



The Daily Star



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BANGLADESH UPDATE **3,504** New cases in 24hrs **1,33,978** Total cases **1,695** Deaths **54,318** Recoveries **GLOBAL UPDATE** **498,668** Deaths **9,985,556** Total cases

Sloppy Biman stays grounded

No fare cuts, no other efforts to attract flyers on domestic routes; private airlines read the situation well, keep operating flights

RASHIDUL HASAN

In the first 17 days of this month, the country's two private airlines operated 552 domestic flights with 16,334 passengers, and the state-owned Biman operated just two carrying 24.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines operated the flights between Dhaka and Saidpur on June 1, the day the government eased the air travel restrictions. That was all. The company then gave up, saying too few people were flying.

However, aviation industry insiders said the main reason why people were not choosing Biman was that its tickets were pricier than the ones sold by private airlines US-Bangla and Novoair.

The private airlines had base fares at around Tk 2,000 after the coronavirus restrictions were lifted. But Biman's base fare was around Tk 3,000.

"Other airlines are selling tickets at lower prices. But we don't want to engage in an unhealthy competition," a senior Biman official said, requesting anonymity.

"Instead of domestic flights, we are focusing on chartered flights on international routes [and domestic routes], which are profitable," he added.

On June 4, Biman for the first time offered chartered flights on domestic round trips for families at a cost of between Tk 3 lakh and Tk 5 lakh depending on the distance and time spent on the ground. But nobody has so far shown any interest in taking the offers.

Biman CEO Mokabbir Hossain told a reporter last week that the turnover from domestic flights was too small.

"For Tk 2,000 airfare on a domestic route, the government takes Tk 538 in travel tax. With just Tk 1,462, how will we operate the flights and pay for fuel and other things?" he asked.

But Novoair and US-Bangla had base fares at around Tk 2,000 until last

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A man talking to a doctor about his Covid-19 symptoms using a mobile device at Muggda General Hospital in the capital yesterday. UK Aid and Concern Worldwide have partnered the initiative to provide poor people with free testing for the coronavirus. The patients also talk to a doctor for free before giving their samples. With their incomes slashed, many people can't afford to pay for the tests.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Govt mulls shorter HSC test schedule, fewer subjects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister Dipu Moni yesterday said the government was considering to cut short the exam days and number of subjects of Higher Secondary Certificate and its equivalent exams which were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Speaking at a webinar, the minister said they were also thinking of shortening some holidays of the rest of 2020 and 2021 academic calendar years so that students do not miss lessons.

"There is no need to reduce the syllabus for this year's HSC exams as the students have already completed it," Dipu Moni said.

Education Reporters Association of Bangladesh organised the webinar titled "Challenges in education from novel coronavirus and what needs to be done."

The minister said HSC

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Zoning system a continuous process

Says DGHS; reports 3,504 new cases, 34 deaths

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Marking areas into red, yellow or green zones is a continuous process.

Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), made the remark while attending the routine Covid-19 bulletin yesterday.

There had been a debate over the proposed zone-based lockdown system since the beginning of June.

Since the beginning of June, the authorities were planning to impose zone-based lockdown, and put four areas in Dhaka city, Narayanganj and Gazipur into complete lockdown.

Authorities, however, could not reach any conclusion for further steps on it as of yesterday.

"Implementation of this system has continued considering the rate of transmission. Red zoning is being

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LEVYING TUITION FEES

Parents struggle, but schools can't help it

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

When many guardians, either having lost their jobs or wages cut amid the coronavirus pandemic, are struggling to pay their children's tuition fees, schools plead with them to make the payment on an urgent basis.

The schools say they are running out of funds quickly and that they desperately need the money to continue disbursing salaries to teachers and other staff.

The guardians, however, say the educational institutions have remained closed since March and only a handful of them took online classes. So giving them tuition fees for April, May and June in full, which they have asked via text messages, was not "logical".

Tension over the issue is growing between the parents and the schools, and experts say the problem can be solved by providing the institutions with government funds.

Talking to The Daily Star, several guardians have meanwhile demanded the fees be waived for at least six months from March.

Some said they were finding it hard to run their families as their income has been slashed, while some asked why they would pay since regular classes did not take place for months.

