

The Daily Star

ICU IN SYLHET DIVISION
32 out of 46 dedicated
beds are at private
hospitals
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**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**

3,462
New cases in 24hrs

1,22,660
Total cases

1,582
Deaths

49,666
Recoveries

**GLOBAL
UPDATE**

481,442
Deaths

9,422,847
Total cases

CONTAINING COVID-19

Testing kit crunch frustrates efforts

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

With the country witnessing a continuous surge in Covid-19 infections and deaths, a shortage of testing kits appears to be a major setback for efforts to contain the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

In terms of the number of tests, Bangladesh remains at the bottom among the South Asian countries, and the crisis of kits has already led to suspension of testing in some laboratories.

Shortage of kits at such a crucial time raises serious concern as it is not only causing delays in identifying infected people and tracing their contacts, but also in deciding whether a patient has recovered, said experts.

They said the authorities were not testing enough people taking the country's high population density into consideration. The number of daily tests still hovers around 17,000, although it should be at least 20,000.

As of yesterday, the country tested 660,444 samples, shows data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

According to www.worldometers.info, 4,029 out of every one million people in the country have so far been tested, whereas the number is 89,351 in the United States, 83,585 in Italy and 5,329 in India.

The government has managed to test only about one out of every 250 people, which is direly inadequate to get any conclusive picture of the real Covid-19 situation on the ground, said experts.

KIT CRUNCH

The 300-bed government hospital in Narayanganj is one of the places where testing remained suspended for five days from Thursday amid kit shortage.

"We have the capacity to test 280 samples per day. The demand is huge, but we cannot meet it because of the crisis of kits," Goutam Roy, superintendent of the hospital, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The facility received 1,920 kits on Tuesday, which would last for a week and officials have already asked for more, he added.

In Gazipur, Shaheed Taj Uddin Ahmad Medical College wrote to the

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Dinghies crammed with mostly garment workers arriving in Nishat Nagar area of Tongi, crossing the Turag river, yesterday morning. Everyone, except a few, is wearing masks. The boat could have carried fewer people to ensure physical distancing.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Five lakh customers got inflated power bills

State minister says distributors working to correct 'errors'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The distribution companies have mistakenly inflated bills for about 5 lakh customers while preparing an average monthly charge as officials could not go from door to door amid the coronavirus pandemic, said state minister for power Nasrul Hamid yesterday.

"The current problem is down to the mistake of the distribution companies. While preparing the average bill, they inflated bills in some cases," said the state minister.

He made the comments during a virtual discussion organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue on the power sector.

Many customers have complained that they received monthly electricity bills that are much higher than in the previous months.

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3,000-plus daily cases the new normal

3,462 more reported infected; 37 die

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In all but one of the last 16 days, the daily new Covid-19 cases has not dipped below 3,000 and another 3,462 tested positive in the 24 hours preceding 2:30pm yesterday.

Over the same duration, 37 people -- 28 male and nine female -- have died of the highly contagious virus. The death toll now stands at 1,582 and the total number of confirmed coronavirus cases at 1,22,660.

June 9 saw the highest number of new cases until then -- 3,271, also the first time the number crossed the 3,000 mark. On June 16, authorities reported 53 deaths -- the highest single-day fatalities in the country. The very next day, the highest number of new cases till date, 4,008, were recorded.

June 13 was the only exception, when the total number of new cases dipped below the 3,000 mark as 2,856 new cases were reported.

Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general of the Directorate General

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Lockdown helped in East Rajabazar

Officials say infection rate fell; people of low income group suffering inside red zone

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The two-week lockdown of East Rajabazar has resulted in reduced number of cases of Covid-19 transmission.

Ayesha Akhter, an assistant director of the Directorate General of Health Service, said infections among people in East Rajabazar have reduced after enforcement of lockdown there.

She urged all to follow the guidelines for preventing coronavirus infections.

Faridur Rahman Khan Iran, councillor of ward-27 of Dhaka North City Corporation, told The Daily Star yesterday, "There were 31 infected people when the area was locked down on June 10 ... Hundreds of people might have been infected by them but that did not happen."

"Only 19 people were reported infected a couple of days after the lockdown was enforced. They were actually infected before the lockdown and detected later. Nobody got infected since then, as far as we know," he said.

At least 35 of the total 50 recovered and the rest were doing fine, he said. Faridur said samples of nearly 230 people had been collected for Covid-19 tests and that some results were yet to be delivered.

This correspondent spoke to nearly a dozen people who live inside the locked down area.

