

## ICU beds lie unused

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According to different studies, around 20 percent of the Covid-19 infected patients require hospital admission. These patients usually need oxygen therapy and some of the critical ones need ICU support.

A total of 13,429 people have been admitted to these hospitals as of yesterday, according to DGHS.

### SHORTAGE OF MANPOWER

Shortage of trained manpower is one of the reasons why ICU beds remain unoccupied, said officials.

Take Kuwait-Bangladesh Maitree Government Hospital in the capital for an example.

The hospital dedicated to treating Covid-19 cannot operate all its 26 ICU beds due to manpower crisis.

With the existing manpower, the hospital is now using 16 ICUs, Dr Shehab Uddin, its superintendent, told The Daily Star.

To operate an ICU, a critical care medical specialist is necessary, but the country has extreme dearth of such specialists, he said, adding that there are only 13 such specialists in the country.

Although anesthesiologists can operate an ICU, the number of anesthesiologists is also low, he said.

"We have sought necessary manpower to operate the ICUs, but the problem is that there is a crisis of skilled manpower in this field," he said.

Public health experts said the reason behind the current situation could be the fact that all the ICUs were not functional or yet to be operational.

Besides, people find it hard to get ICU due to unavailability of data on vacancies in the Covid-19 hospitals, they added.

Of the ICU beds, a total of 218 were in the Covid-19 hospitals or hospital units in Dhaka city while the rest in the Covid-19 hospitals or hospital units elsewhere.

"If the average use is only 78, then why are many people not getting ICU support in time? The authorities should answer the question clearly," Prof Nazrul Islam, a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on finding ways to prevent the spread of the virus, told The Daily Star.

Since its inception on April 18, the

NTAC has been stressing on increasing ICU facilities in the Covid-19 hospitals.

Sources in the DGHS said some of the ICUs in such hospitals were not installed properly due to shortage of time. As a result, those have not been made operational yet.

Even Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) in a letter to the health minister on June 20 mentioned the issue of installing ICUs "unscientifically".

Besides, a portion of the ICU beds are also kept reserved for VIPs, said a DGHS official, requesting anonymity.

A Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) study, published on June 15, found less than 140 ICUs in these facilities were functional.

To ensure people's access to information about the Covid-19 bed vacancy, the NTAC suggested the DGHS make the data available online.

This was not done till last night.

"Since April, we have been suggesting adopting a mechanism to make people informed about the available ICU beds. That has not been implemented yet," Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, president of NTAC, told The Daily Star.

Talking on the issue, Dr Habibur Rahman, director of Management Information System unit of the DGHS, said, "These are the daily figures of all government and private Covid-19 hospitals. Usually, data from around 20 percent of these hospitals are not updated regularly."

Contacted, Prof Abul Kalam Azad, director general of DGHS, said patients may not go to the "right hospitals where ICU beds are available".

"Sometimes I was told why people are not getting beds in hospitals. But I see beds are vacant. So it is a matter to see which hospitals people are going to and whether ICU facility is available there," he said.

Prof Azad said, "It will not be [right] if you say less [use of ICU]. There are many vacant beds and ICUs in the [Covid-19] hospitals. I do not know why people are saying this ... And it would not be right to admit people to ICU forcefully."

He said they were focusing on ensuring oxygen supplies in the hospitals to "save lives".



A Dhaka North City Corporation employee spraying insecticide in Mohammadpur's Tikkapara area to destroy mosquitoes and their larvae. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Loan sharks feast on slum dwellers

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Like Babu, many slum dwellers in the city are going through a miserable phase with no work and the burden of loans mounting.

The Daily Star spoke to over a dozen of them at various slums, including Karail and Bhashantek. Five shared their bitter experiences.

The shutdown left most slum dwellers without work or jobs to support their families, they told The Daily Star.

Many had to borrow money from loan sharks.

A group of people, backed up by local goons, have been lending money this way for years. But the number of loan seekers has increased sharply after the government declared a shutdown to slow the spread of the virus.

There were around 6.46 lakh people in around 3,394 slums in Dhaka. At least 1,639 of the slums, with 4,99,011 people, were under Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), and 1,755 slums, with 1,47,056 people, in Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), said Local Government Division Minister Tazul Islam in parliament in June last year.

According to the slum dwellers, many of them did not get adequate relief materials and were forced to take loans.

