

2 govt hospitals

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oxygen supply line at other wards is under process, said officials.

Patients at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital would be provided with the service from Saturday after a test run for two or three days, said officials concerned.

Another Covid-19 dedicated hospital -- Kurmitola General Hospital -- is likely to get the central oxygen supply within two or three days, they said.

Besides, the health ministry on Sunday gave permissions to set up liquid oxygen tanks, the key equipment for central oxygen supply, at 23 more public hospitals across the country.

Setting up liquid oxygen tanks in those hospitals will start within a day or two and is expected to be completed within 15 days, the officials added.

A central oxygen supply means having a dedicated place at a hospital where oxygen is stored and supplied to all patient beds, using lines in the wall.

With the number of infections surging every day, providing adequate oxygen support to the critical Covid-19 patients is extremely crucial.

Experts said uninterrupted oxygen supply could save many lives and central oxygen supply could do that.

The development came weeks after a health ministry document painted a grim picture of central oxygen supply at public hospitals.

In a letter to the National Electro-Medical Equipment Maintenance Workshop and Training Centre (NEMEMW and TC) on June 2, the health ministry said most of the 39 major public hospitals, including those dedicated to treating coronavirus patients, still do not have a nonstop supply of this essential treatment for critical Covid-19 patients.

These hospitals, constructed by the Public Works Department, have medical gas pipeline systems, but most lack the central oxygen supply supported by liquid tanks.

So, they rely on inter-connected oxygen cylinders. As a result, it is not possible to ensure uninterrupted oxygen supply to the critical coronavirus patients, who suffer from severe respiratory problems, health officials said.

In the letter, the ministry asked NEMEMW and TC to ensure liquid oxygen tanks at the 39 hospitals, if they do not have it, on an urgent basis, to activate central oxygen supply system. Currently, 22 public hospitals have central oxygen supply system.

DEVELOPMENT

Following the order, NEMEMW and TC wrote to the health ministry in three phases, pressing for installation of oxygen liquid tanks at 26 public hospitals, said NEMEMW and TC's Chief Technical Manager Aminur

Rahman.

But in the meantime, two contractors, following the ministry's verbal approval, began setting up of the tanks at three hospitals, considering the current situation, he said.

"We got permissions from the ministry to install the tanks at 26 hospitals on Sunday," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"As installation of oxygen liquid tanks has already been completed at two hospitals, contractors are supplying oxygen to the hospitals from today [Monday]," he said.

Spectra Oxygen Ltd set up the tanks at Kuwait Maitree and Suhrawardy hospitals, while Linde Bangladesh Ltd is installing them at Kurmitola General Hospital and it would be done within two or three days, he added.

Aminur said, "We would start setting up the tanks at 23 other hospitals within two or three days, and the work would be done within 15 days."

The hospitals are: Faridpur Medical College Hospital, Syed Nazrul Islam Medical College Hospital in Kishoreganj, Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Medical College Hospital in Gazipur, MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital in Sylhet, Sheikh Abu Naser Specialised Hospital in Khulna, 250-bed general hospitals in Chattogram, Tangail, Gopalganj, Manikganj, Jamalpur, Munshiganj, Habiganj, Chapainawabganj, Kushtia, Sherpur, Bagerhat, Barguna, Chuadanga, Bhola, Magura, and Nilphamari, 100-Bed Children Hospital in Rangpur, and Government Employee Hospital in Dhaka.

MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital has currently a liquid oxygen tank with a capacity of 10 kilo litres, which will be increased to 20 kilo litres.

KM Mamun Murshed, deputy director of Suhrawardy hospital, said although the contractor supplied oxygen to tank yesterday, they would provide oxygen to patients from Saturday after a trial run.

He said they have 90 beds for Covid-19 patients at present and they were supplying oxygen to patients from cylinders, which require to refill daily.

Mamun said they would add 100 more beds from Saturday and start supplying oxygen from liquid oxygen tank that day.

"We will be able to supply uninterrupted oxygen to patients once we start providing it from the central supply system. A patient will get oxygen while he or she in washroom," he added.

Dr Sarwarul Alam, director of Kuwait Maitree hospital, said only the ICU patients would now get the central oxygen supply.

There are 141 Covid-19 patients at the hospital. Sixteen of them are in ICU, he added.

Report justifies

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"Sensitivity" is calculated as the ratio between the number of correctly identified Covid-19 samples versus the total number of samples identified as positive for Covid-19.

For a hundred Covid-19 positive patients between Day 8-14 of their infection, the kit could detect antibodies in 41 cases and could not in 59.

For 109 Covid-19 patients who are symptom-free for at least 14 days, the test could detect antibodies in 76 cases.

The BSMMU committee recommended that the antibody kit be used for seroprevalence or to assess the proportion of a population which was infected but recovered.

