

Road accidents claim eight lives

Four of them killed in Thakurgaon as truck collides with three-wheeler

STAR REPORT

Eight people were killed and six others injured in road accidents in three districts on Tuesday.

In Thakurgaon, four people were killed when a truck collided head-on with a diesel-run three-wheeler around 8:00pm on Tuesday in Kadashuka area on Thakurgaon-Baliadangi road.

The victims are Sadequl Islam, 30, Banu Begum, 45, Shahidul Islam, 45, and Yakub Ali, 55.

Sadequl, Banu, and Shahidul were residents of Baliadangi upazila, while Yakub hailed from Naogaon's Dhamoirhat.

Banu and Yakub died on the spot. The two others were taken to Baliadangi Upazila Health Complex in a critical condition where doctors declared Sadequl dead, said Hasibul Haque Prodhan, officer-in-charge of Baliadangi Police Station.

All three were the three-wheeler passengers. Meanwhile, Shahidul, who was the three-wheeler driver, was moved to Rangpur Medical College Hospital. He died there later.

Banu's six-year-old son Rahimullah, who was also injured in the accident, was now undergoing treatment at Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital.

A case was filed with Baliadangi Police Station in this connection, the OC said.

Two people were killed and two others wounded when two trucks collided with each other in Sirajganj's

Pachalia area on the Sirajganj-Dhaka highway on Tuesday morning.

The dead are Kawsar Ali, 28, and Sanwar Hossain, 20.

The accident took place around 9:30am when a Sirajganj-bound brick-laden truck hit a stone-laden truck from the rear. Kawsar and Sanwar died on the spot.

Law enforcers and fire fighters rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies, said Abdur Rashid, sub-inspector of Hatikumul Highway Police Station.

In Tangail, a newlywed woman and her grandmother were killed in a road accident in Kalihati upazila on Tuesday.

The victim are Moriom Akter Munni, 18, and her grandmother Omichha Begum, 80, of Nonla Bagbari village in Tangail's Dhanbari. Moriam's husband Tofayel Ahmed Anik and two others were also injured in the accident.

Tofayel and Munni were married in the first week of June, and he along with his wife and her grandmother were going to his brother's house in Tangail town on a CNG-run auto-rickshaw.

The auto-rickshaw collided head-on with a Dhanbari-bound bus from Dhaka on Bangabandhu bridge at Elenga in the morning.

Kamal Hossain, in-charge of Elenga highway police outpost, said the injured, including the CNG driver, were admitted to Tangail General Hospital.

Police seized the bus, but its driver and helpers managed to flee.

Our correspondents from Thakurgaon, Pabna, and Tangail contributed to this report.



A motorcyclist weaving through traffic at speed in Aminbazar area on Dhaka-Aricha highway yesterday morning. Such unnecessary risk-taking is all too common on the roads.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Five lakh customers

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"I have said a number of times a mistake is taking place. There is nothing wrong in admitting the mistake. Our distributors are working to correct the mistakes. So, we are acting on it," Nasrul said.

There are 3.68 crore electricity consumers in Bangladesh. Of them, 30 lakh customers use smart meters. The rest use manual, Nasrul said.

"Meter readers have to read those manually. It would take 20 lakh people to read the meters at 4 crore households. If these people were sent to every household, at least 5 lakh people would have contacted the coronavirus," he said.

So, they were told to find a solution so that nobody faced any trouble, he said.

Some four lakh to five lakh customers in both rural and urban areas have faced inflated bills, according to the state minister.

"The customers should not worry about it. The issue is being solved if they go to their local electricity offices."

"There are meters. The bills would be corrected by looking at previous months bills," he said.

The government is also not taking any surcharge for three months at household levels to give some comfort to customers, according to the state minister.

As people are staying home because of the coronavirus-induced shutdown, they are also consuming more electricity compared to previous months, he said.

3,000-plus daily cases

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of Health Services (DGHS), yesterday said, "We urge people to maintain hygiene and social distancing to stay safe."

A total of 16,433 samples were tested in 65 labs across the country before yesterday's daily briefing, she said.

The percentage of tests that returned positive was 21.07, marginally higher than the 20.94 percent the day before.

In terms of the total confirmed cases, the death rate was 1.30 percent, showing almost no change for the two months, according to DGHS data.

Bangladesh also continued to be the 17th worst affected country in terms of the number of cases. It remains one step ahead of South Africa and just below France, according to worldometer.info.

Meanwhile, 2,031 Covid-19 patients have recovered in the 24 hours.

The total number of recoveries has reached 49,666. The recovery rate was 40.49 percent, the DGHS official added.