One of them is a mother of two, who are students at a renowned school in the capital's Moghbazar. She said the school authorities have been contacting her via SMS, asking her to pay tuition fees through a mobile money transfer application.

"They introduced online classes on Facebook only early this month. But they are telling us to pay tuition fees since March. This is ridiculous," she said, demanding a waiver of the fees.

Another guardian -- father of a student of a school in Narayanganj's

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2 field hospitals for the metro rail workers

The move aimed at building confidence

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Hoping to build confidence among the engineers and workers, the metro rail project authorities are setting up two field hospitals for their employees infected with the coronavirus.

Physical work for building the hospitals with 10-15 beds in the capital's Uttara and Gabtoli has started. Beds and oxygen cylinders have reached the sites, officials said.

"We hope to complete the work within next week. We will need some time to get the doctors," MAN Siddique, Managing Director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd (DMTCL) said.

He has talked with the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) and a number of medical personnel will be hired as its advice.

Currently, six doctors, who received training in Covid-19 treatment, are providing health services for Mass Rapid Transit (MRT)-6, which is being built between Uttara and Motijheel, and a team

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Together we'll find a way out of this crisis

In an interview with The Daily Star, Jica's chief representative says about the challenges the Covid-19 pandemic posed to projects in Bangladesh

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) is looking for a path to overcome the difficulties of the Covid-19 pandemic in implementation of its funded projects in Bangladesh.

Jica has 30 ongoing projects, including large infrastructure projects like Matarbari power plant in Maheshkhali where over \$3 billion is invested.

"I can't deny that there already are impacts of the Covid-19 on the Jica funded projects and there will be more to come," said Hirata Hitoshi, chief representative of Jica Bangladesh office in a virtual interview with The Daily Star recently.

"I am confident that our executing agencies, consultants and contractors will together find a way through this difficulty. They have always overcome difficulties in the past; they will do it this time too."

According to Hitoshi, travel restrictions abroad have prohibited foreign experts to come to Bangladesh, while travel restrictions and lockdown within Bangladesh has constrained movement of materials, equipment and labourers. All of this has slowed down the projects.

He said the implementation work of the infrastructure projects are running on a limited scale to observe the measures initiated by the government.

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Hirata Hitoshi

Admission test held at school amid pandemic

Parents say young children were exposed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

South Point School and College in Dhaka held its admission tests yesterday, disregarding the government directives on keeping all educational institutions shut to contain the spread of coronavirus.

The authorities of the institution exposed students, including of grade-I and -II, to highly contagious Covid-19 by taking the tests, alleged several guardians.

Students who wanted to enroll to the English medium section of the institution had to participate in the tests.

The hour-long examinations started at 10:00 am and held at the Malibagh branch of the institution.

No journalist was allowed inside the campus premises during the examinations when they

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A boy and his parents waiting for the admission tests to begin at South Point School and College in the capital's Malibagh yesterday morning. The school has ignored the government directive to shut educational institutions to combat the spread of coronavirus and exposed many to the risks of contracting the disease.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

KHULNA DIVISION COVID-19 Two dedicated ICU facilities on deathbed

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

The 10 districts of Khulna division have only two ICUs for coronavirus patients -- that too are plagued with faulty equipment and inadequate medical supplies.

Both the intensive care units are under public hospitals while no private facility in the division treat Covid-19 patients.

All the eight ICU beds of Satkhira Sadar Hospital and all the 10 of Khulna Diabetic Hospital, now under Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH), have been kept for Covid-19 patients.

There is no equipment in the ICU of Khulna Diabetic Hospital to immediately assess a patient's condition, said Dr Farid Uddin Ahmed, focal person of the hospital, dedicated for coronavirus treatment.

The breathing tubes of the ventilators are all damaged and some of the beds do not have a central venous line (a tube placed in a large vein of the body to give fluids, blood or medications or conduct tests quickly).

The physician added that there is also a shortage of electrolyte including sodium, potassium and chloride at the ICU.

Moreover, the negative pressure chamber, which takes out contaminated air out of the intensive care unit, is not working properly and needs replacement.

"We also have to appoint manpower. Without manpower, only ICU beds cannot do anything," Dr Farid said.

Problems are arising with the ICU at Satkhira Sadar Hospital too as the beds, installed 10 years ago, have remained unused for a long time, said Md Hussain Shafaat, civil surgeon of Satkhira.

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