"GR Covid-19 rapid antibody test has about 70 percent 'sensitivity' in convalescent patients," stated the BSMMU report.

It put the "95 percent confidence interval" between 60.19 to 78.16 percent -- which means there is a 95 percent confidence that the sensitivity of the test will once again fall within that range, if the study is repeated. This also means, based on the current data, the report is saying that the sensitivity can be as high as 78.16 percent.

Swiss company Roche's antibody test received authorisation from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in May because their test had a 100 percent "sensitivity" in cases that were 14 days post-PCR confirmation.

"We are submitting a letter to the Directorate General of Drug Administration today [yesterday] asking for authorisation for the use of this kit as an antibody test to be used for the purposes recommended," Dr

Bijon Kumar Sil, lead researcher at Gonoshasthaya Pharmaceuticals, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The recommendations listed in the report include "usage of the test for diagnosis of Covid-19 in the second week of illness where RT-PCR is not available and in clinically suspected but RT-PCR negative patients."

In order to understand what the test means for the increasing numbers of "suspected" patients seeking treatment but failing to get any without an RT-PCR test result, Covid-19 Rapid Dot Blot Project Coordinator Dr Mohibullah Khondoker was presented with a scenario: a person showing clinical symptoms for more than 8 days, trying to get admitted into a hospital, but does not have a RT-PCR test result. Can the hospital use the GK kit to determine if he has an infection?

"Yes, he can do an antibody test. But if the result is negative, an antigen test should also be done for viral clearance," he said.

As the report states, if the result is negative, it could mean that either the person is not infected at all or that the person is Covid-19 positive, but the rapid dot blot test is not detecting antibodies yet.

Meanwhile, the report also states that if the result is positive, this could mean that the person either has an active infection that their body is fighting or they have had it in the past and have recovered.

Both scenarios open the doors for Covid-19 dedicated hospitals laying to rest the fear of getting infected in hospital.

Lack of leadership

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Australia urging the WHO to have more powers, enabling it to respond more quickly to a health crisis.

"The world is in desperate need of national unity and global solidarity. The politicisation of the pandemic has exacerbated it," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a virtual health forum organised by the World Government Summit, an event organised by Dubai.

"...The greatest threat we face now is not the virus itself, it's the lack of global solidarity and global leadership."

He said some parts of international health regulations needed to be strengthened to make them "more fit for purpose".

He did not say which parts, only that they needed "coordinated, predictable, transparent, broad-based and flexible

funding" to be fully implemented.

He also said all countries must make universal healthcare a priority, warning the world had learnt the hard way that strong healthcare systems were "the foundation of global health security and of social and economic development".

"Its effects will be felt for decades to come," Tedros said.

The WHO on Sunday warned the pandemic was accelerating, as global infections rose above 8.9 million people with more than 468,000 deaths.

Norway's Health Minister Bent Høeie cautioned that the outbreak was "far from over".

A vaccine remains months off at best despite several trials, while scientists are still discovering more about the virus, its symptoms and the extent to which it may have spread before being identified.



Rickshaw pullers and other underprivileged people wait for food in TSC area on Dhaka University campus yesterday. With help from others, DU student Tanbir Hasan Shaikat and four of his friends have been distributing free food among such people twice a day for more than three months.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Incoordination behind fiasco

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lockdown in the last few days, further deepening the confusions, they said.

In a latest development, the public administration ministry on Sunday night announced a "general holiday" in 27 "red zone" areas in 10 districts. Those districts are Chattogram, Bogura, Moulvibazar, Chuadanga, Jashore, Madaripur, Narayanganj, Habiganj, Munshiganj and Cumilla.

According to the gazette notification, the holiday will be applicable to all institutions -- both government and private -- and their employees in those areas. Some of the areas have been under lockdown since June 11 while for some areas the lockdown will be effective for up to 21 days, it said.

Last night, the ministry issued another circular, announcing the holiday for 11 "red zones" in five other districts.

Talking to The Daily Star, a top official of the Directorate General of Health Services, however, said the notification was issued without the health ministry's consent.

"The areas have been placed in red zone based on preliminary discussions held immediately after businesses were reopened," said the official, wishing not to be named.

This newspaper could not reach Farhad Hossain, state minister for public administration, over phone yesterday for comments on the matter.

Meanwhile, public health experts are skeptical about the success of such lockdown now. According to them, the spread of the virus could not be stopped just by dividing areas into different zones and blocking entrances to them with bamboo.

The authorities must act fast to identify all the infected people, those with whom they came in contact and ensure that they stay in isolation, they said.

"There is a need for a rigorous programme in this regard. Otherwise, only imposing any lockdown will not work," Prof Nazrul Islam, a noted virologist and a member of the national technical advisory committee on Covid-19, told The Daily Star.

He said ensuring people maintaining health guidelines was more important than enforcing lockdowns.