In total, 749 people were put under

isolation in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday.

Among those who died in that duration, 10 were from Dhaka, nine from Chattogram, six from Rajshahi, seven from Khulna, three from Mymensingh, one from Barishal and another was from Rangpur Division.

One of them was aged between 11 and 20 years old, two between 21 and 30, two between 31 and 40, three between 41 and 50, 12 between 51 and 60, nine between 61 and 70 and the rest were 71 and 80 years old, Dr Nasima also said.

According to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) website, males constituted 77 percent of the deaths and 71 percent of infections in the country.

More than half of the total infected were aged between 21 to 40 years, reported IECCR, adding that the death rate was 65 percent higher among patients older than 50 years of age.

Cops track down

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syndicates are involved in selling fake Covid-19 certificates. We have already increased vigilance and are conducting drives to arrest them," Lt Col Sarwar-Bin-Quasem, director of Rab's legal and media wing, told The Daily Star yesterday.

In the latest drive on Wednesday, a team from Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Tejaon Division arrested a couple from Airport area, who were selling fake Covid-19 certificates. The arrestees are Humayun Kabir and his wife Tanzina Patowari.

Harun-Ur-Rashid, deputy commissioner of Tejaon Division Police, told this newspaper that they used to collect samples by visiting people's houses, even though they have no laboratory.

After collecting samples, they would go home and prepare fake certificates on their laptops. They would write "negative" or "positive" on the certificates depending on the patient's symptoms, he said.

If the patient had any Covid-19 symptoms, they would write positive and if not, they would write negative, added the DC.

Interrogating the couple, police later conducted a drive in the capital's Badda area and arrested three others, including JKG Healthcare CEO Ariful Chowdhury.

The two others are Sayed Chowdhury and Al Mamun, an IT expert, said police. Md Mahmud Khan, assistant commissioner of DMP Tejaon Zone, said that Humayun Kabir is a graphic designer and used to give patient reports on the official pads of the health directorate and the IEDCR.

"Tanzina, a nurse, worked for JKG Healthcare but the CEO Ariful said she was sacked her in April. But, we have

found IEDCR pads on the laptops of JKG Healthcare," he said.

"We would be able to say more about the syndicates' activities and involvement of any other gang after interrogating them [the arrestees] after taking them into remand," said Mahmud.

He added that in primary interrogation, they have come to know that these syndicates so far sold around 40 certificates to different people.

If the patient was a local resident, they charged Tk 5,000 but if the patient was a foreigner, they charged \$100, Mahmud said.

Meanwhile on June 15, a Rab-3 team raided a photocopy shop in the capital's Muga area and arrested four for selling fake Covid-19 certificates. The arrestees were Fajal, Sharif, Jamshed, and Liakat.

According to the law enforcers, they have sold around 150 to 200 certificates to different people and charged Tk 5,000-7,000 per certificate.

During interrogation, the arrestees said that mainly the garment workers would take negative certificates from them to join their work. But some people take positive certificates to submit those in office so that they could take leave.

ABM Faijul Islam, senior assistant director of Rab-3, told The Daily Star yesterday that the arrestees worked in photocopy shop and they used to scan and preserve certificates of Covid-19 patients. Some brokers in the hospital used to help them for the job, he said.

"We are investigating the incident to trace these brokers and such syndicates involved in selling fake Covid-19 certificates," he added.

Earlier on June 5, police arrested two people from the Savar upazila health and family planning office for selling fake Covid-19 certificates.

Testing kit crunch frustrates efforts

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Prime Minister's Office, drawing its attention to a severe crisis of test kits.

"We had informed the matter to the Prime Minister's Office on Tuesday. We then got some kits. The problem is solved for now," said Principal Prof Asad Hussain.

SK Saiful Alam, assistant professor and head of the department of microbiology there, said they were supposed to test 188 samples a day, but the number came down to 70 to 80 due to the shortage.

The microbiologist also said his team got some new European kits, but the team needs training to learn using them. He said he hoped that they would begin using them from Friday.

Even a ruling party lawmaker has recently vented anger over the shortage of kits that led to suspension of Covid-19 tests in three districts.

Coming live on Facebook on Monday, Ekramul Karim Chowdhury, lawmaker from Noakhali-4, alleged that the testing had stopped in Noakhali, Feni, and Laxmipur.

Ekramul, also a member of the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, said, "I have come to know that three or four business companies have already brought

around 10 lakh testing kits, but they have not been able to supply them to the health ministry due to the 'Mithu Syndicate'. Our health sector will never be normal until it gets rid of the Mithu Syndicate."