Cashing in on the situation, the lenders increased their interest rates, which is now between Tk 100 to 200 per month for every Tk 1,000.

They said one has to have their own house, rickshaw or auto rickshaw, a shop or at least belongings in a house

worth something to qualify for loans from the sharks.

A local wishing anonymity said, "It is difficult to get loans if someone has none of these."

Abdus Sobhan, president of Bou Bazar unit of Karail Slum Development Committee, said although the government and some NGOs distributed relief material among the slum dwellers, it was not adequate for the large number of people who live there.

Around 1.5 lakh people live in the around 30,000 houses in the slum, locals said.

Sobhan said many slum dwellers went to their village homes as there was no work in Dhaka. But those who do not have anything in the village still live here in difficult conditions.

Sheikh Sadi, a 25-year-old labourer of Karail slum, has been without work for the last three months.

He took out a Tk 25,000 loan to run his two-member family.

"Even after the withdrawal of shutdown, I am facing problems getting work. I owe two months' rent and monthly interest of Tk 2,500. Where will I get the money?"

Sadi came to Dhaka with his parents more than one decade ago after river erosion took their home in Patuakhali.

Md Shukkur, 29, a carpenter of Abulur slum in the capital's Bhashantek area, said he used to earn Tk 600 a day but he had almost no work after the shutdown was enforced.

"During the shutdown, I worked

irregularly for a few days," he said.

His younger brother worked in a small garment factory which was closed after Eid.

"Now both of us are unemployed. We need around Tk 12,000 to 15,000 a month to run our five-member family," he said.

Finding no alternative, he borrowed Tk 10,000 from a loan shark at a monthly interest of Tk 2,000.

Although the shutdown was withdrawn, he still has no work.

"But the lender regularly demands her interest. We get into fights almost every day," he said.

Nagor Chairman is the major loan shark there and his business is worth over Tk 1 crore, locals claimed.

"We see people gathered at his house regularly, taking part in arbitration over loan," a local said.

Nagor Chairman declined to talk to this paper.

Md Raju, 30, a labourer in a Bihari colony in Mirpur-11, is in dire need of money as his wife is likely to deliver a baby next month.

With no work, he could not manage the money that will be required at the hospital.

"So, I have talked to several lenders for Tk 2,000 so that I can take my wife to hospital. But nobody has agreed to give the money as I have no belongings worth something in my house," he said.

"However, some of them assured me that they would give me the money if I have to take my wife to the hospital," he added.

## Bangladeshi man shot dead by BSF

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

A Bangladeshi man suspected of cattle rustling was shot dead by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) in Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila early yesterday.

Mizanur Rahman, 22, was a resident of Burimari union in the upazila, police said.

BSF men opened fire on Mizanur and some 10 of his associates while they were smuggling Indian cows to Bangladesh through Shamsernagar border, said Subedar Sultan Hossain, company camp commander of BGB 61 Battalion.

Mizanur caught in the line of fire near the border and was taken to Patgram Upazila Health Complex where doctors pronounced him dead, he said, adding that BGB sent a letter to BSF protesting the killing.

Sumon Kumar Mohanta, officer-in-charge of Patgram Police Station, said they prepared an inquest report of the body and sent it to Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital for an autopsy.

## Man held for raping 7-yr-old in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A man was arrested on charges of raping a seven-year-old girl in Sirajganj's Kamarkhand upazila early yesterday.

Police later produced Monirul Islam, 25, of Jamtoil Sheikhpara village of the upazila, before a Sirajganj court that sent him to jail.

Quoting the case statement, Habibul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kamarkhand Police Station, said the accused took the girl to his house, luring her with money and raped her on Wednesday afternoon.

Hearing her screams, locals rushed to the spot and rescued her.

The victim then disclosed the incident to her family.

Her grandfather filed the rape case against Monirul at night.

"After filing of the case, police raided the village and arrested Monirul from his house," the OC said.

The girl was sent to Sirajganj General Hospital for medical tests yesterday, he added.

## Surge in new cases as virus

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was above 17,000 and the number of those tested positive for Covid-19 was above 3,800.

On the contrary, the lowest number of tests in the last 14 days was carried out on June 14 and 20 -- 14,505 and 14,031.

The numbers of newly identified cases were also lower on those days -- 3,141 and 3,240 respectively.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), as many as 17,999 tests were conducted in 66 labs across the country in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday. This was the highest number of tests carried out in same duration in the last 14 days.

Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of DGHS, yesterday said 3,946 new Covid-19 cases was identified in the 24-hour period.

With this, the total number of novel coronavirus cases in the country now stands at 126,606.

In the 24-hour period, another 39 people have died from the virus. The death toll now is 1,621.

Among the deceased were 32 men and seven women. They

were 10 each from Dhaka and Chattogram divisions, five each from Rajshahi and Khulna, three from Mymensingh, two from Barishal and four from Rangpur division.

Two of the dead were aged between 21 and 30, one was between 31 and 40, seven were between 41 and 50, nine between 51 and 60, 12 between 61 and 70, seven between 71 and 80 and another was aged between 91 and 100, Nasima added.

A total of 1,829 Covid-19 patients recovered during the same period, she said, adding that 51,495 people recovered from the deadly disease so far.

Speaking to The Daily Star, experts recently said the country's testing capacity was still quite insufficient against its huge population.

"The current number of daily tests is poor. We have to take the number to 50,000," said IEDCR consultant and epidemiologist Mushtaq Husain.

Prof Shahid Ullah, chief of the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19, said there should be at least 20,000 tests per day now.

## Is foul play the new normal?

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The data was submitted by individual factories to the BGMEA as cancellations started to happen, and The Daily Star received a copy in mid-May. It was then cleaned for duplicate entries and incomplete data to calculate the estimates presented in this report.

The top five countries that had the most cancelled or postponed orders were: United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Canada and Germany. The brands which cancelled or postponed the highest volume of orders were: Primark, H&M, C&A, Marks & Spencer and Tesco.

Of the top 50 brands which reported the most cancellations/postponements from Bangladesh, only 10 have thus far made public commitments to pay in full for orders completed and in production, according to Worker Rights Consortium, an international labour rights monitoring body. These brands are: H&M, Marks & Spencer, Tesco, Kiabi, VF, LPP, PVH, Inditex, Target and Ralph Lauren.

Four more brands, namely Bestseller, C&A, Primark and Walmart, have made vague promises to take back cancelled goods, but have not specified when they would do so, and more importantly, when and what percentage of the original cost suppliers would be paid.

BGMEA president Rubana Huq said that as of May 20, these brands had reinstated up to 58 percent of their initial cancellations.

However, even for reinstated orders, brands are not taking them immediately, added Huq.

"The goods supposed to be shipped in March, 2020 are getting delayed and suppliers have to bear with the stockpiling. This is eventually increasing the costs of the product, while the

payment is remaining same or even less," she said.

Meanwhile, despite stores opening up selectively in Europe and North America, buyers have continued to demand massive discounts, delay payments or ask suppliers to store products till the next season, incurring additional costs, as per in-depth interviews with suppliers sourcing for 20 major brands.

Suppliers also highlighted the double standards of global brands who ask for increasingly stringent compliance measures, but refuse to subsidise the costs that come with ensuring better conditions and job security for workers.

According to a research report by Mark Anner, Director, Center for Global Workers' Rights in Association with the Worker Rights Consortium, 98.1 percent of suppliers stated that they had received no support from buyers with the cost of furloughing workers as a result of buyer in-process order cancellations, and 97.3 percent of suppliers responded that buyers did not provide support for severance pay costs when workers were dismissed.

At least 24,860 garment workers have lost their jobs since Eid this month alone, as per the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE). Labour leaders, however, noted that the numbers are much higher.

The future looks even bleaker for workers as well as the industry at large, with a majority of buyers reducing the volume of orders from Bangladesh—some by as much as 50 percent. Even the more responsible brands said to The Daily Star that reductions in orders are inevitable.

## Make it pro-poor

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ministry Ekramul Haque Chowdhury said several lakh kits have been imported to the country, but they have not been used because of a supplier cartel leader named Mithu. He urged the prime minister to intervene and disband the syndicate influencing the purchase of medical equipment.

At yesterday's discussion, Zafullah said one of the major factors driving the high out-of-pocket spending was a lack of health insurance schemes.

Citing the example of Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital where he was treated for Covid-19 under an insurance policy in the rich category, he said he was in a cabin and the daily cost inclusive of oxygen, medical consultation and medication was Tk 17,000.

At any corporate hospital, the cost would be between Tk 1 lakh and 1.5 lakh, added the founder of Gonoshasthaya Kendra.