The national technical advisory committee, at a meeting on June 10, had recommended imposing a

complete lockdown in areas based on the number of infected people and the risks regarding transmission of the virus.

LOCKDOWN 'FIASCO'

After reporting the first three confirmed cases of Covid-19 on March 8, the government imposed a nationwide shutdown on March 26 to curb the spread of the virus. The shutdown, during which public transport services remained halted and public movement restricted, continued till May 30.

The authorities later allowed offices and businesses to reopen on a limited scale from May 31 to June 15 while public transport services resumed with condition that health guidelines would have to be followed.

But as coronavirus infections and deaths have since surged to record highs, the government drew up the containment strategy on June 1 to impose fresh curbs by dividing areas into the three zones.

The administration and local government bodies will enforce lockdown, the authorities announced.

Several committees comprising police members, health officials, and social workers will be formed and the committees will be led by local representatives, according to government guidelines.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) started mapping the areas in the first week of this month.

But the process hit a snag as the authorities concerned didn't have data on the current population of certain areas and could not settle on a definition of coloured zones, said sources.

Though an "experimental zoning system" was launched in the capital's East Rajabazar and parts of Gazipur, Narayanganj and Narsingdi on June 10, mapping of areas across the country is yet to be completed, they mentioned.

In the meantime, a technical committee of the DGHS prepared a primary list of areas all over the country through colour-coded zoning and identified 45 areas in Dhaka North and South City corporations as red zones.

At a meeting on June 14, it also identified as red zones 11 areas in Chattogram city, the entire Gazipur district, and several upazilas in Narsingdi and Narayanganj.

A day later, the Cabinet Division

issued a circular declaring general holiday in the red zones. This threw people into confusion as the notification, with effect from the following day, did not make it clear which areas to be flagged as red zones and from when.

It prompted people to rush to markets to buy essentials in fear of being confined to their homes any time.

As of yesterday, there was no official announcement on the list of areas to be classified as red zones or any specific date for imposing lockdown in such areas.

The authorities and local government bodies tasked with implementing lockdown in the capital are confused about the issue and are waiting for the micro-maps of zones currently being prepared by the DGHS.

Contacted, Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam said it's essential to provide them with zoning maps specifying particular areas so that they can take proper steps.

"We got the primary list earlier. But we have not yet got any specific zoning maps from the authorities concerned. We are waiting for it," he told The Daily Star.

The mayor mentioned that they would need 72-hours to complete preparations for lockdown after they get the list of specific areas.

Asked, DGHS Director General Prof Abul Kalam Azad said, "We have imposed lockdown in some areas on a pilot basis. Let's see the outcome... Then we will do it [lockdown] wherever and whenever it is needed."

About the public administration ministry's circular, he said, "They [the ministry] have taken some measures. We are now discussing more ways to implement the proposed area-wise lockdown. This is a continuous process."

Prof Nazrul Islam, however, thinks it has been tough for the authorities concerned to impose zone-based lockdown as they don't have complete geographical data on Covid-19 patients.

"Is there anyone who understands this science to implement such a programme? Officials [bureaucrats] are making decisions. We are in a dire situation because of a lack of coordination among them," the virologist pointed out.

'Drug peddler' killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

A suspected drug peddler was killed in a "shootout" with Rapid Action Battalion in his rented flat in Ashulia of Savar yesterday.

The dead, Raihan Sarkar, 35, was from Chandpur's Matlab upazila. He was accused in at least 11 cases, including those for murder and drug-related offences, said Mohiduddin Faruq, superintendent of police at Rab-2.

He said a Rab team raided a flat in a three-storey building in Ashulia's Kabirpur area around 9:30am on information that Raihan, who had been selling drug for a long time, was staying there.

Standing at the front door of the flat, Rab members asked Raihan to surrender, but he did not comply. Instead, he opened fire at the law enforcers, forcing them to fire retaliatory shots, added Mohiduddin.

At one stage, Raihan was hit by bullets and he died on the spot.

The official claimed that Rab members Nasir and Monir received bullet injuries to their legs during the "gunfight". They were given first aid.

The Rab also claimed to have recovered a gun, two bullets, and 10,000 yaba tablets from the flat.

The body was sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College in Dhaka for an autopsy.

Javed Masud, inspector (investigation) of Ashulia Police Station, said the Rab was yet to inform them officially about the "shootout" incident.

Govt to hire

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see off a Chinese expert team.

Talking about the rising number of novel coronavirus cases, Zahid said, "If the people do not become aware of the highly contagious virus, all the hospitals of the country will be full to capacity with Covid-19 patients. People should be more aware of the virus."

He also emphasised on allocating more budget for the health sector to fight the novel coronavirus.

The minister also said China is working to develop a coronavirus vaccine and the Chinese government has said Bangladesh will get priority in terms of cooperation and support if they can successfully develop a vaccine for the virus.