IEDCR data indicates that the testing also got halted in Jamalpur

and at some private hospitals in Dhaka, apparently due to a shortage of kits.

Experts said the country's testing capacity was still drastically insufficient against its huge population, amid a pandemic when testing facilities should have been expanded every day.

"The current number of daily tests is poor. We have to take the number to 50,000," said IEDCR consultant and epidemiologist Mushtuq Husain, but pointed out that that might not be possible with PCR machines.

RT-PCR, in which samples from nose and throat are swabbed, is considered gold standard for Covid-19 tests.

Since the testing machines have to be imported, there are chances of a disruption in the supply chain. "So, we have to go for local production or other means of testing."

Replying to a query, Prof Shahid Ullah, chief of the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19, said it was tough to determine the target of daily tests as the "trend of infection will determine the number."

"We have been saying there should be at least 20,000 tests per day now," he said.

The DGHS yesterday said 17,245 samples were collected and 16,430 tested in 66 labs across the country.

Regarding the kit crisis, he said the government must keep at least two lakh kits in reserve as the supply chain could be disrupted any time. Besides, it should look for other

markets also.

Health officials said one of the major challenges is PCR machines cannot conduct a huge number of tests in a single day.

Take the capacity of DNA Lab limited, a testing facility in Dhaka, for an example.

It has around 500 kits in stock and those could last about three days. After that they will have to collect more kits.

"Kit crisis is worsening every day," said Gobindha Chandra Ghosh, a top official of the facility.

Officials, however, said there was no crisis of kits and that the testing did not stop at any place.

"Right now, we have one lakh and two thousand kits. More kits will come. So there is no kit crisis in the country," said Abul Kalam Azad, director general of DGHS.

He said they were gradually increasing the test numbers and more districts were coming under the testing facilities.

64 Bangladeshis

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contacting Bangladesh officials in Madrid regarding the incident in North Macedonia.

The so-called Balkan migration route, mostly running through former Yugoslav republics, has been closed since 2015 and Greek border with North Macedonia was closed earlier this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the AP report.

But police said trafficking networks remain active in the border area, it added.

Primary healthcare made hassle-free

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centres. When and if the GPs fail to diagnose a disease or if a patient needs to see a specialist for the severity of the disease, the GPs can refer them to a specialist," he said.

"I have tried to replicate the model here in Bangladesh so that an overwhelming majority of our patients, who crowd specialist chambers or hospitals for a general diseases, can take treatment from our general physicians. This way, they can save both their time and money.

"At the same time, our specialists, who are overburdened with duties, can give proper time to critical patients at the hospitals and focus on emergency situations," said Ratindra Nath.

Besides, since Bangladesh has no specialist field for general physicians, and every year, a large number of new graduate doctors fight for employment, Dakarkhana has been helping the new doctors with employment.

Newly graduated students, who have an MBBS degree and are registered as a doctor under Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BM&DC), can

take part in a four-day training called GPOC (general practice orientation course) by the General Physicians' Society. After training successfully, one can open a Dakarkhana branch with due permission.

"The training covers all areas so that they can treat all types of general diseases and give treatments to newborns and adults alike. They are also taught to counsel the patients about the possible side effects of the medicine they will prescribe and much more," he said.

"And most importantly, we advise them [the GPs] to give at least 15 minutes to hear the case history of every patient," the doctor said.

In metropolitan areas, one needs to pay Tk 200 for treatment, while in district and upazila level branches, they charge Tk 100 from the patients.

To open up a medical history record book, one needs to pay Tk 30, while the patients of district and upazila level need to pay Tk 20.

However, if someone is unable to bear the fee, Dakarkhana doctors provide with free treatment and

medicine.

Since its inception on February 14 last year, it has established 70 branches around the country, while a total of 95 doctors have been offering treatment at Dakarkhana.

A total of 15 GPOC have been carried out countrywide, where a total of 3,250 doctors were trained.

Another positive aspect of Dakarkhana is that during the Covid-19 crisis, all their branches have been providing free telemedicine.

Laiju, a pregnant woman living in Mirpur-1 area, who had been doing her prenatal visits at the local Dakarkhana, continued her check-ups over phone with her doctor.

"I even called the doctor at 2:00am and he prescribed medicines and gave advice. I'm very grateful to him," she said.

Currently, Ratindra Nath is aiming to set up a branch for every 20,000 people and in every one kilometre area. "If there is one such branch in every area, only 15-20 percent of patients will need to go to specialists," he said.

Masud Hossain, zonal executive officer of zone-5 of DNCC, claimed that they had received some reports of issues relating to high prices of essentials inside the locked down area, but the sellers were now selling products at market price.