Rakibul Hasan, a resident of East Rajabazar, said, "People did not care much [about social distancing] during the countrywide shutdown and moved freely on the streets. But after the lockdown, people stopped going out and maintained social and physical distancing."

"I hardly see anyone on the streets without a mask now. That can be a reason for fewer infections," he said.

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FAST-TRACK PROJECTS Govt moves to speed up work amid pandemic

Monitoring Task Force to sit with implementing agencies today

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and REJAEUL KARIM BYRON

Amid growing concern over the slow pace of work of almost all fast track projects due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the government is working to find ways to speed up the schemes.

As part of its efforts, the Fast Track Project Monitoring Taskforce is going to meet today with the officials of the project implementation agencies, officials said.

Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus, also the head of the taskforce, will preside over the virtual meeting from Prime Minister's Office. Secretaries of different ministries and project directors concerned will join the meeting through videoconferencing, they said.

Abul Mansur Md Faizullah, secretary of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division, said as many first track projects were running behind

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Primary healthcare made hassle-free

Daktarkhana, country's first general physician centres, ensuring treatment at low cost

NILIMA JAHAN

When 50-year-old Md Shahjahan Khandaker was having an asthma attack last month, he was too afraid to go to hospital.

A businessman from Rangpur's Taantipara area, Shahjahan has been an asthma patient for the past few years. Even though he had no other symptoms of Covid-19 apart from shortness of breath, he was reluctant to go to a doctor, afraid of being a Covid-19 suspect and then being denied treatment.

However, when his condition deteriorated, his son Md Monsur Ali, took him to Daktarkhana -- the first general physician (GP) model in Bangladesh -- right next to their home. "The doctor there examined him and assured us that it was nothing related to Covid-19 and said that with the prescribed medicine, he would be fine."

A week after the first Daktarkhana visit, Shahjahan was all better without having to see a specialist or go to a hospital.

"The whole process cost me only Tk 200. If I took my father to a specialist or a hospital, it might have cost me thousands," said Monsur, adding, "I was amazed that the doctor gave us enough time in exchange for such a low cost."

"Without hesitation, I took my four-year-old daughter to the Daktarkhana as she was suffering from fever. With the prescribed medicine, she too was cured," Monsur said.

According to Dr Ratindra Nath Mondal, a medicine specialist and founder of Daktarkhana, in developed countries, each area has a GP centre, where people of that particular area can go and get primary medical consultation and treatment.

"In order to see a specialist, one needs to get reference from the GP

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FAKE COVID REPORTS Cops track down dozen syndicates

Some hospital staffers involved in it; each report sold for Tk 5,000-9,000

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

While the coronavirus itself is a cause for grave concern in the country, some people are out there making business by putting others at further risk of infection by selling fake Covid-19 certificates.

Law enforcers claimed to have detected around a dozen syndicates, who are selling fake certificates during the pandemic. They provide a printed "Covid-19 negative/positive" certificate or an E-mail as per desire, for Tk 5,000 to Tk 9,000.

In cooperation with some hospital staffers, these syndicates mainly target those in need of a Covid-19 negative certificate to go abroad, said officials of police and Rab. They have medical staffers, graphic designers and IT experts involved in their gangs. For the certificates, they mainly use DGHS or IEDCR pads.

Police and Rab claimed to have learned about the syndicates after arresting around a dozen people who were selling fake certificates.

"We have come to know that several

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Saiful Islam is all smiles holding a report that says his grandchild tested negative for coronavirus at the National Institute of Neuro-Sciences & Hospital in the capital. He came from Jashore with the child for a surgery.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

64 Bangladeshis found in a truck in Macedonia

Detained, taken to a site close to border with Greece

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police in North Macedonia said 64 Bangladeshi migrants were found in a truck on a highway near the country's border with Greece, reports AP.

The driver evaded arrest during an inspection late Monday near Strumica in the country's southeast. In a statement Tuesday, police gave no other details about the migrants, the AP report said.

Contacted, Mutasimul Islam, first secretary at the labour welfare wing of the Bangladesh embassy in Spain, which is responsible to look after diplomatic issues in North Macedonia too, said they communicated with the North Macedonian government for details about the incident, but did not get any response till yesterday evening.

"We have sent an email to know about the incident. We will be able to tell about it once we get the reply," Mutasimul told The Daily Star via WhatsApp.

The migrants were detained and transferred to a holding site in the border town of Gevgelija, pending deportation to Greece, said the news agency on Tuesday.

Syeda Farhana Noor Chowdhury, labour welfare counsellor at the Bangladesh embassy in Athens, said they were

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