the minimum dissent."

"This law criminalises hurting the spirit of the Liberation War. But the person in charge of deciding whether the spirit of the Liberation War has been hurt in any way is a police sub-inspector. How is an individual sub-inspector's judgment enough to decide whether a constitutional violation has been made or not?" said advocate Hasnat Quaiyum, also a member of the political thinktank Rashtrachinta, whose member Didarul Islam Bhuiyan is in jail after being arrested under DSA last month.

"Of the 20 provisions being presented here, 14 are non-bailable. Which criminal should not deserve bail? Die-hard criminals who will

harm society if kept outside the jail. The minimum punishment is one year's imprisonment, while the maximum is lifetime [imprisonment]. According to the road accident law, drivers killing people have a maximum punishment of five years, whereas a journalist can be put inside for life sentence," he said.

Arrests don't require a warrant either, he added. "If the police think a crime is happening or about to happen, they can arrest without a warrant."

Teachers and students who were prosecuted and arrested under the law spoke about their experiences. Maidul Islam, assistant professor, University of Chittagong spoke about how, on the days leading to his arrest, he was threatened on all platforms by his own students aligned with the ruling party.

"How is it that they can't be prosecuted under this law for threatening me, but I could be arrested for expressing my thoughts?" he observed.

2nd-time infections

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deaths in the same period, taking the count to 1,464.

With this, the death rate was 1.30 percent, said Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the DGHS, during the regular briefing.

Earlier on June 16, authorities reported 53 deaths, the highest in a single day.

Meanwhile, 1,084 Covid-19 patients recovered, taking the total number of recoveries to 45,077.

According to Johns Hopkins University, Bangladesh was the 16th worst affected country in the world in terms of confirmed infections with 63,357 active cases in the country.

Of the deaths in the 24 hours till yesterday afternoon, 35 were male and four female, Nasima said, adding that 16 were from Dhaka, 11 from Chattogram, two from Rajshahi, one from Rangpur, one from Sylhet, four from Khulna and four from Barishal divisions.

Of them, 33 died at hospitals and six at home, the DGHS official said.

One of the dead was aged under 10, one between 21 and 30, six between 31 and 40, 12 between 41 and 50, 12 between 51 and 60, four between 61 and 70, two between 71 and 80 and another was between 81 and 90.

A total of 631 people were put under isolation in the same period in Dhaka division, she added.

There were also many deaths with Covid-19 symptoms in recent days.

According to a recent report by Centre for Genocide Studies at Dhaka University, 1,070 people died with Covid-19 symptoms between June 7 and 14.

Experts said the actual rate of transmission in the country is higher than what the authorities are reporting. There are many hidden cases as many people are still not being able to access testing facilities.

According to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, the infection rate in the country was 1.25, which means each infected person is infecting 1.25 people on an average.

However, experts said the number cannot be known as the current tests are not representative of the reality.

Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, told The Daily Star recently, "If there were adequate number of tests and if those were done through representative sampling, the level of transmission could be measured far more accurately."

Besides, the daily number of tests does not represent the actual number of people being tested every day.

An official linked to a testing facility told this newspaper on Saturday that at least 3,000 people are getting tested for the second time.

"So, actual number of daily tests remains stagnant -- within 12,000," said the official, requesting anonymity.

Dr Shafiqur Shimul, an associate professor of health economics at DU, leads a team that helps the government make a projection of the Covid-19 transmission trend.

Speaking to The Daily Star on Saturday, he said, "There is a big gap in testing data. If the actual number of daily tests is below the data we get every day, then the transmission rate is higher."

Masses left by the wayside

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Prof Dr Rashid-E-Mahbub, former president of the BMA, said that since the country's health sector is fragile, different influential groups are trying to ensure treatment for their members, ignoring general people.

"As a result, common people's access to treatment facilities will shrink. Only the influential people will be able to get treatment..." he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The government should ask all private hospitals, which have the capacity to treat Covid-19 patients, to provide healthcare services to all equally during this pandemic.

"However, the government is not doing this."

The BMA raised the demand for special arrangements as the government gave special facilities to some professional groups, added Prof Rashid.

Noted rights activist Nur Khan Liton said general people would be deprived of healthcare services if hospitals are dedicated for different professional groups.

Some ministers and government high-ups are taking treatment at the Combined Military Hospital while professional groups are now booking private hospitals. On the other hand, only influential people can get proper treatment at public hospitals, he mentioned.

"Where will the general people go during the pandemic?" he asked.

Earlier, in the face of public criticism, the government had to

retreat from a move to allow some elite hospitals in the capital to exclusively treat Covid-19 patients from the upper echelons of society.

ARRANGEMENTS

On June 11, Bangladesh Judicial Service Association signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Universal Medical College Hospital Ltd so that lower court judges from across the country get treatment for Covid-19 and other diseases at the hospital in the capital.