He said people were tired of the lockdown. "We are getting calls urging the end of the lockdown."

Govt moves to

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schedule due to the virus outbreak, they sent letters to project directors to come up with recovery plans.

"Tomorrow's [Thursday] meeting will discuss the problems faced by the projects and how to overcome those. Some specific directives are likely to be given [to the project implementing agencies] from the meeting in this regard," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

With most of the first-track projects already running behind schedule mainly due to uncertainty over funding, complexity over designs, planning and land acquisition, their progress was hit hard by the Covid-19 outbreak.

The number of first-track projects rose to 12 after three new projects were included and one was excluded from the list in the last meeting of Fast Track Project Monitoring Committee, chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in January.

The projects are Padma Multipurpose Bridge, Metro Rail (MRT-6), Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, Padma Rail Link, Chattogram-Cox's Bazar Rail Line, Rampal Thermal Power Plant, Payra Port First Terminal, Payra port infrastructure development, Maheshkhali Matarbari integrated infrastructure development activities, MRT-1, MRT-5, and Matarbari Port Development Project.

The last three was included in the list of the first-track project. The Sonadia Deep Sea Project has been dropped from the list.

Once the projects are completed, the country's communication and power sectors will get a huge boost, traffic congestion in Dhaka city will ease, and trade and tourism will be benefited immensely, say experts.

Studies show that the country's GDP will increase by 3 to 4 percent after the completion of the projects.

DELAY IN PROJECTS

The long-cherished Padma Multipurpose Bridge project suffered shortages of workers, both Chinese and local, and construction materials since January after the virus broke out in China, officials said.

A project official said the project authorities are now working on a pace of 70 percent of normal. It received an allocation of Tk 5,370 crore from the outgoing Annual Development Programme (ADP), but officials could spend Tk 2,140 crore as of February.

Bridges Division Secretary Belayet Hossain yesterday said, "We have returned Tk 1,700 crore from the ADP allocation. The current deadline of the project is going to be deferred by six months as the work has been disrupted by Covid-19."

After several deferrals, the current deadline of the project is June 2021. The overall progress of the project was 79.50 percent as of May this year, according to project documents.

Another important first track project is the construction of a single-line dual-gauge railway track from Dohazari to Cox's Bazar via Ramu. It will bring the country's popular tourist destination under railway network. The long-drawn project has also been facing obstacles since the Covid-19 pandemic began due to a lack of workers, officials said.

Project Director Mofizur Rahman said they had a plan to complete 50 percent physical work of the project within the current fiscal year, but the progress reached 40 percent as of now.

The physical work of the project came to a near-halt after March, he said, adding that although most of the workers have returned to the project site, rain was creating obstacles.

"We are hopeful about recovering the delay if the virus situation returns to normal. But if the situation recovers, it may not be possible for us to recover the delay within the deadline," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meanwhile, the MRT-6 project has witnessed 44.67 percent physical progress till last month, Padma Rail Link 24.43 percent, Rampal Thermal Power Plant 48.93 percent, Payra Port First Terminal 0.82 percent, and the Payra port infrastructure development has seen 66.25 percent physical progress.

The 2,400 MW Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, the largest single project worth Tk 113,092 crore, saw 25.04 percent financial progress till last month. The deadline of the project is December 2025.

CMCH doctor dies

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Dr Aniruddha Ghosh, associate professor of medicine at CMCH.

Samirul's family shifted him to a private hospital in the port city on Monday, said Brig Gen SM Humayun Kabir, director of CMCH, adding that his health condition suddenly deteriorated yesterday and he was put under a ventilator at Metropolitan Hospital where he died around 2:25pm.

His death was mourned by many on social media as Samirul was known as a humanitarian doctor.

Journalist and poet Bishwajit Chowdhury wrote, "How an unknown person can become so dear after the very first meeting. I understood when I met Dr Samirul...Patients praised his amicable behaviour and professional attitude. I can't believe he is no more. I can't hold my tears."

Abdur Rob, a senior consultant of Medicine at Chattogram General Hospital, said Samirul was a very good person. "All the good are dying young. Such a loss is irreplaceable," he said.

Reaz Hyder Chowdhury, general secretary of Peshajibi Samannoy Parishad in Chattogram, said the death of a good doctor like Samirul is a great loss for society.

More than 4,000 healthcare staffers, including 1,268 doctors and 1,199 nurses, have so far been infected with Covid-19. At least 45 doctors and nurses and eight other healthcare staffers died of the virus so far, according to the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA).

The BMA has accused the health ministry of reluctance to ensuring safety and security of doctors at workplace during coronavirus pandemic.