"This kind of health insurance policy could be a model to follow."

Other causes of high healthcare costs include numerous diagnostic tests and drug companies paying doctors to prescribe their expensive but not-so-effective products, he said.

"Actions should be taken against those who benefit from drug companies," said the public health expert, who had a significant contribution to the formation of the country's 1982 drug

policy that helped flourish today's pharmaceutical industry.

He urged people to form a movement to reform the sector.

Binayak Sen, research director at Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said that Tk 29,000 crore was allocated for the health sector this year. The amount is about only 2 percent of the GDP while the World Health Organisation recommends it to be 5 percent of the GDP.

There is also a crisis of health infrastructure in urban areas, especially for primary healthcare. If there were ward-level health facilities, people with Covid-19 would not have to rush to the tertiary hospitals, he said.

He said the social safety net was prioritised, but good governance was a major overlooked issue.

Nagorik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna said some 1.5 crore people have been pushed into poverty during the pandemic, making the total to over 4 crore.

When large scale testing is crucial, the government is delaying the approval of a rapid test kit developed by Gonoshasthaya Kendra, he said.

"We are yet to arrive at the peak of the outbreak, but lack of planning and mismanagement have already left us in disarray."

Ganasanghati Andolon Chief Coordinator Zonayed Saki said not

## Deposits by BD nationals drop

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They, however, said the rate of drop is very insignificant and the volume of deposits is still a matter of concern.

Over the last several decades, Switzerland has provided wealthy families around the globe with a convenient and safe place to stash their money. The country's political neutrality, stability and tradition of bank secrecy have kept the fortunes beyond the reach of national governments and even the most determined tax collectors.

But Swiss banks have come under global pressure in recent times, as a number of countries are stepping up crackdowns on black money. A Europe-led clampdown has also been launched on tax evasion and corruption.

Zahid Hussain, former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, said the deposits from Bangladeshi companies in 2019 are slightly lower than in 2018, and this does not necessarily mean capital flight has declined.

He said Swiss banks as safe havens

have lost their glamour with tighter application of AML/CFT regulations on banking transactions worldwide.

"As a result, capital flight seems to have changed both its form and destination, taking advantage of various investment incentives offered by countries such as Australia, Canada, US, Malaysia and so on. Our own policies to control capital flight have failed to produce visible results," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Whenever such reports are published, Bangladesh Bank officials say Bangladeshi nationals' deposits in Swiss banks don't mean the money was sent there only from here or was illegally earned or laundered.

Bangladeshi living abroad also keep their money in Swiss banks, they say. Bangladeshi businesspeople, who make transactions with firms or individuals in European countries for business purposes, may have also kept money in Swiss banks, they argue.

Zahid Hussain, however, said the black money whitening facility

going for widespread testing was costing lives. The government might be waiting for herd immunity, but that means a lot of people will die in the process.

As an immediate measure, he recommended at least one lakh tests every day and isolation and treatment of those found infected. Saki suggested immediate formation of a judicial commission to investigate corruption in the health sector and a national expert committee on healthcare reforms.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra's Rapid Dot Blot Project Coordinator Dr Mohib Ullah Khondoker said his team wrote three letters to the Directorate General of Drug Administration for fast approval of the rapid test kit that the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) recommended for antibody tests to assess the portion of the population who developed antibodies after recovering from Covid-19. BSMMU sent its report to the drug administration on June 17.

"Drug administration said they will let us know their decision next week. We don't know why it is delayed," he said.

The BSMMU might start trialling the Gonoshasthaya's antigen test kit next week, he said.

Dhaka University Law Professor Nazrul Islam and pro-environment lawyer Syeda Rizwana Hasan also spoke.

the proposed budget for FY 20-21 that practically gives legitimacy to money laundering, totally disregarding specific provisions of the relevant national and international laws, which is unprecedented. It is extremely disconcerting in a country that is badly starved of capital and revenue," he told this newspaper yesterday.

The Swiss data reiterate the importance of refraining from such blanket budgetary impunity to illicit transfer. They in fact call for serious and effective efforts by the relevant agencies of the government to bring back stolen assets and bring to justice those who are involved in such national and international crime, he said.

"This is quite possible through international cooperation including mutual legal assistance under the UN Convention against Corruption if there is the political will to take the necessary actions without fear or favour even though many of those involved may be amongst high and mighty," he said.

"It comes against the backdrop of