With assistance from Law Minister Anisul Huq, the MoU was signed at the law ministry. Under the deal, the lower court judges will be treated at the hospital on a priority basis, says a press release of the ministry.

There are more than 1,800 judges at lower courts across the country, and 21 of them got infected with the virus till Saturday.

As Covid-19 infections among police personnel are on the rise, Bangladesh Police "hired" Impulse Hospital in the capital for two and a half months for treating its members.

On May 5, the Central Police Hospital and Impulse Hospital signed a MoU in this regard. The 250-bed hospital will treat only police personnel infected with the virus, said a press release from the Police Headquarters on May 8.

Till Saturday, 30 members of the police died from the virus and 8,544 others got infected.

The DGHS on June 18 sent a letter to three private hospitals -- Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College

Hospital, Anwar Khan Modern Medical College Hospital and Japan East West Hospital -- asking them to provide treatment to the members of Supreme Court Bar Association and their families.

The letter, signed by DGHS Director (hospital) Aminul Islam, said many members of the SCBA and their families have been infected with the virus. They failed to get admitted to hospitals or get treatment timely. Amid such a situation, the SCBA secretary made a request to it in this regard.

Asked, SCBA President AM Aminuddin said they sought the arrangement as the SCBA members, who tested positive for the virus, were confused about where to go for treatment.

In its letter to the health minister, the BMA blamed the health ministry and the DGHS for the high number of infections among doctors.

The ministry has taken initiatives for separate arrangements for journalists, police, lawyers and other professionals but has not shown any interest in taking similar steps to ensure treatment for the frontline fighters, the letter said.

Contacted, BMA Secretary General Md Ehteshamul Huq Choudhury said around 3,500 health workers, including over 1,100 doctors, got infected with Covid-19, and 44 doctors died from the virus.

"In this situation, it's important to boost their morale. Otherwise, it would be difficult to get services

Man killed in 'gunfight' in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A suspected drug peddler was killed in a "gunfight" with police on Karamza Eidgah ground in Santhia upazila of Pabna early yesterday.

The dead -- Abdus Subhan, 48, of the upazila's Karamza Sardarpara area -- was accused in 11 criminal cases including of drug peddling, claimed police.

Asaduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Santhia Police Station, claimed a police team went to the Eidgah premises on information that a group of drug peddlers gathered there.

As soon as the law enforcers tried to nab the miscreants, they opened fire, forcing police to retaliate, he added.

At one point of the "gunfight", Subhan was shot and run of the miscreants fled the scene. Subhan was rushed to Bera Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead, the OC said.

The body was sent to Pabna Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

from them. So we have written to the ministry to ensure treatment for doctors," he told this newspaper yesterday.

Many of the doctors who don't work for any hospital will have difficulties in getting healthcare facilities if they get infected with the virus, he noted.

Asked whether common people would be affected if hospitals are dedicated for professional groups, he said, "We have sought beds for doctors, not any dedicated hospital. Why didn't you raise the question when journalists and other professionals were given the facility?"

"Doctors are in the frontline in the fight against the pandemic. They are the ones who need proper treatment first," he added.

Talking to this newspaper, Shakil Ahmed, member secretary of the Broadcast Journalist Centre, a platform of television journalists, said they struck a deal with the Holy Family Hospital, which would allocate up to 50 beds and two ICU beds for the association members, given that those are vacant.

"So far 16 from TV channels and different media houses took treatment at the hospital," he told this newspaper yesterday.

In the meantime, the government has improved healthcare facilities at Sarkari Kormochari Hospital for public employees, and every ministry has formed a quick response team to provide assistance to the infected staffers.

Pope says coronavirus should spark new environmental awareness

REUTERS, Vatican City

The drastic reduction in pollution during coronavirus lockdowns around the world should lead to greater concern for the environment as restrictions are lifted, Pope Francis said yesterday.

At his Sunday address in St. Peter's Square, Francis said the pandemic made many people reflect on their relationship with the environment. The square reopened to the public a month ago and Italy's last travel restrictions were lifted on June 3.

"The lockdown has reduced pollution and revealed once more the beauty of so many places free from traffic and noise. Now, with the resumption of activities, we should all be more responsible for looking after our common home," he said, using his term for the Earth.

Ministry

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"Infection and death of the doctors in such rate were not seen in any other country to date," read the letter signed by BMA President Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin and Secretary Ehteshamul Huq Choudhury.

The government has already faced huge criticism due to the supply of substandard personal protective equipment (PPE) including gowns and masks since the first two cases were reported on March 8.

Health experts have attributed the high mortality and infection rates of health workers to mainly lack of infection control measures, monitoring, and proper management at the hospitals by the authorities.

In a separate later to the minister, the BMA also protested the recent death of Dr Abdur Rakib Khan after being attacked by some relatives of a patient.