About the visit of the Chinese delegation, he said, "The Chinese delegation expressed satisfaction over the work of Bangladesh in tackling the coronavirus crisis. They also said there are some areas where improvement is possible. We will work on those identified areas in future."

Referring to Covid-19 testing kits, Zahid said the government has taken steps to meet the demand and so there is no reason to worry about it.

The 10-member team of Chinese experts, who has firsthand experience of containing the virus and treating patients with remarkable success, came to Bangladesh with medical equipment.

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming, who was present at the press briefing, also assured of providing vaccine to Bangladesh on priority basis once it is developed.

Prof Abul Kalam Azad, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, also spoke at the press briefing.

Representatives of the Chinese delegation and top officials concerned of the health sector were present.

Chinese team bemoans lack of awareness

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The 10-member expert team's visit happened after a telephone conversation between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Chinese President Xi Jinping on May 20 when the latter reassured Hasina of standing by Bangladesh in this war against Covid-19.

The team, which left for China yesterday, prepared four reports on the Covid-19 situation and made recommendations for Bangladesh and submitted it to the Chinese Embassy in Dhaka. The embassy will submit it to the health ministry in a week, said Hualong.

Shuming Xianyu of the expert team said the medical personnel had been working hard day and night, but the overall public awareness on hygiene was low.

She described how the masks and personal protective equipment should be used.

There are lots of people walking on the streets, she said. Maybe they are wearing masks and gloves and thinking they are protected, but they are not maintaining social distance.

It is not appropriate to get the hands close to one's mouth or nose even when one is wearing masks and gloves.

Xianyu said eating or drinking just after removing the masks is not right at all. One must use the lace of the mask tied to the ear to remove masks and must wash hands before touching anything like food or a water bottle.

Proper use of masks can prevent 95 percent of infections, she added.

The government officials, health

care personnel and the public should know and strictly follow the right rules of hygiene and health practices.

Hualong Yan said the Chinese authorities formed a national team of 40 health personnel who visited Wuhan during the outbreak, but none of them got infected. But many of the doctors in Bangladesh are being infected. That means proper PPE and medical protocols are not being maintained.

One has to admit that unlike China there is a shortage of resources -- PPE and other equipment -- in Bangladesh, Hualong added.

Frontline workers and the Bangladesh government are doing a better job than many other countries are doing, but there is a lot to be improved, he added.

Hualong said the Chinese government enforced strong lockdown in the beginning of the outbreak in Wuhan, tested large numbers of people for free and isolated the patients at makeshift hospitals, because keeping them with their families would not have been right.

"We have also used our traditional medicine based on symptoms, alongside providing nutritious food to the patients. These are very important. Besides, the patients must not worry. They must keep mentally strong," he said.

When the outbreak peaks will depend on how the measures of infection control are enforced, an expert said.

The team also said it only supported PCR tests for Covid-19, not antibody tests. It also supports plasma

therapy which was proved to be useful in China.

Hualong said five Chinese companies are working on developing vaccines and Bangladesh would be one of China's first friends to get the vaccines.

"China and Bangladesh had an in-depth discussion and we will support Bangladesh in our highest capacity in fighting the virus. It's a common enemy of the world. We must cooperate."

Indian defence chief visits Moscow amid China tensions

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Amidst rising border tension with China, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh yesterday embarked on a three-day visit to Russia during which he will hold talks with top Russian military brass.

Singh's visit is primarily to attend a grand military parade in Moscow to mark the 75th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II.

His visit to Russia comes in the midst of an escalating border standoff between India and China, particularly after the killing of 20 Indian Army personnel by Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh's Galwan Valley on June 15.

Transmission

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and isolation of every case is the only way to control the transmission.

"No country succeeded to control the transmission with implementing this rigorous measures. We have to increase testing, contract tracing and making people maintain safety precautions -- wearing masks, washing hands and keeping physical distancing," Prof Ridwanur Rahman, another expert, told The Daily Star.

In yesterday's briefing, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the DGHS said, the death rate of the Covid-19 patients was 1.30 percent.

On March 8, authorities reported the first two confirmed cases in the country and reported the first death on March 18.

Meanwhile, 1,678 Covid-19 patients have recovered in the 24 hours till yesterday, taking the total number of recoveries to 46,755. The current recovery rate is 40.38 percent, the DGHS official added.

A total of 618 people were put under isolation in the same period, she added.

Among the dead, 33 were male and five female. Fifteen were from Dhaka, 12 from Chattogram, two from Rajshahi, two from Khulna, two from Mymensingh, four from Barishal and another from Sylhet divisions.

One of them was aged between 11 and 20, three between 21 and 30, one between 31 and 40, three between 41 and 50, sixteen between 51 and 60, 10 between 61 and 70, three between 71 and 80 and the other one aged between 81 and 90.