"Silence of your ministry after the death of the doctor has made us astonished," said the BMA officials in the letter.

They demanded to take necessary steps to adopt a law or ordinance safeguarding the doctors "as early as possible."

Health, agriculture

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Yesterday's was the 24th Ecneec meeting of the outgoing 2019-20 year. It was held at the NEC conference room in the capital. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was in the chair.

She and the planning minister joined the meeting through a videoconference.

"Today's (yesterday) Ecneec meeting approved 10 projects and the total estimated cost of the projects is Tk 9,460.09 crore. It is a matter of pleasure that the entire money will come from government funds," said the planning minister at a press briefing.

Of the total 10 projects, six are new and four are revised ones.

The rural MPs will get the Tk 20 crore funds under the project titled Development of Palli Infrastructures Phase-III Project involving Tk 6,476.65 crore, he said.

The project will start from next month and will be implemented by June 2024.

More ICUs a crying need

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at CMCH since Tuesday.

Kamal Uddin, vice president of BNP's Chattogram city unit, also met the same fate on June 10 midnight. When he started having breathing problems, the private hospital he was in couldn't provide an empty ICU bed. His family also failed to find one in other hospitals in the port city.

Around two percent of all Covid-19 patients may require ICU support at one stage, said Abur Rob, senior consultant, medicine, at CGH. He is also the focal person for coronavirus treatment at CGH.

Based on the number of patients still undergoing treatment in hospitals and at homes in Chattogram, it can be said that around 60 of them may require ICU support any time.

Currently, only two public hospitals in the district have ICU beds dedicated for Covid-19 patients -- 10 in CGH and seven in CMCH, said Chattogram's Civil Surgeon Sheikh Fazle Rabbi.

Besides, Holy Crescent Hospital, a private hospital brought under CGH and dedicated for Covid-19 patients, has a 10-bed ICU, not yet operational due to the lack of trained manpower, said sources.

The civil surgeon said private hospitals in the port city dedicated 25 ICU beds for Covid-19 patients.

Asked about the coronavirus

situation yesterday, he said a total of 182 doctors, over 30 nurses and 20 other health workers have been infected so far in the district. Among the infected doctors, six passed away.

As of Saturday, 6,288 patients tested coronavirus positive in Chattogram district. Of them, 141 patients have died, 640 patients were released from hospitals and 2,368 patients recovered at home.

Currently, 366 patients are admitted at hospitals and 2,773 are recovering at home.

Liaquat Ali, general secretary of Private Hospitals Owners Association, Chattogram explained that some ICU beds have to be kept for patients with other illnesses.

He said many clinics cannot run ICUs due to manpower crisis. Moreover, many doctors have tested Covid-19 positive while working in ICUs.

Mahfuzur Rahman, convener of Public Health Rights Protection Committee, Chattogram, said the government has allocated Tk 10,000 crore for the health sector in the recent budget.

From that allocation, Tk 500 crore may be expended to set up more 500 ICU beds in Chattogram division.

"Setting up ICU beds is a crying need to save lives. The government has no scope to neglect the issue," he said.

It is very important to improve communication networks to accelerate the economy of the villages, the meeting added.

Asked why such a large amount was given for the project during the pandemic, the planning minister said revenue income was not bad.

"Just yesterday, we got \$ 1 billion from the World Bank," he said.

At one stage, he asked, "Have we stopped eating due to Covid-19?"

"It's an important project as 80 percent of the works of the project will be done in village areas."

The prime minister asked the authorities concerned to build the while maintaining quality, keeping the provision of virtual court in each jail, and modernization of the railway workshops.

Ministers, state ministers and Planning Commission members and secretaries were present.

The Ecneec yesterday approved 10 projects involving Tk 9,460 crore.

Mostafa Khaled, acting director of Directorate General of Health Services, Chattogram division, said, "Setting up an ICU is very technical and time consuming. Moreover, there is a lack of trained manpower all over the country."

He said the government has decided to set up a five-bed ICU in each of all district hospitals.

"It is true that we need many more ICU beds at present in Chattogram but providing high-flow oxygen support is much more important."

Hospitals need central oxygen supply systems for providing high flow-oxygen support. It cannot be given from oxygen cylinders, he said.

Though CMCH has the system, the installation work at CGH is currently underway, the acting director said on Friday.

However, many private hospitals in the port city do not have such facilities.

Giving the picture on ICU facilities in public hospitals of Chattogram division, Mostafa said, CMCH has 17 ICU beds, of which seven are for Covid-19 patients. All the 10 ICU beds at Cumilla Medical College Hospital are for coronavirus patients.

Besides, 10 ICU beds have been installed in Feni General Hospital, all for Covid-19 patients. But this ICU facility is yet not operational due to lack of trained manpower.