

CHILD MARRIAGE MARKS SHARP RISE IN JUNE
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BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,666
New cases in 24hrs



1,83,795
Total cases



2,352
Deaths



93,614
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

569,098
Deaths



12,926,176
Total cases

DEAL WITH REGENT HOSPITAL

DGHS, ministry take refuge in blame game

WASIM BIN HABIB and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The health ministry and health directorate are at loggerheads over signing of a deal with Regent Hospital after the disturbing discovery of the hospital's involvement in issuing fake Covid-19 test results.

Neither the ministry nor the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) is now taking the blame.

The DGHS signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Regent in late March, turning it into a dedicated Covid-19 hospital, in a ceremony attended by Health Minister Zahid Maleque and many high officials.

The MoU was signed even though the DGHS knew that the hospital's licence had expired years ago.

Amid widespread criticism, the DGHS in a statement on Saturday said that it was directed by higher authorities at the health ministry to sign the MoU.

The health ministry yesterday asked the director general of DGHS to explain in three working days what his office meant by "directed by higher authorities".

The health services division of the ministry sent the letter signed by a deputy secretary. The letter wanted to know what was being considered while the deal was inked.

A health ministry official told The Daily Star that: "We are not responsible for the MoU, yet they [DGHS] blamed us. The ministry is going to issue another letter asking them to explain what the basis of their claim is."

Another official said the hospital was supposed to treat the Covid-19

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People living in Korborthan alley of the capital's Shyampur Muktaadhara residential area have been receiving orange-colour water from their Wasa lines for long. Many of them face stomach aches and skin diseases if the water is used for cooking or bathing. They are now forced to purchase drinking water. Inset, some water supply lines going into homes over a drain.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

JKG HEALTH CARE

Dr Sabrina held over fake Covid certificates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested JKG Health Care Chairman Dr Sabrina Arif Chowdhury, also a government official, over issuing fake Covid-19 test reports, about three weeks after the scam came to light.

Meanwhile, the health ministry suspended Sabrina from the post of registrar at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases for violating rules.

Sheikh Muzibur Rahman, additional secretary of the Health Services Division, confirmed this to The Daily Star.

According to the ministry's order, she was suspended for professional misconduct -- holding the post of chairman of a private organisation while in public service -- and also corruption allegations.

As asked by the investigators, Sabrina went to the office of the deputy com-

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Positivity rate soars despite poor testing

47 more die; 2,666 reported infected

MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

The coronavirus positivity rate in the country has soared in the last few days despite a decline in the number of tests during this period.

The health directorate yesterday confirmed 2,666 new cases after testing 11,059 samples in the last 24 hours till yesterday afternoon, meaning the rate was 24.11 percent.

This is the highest single-day positivity rate since the first case was detected in the country on March 8.

Positivity rate is the percentage of positive cases against the total number of tests in a day.

The total number of infections in the country stood at 1,83,795.

Meanwhile, 47 more people died from the Covid-19 in the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 2,352. The current death rate against the total infections is 1.27 percent.

The number of Covid-19 patients recovered during this period was 5,580, taking the tally to 93,614. The current

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Major sex-work racket busted

CID claims to have arrested the ring leader, two associates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Criminal Investigation Department yesterday claimed to have arrested the ringleader and two members of a syndicate that has been trafficking thousands of girls and forcing them into sex work.

The arrestees are Md Azam Khan, 45, the "godfather", and his associates Anwar Hossain Moyna, 50, and Alamin Hossain alias Diamond, 35.

Imtiaz Ahmed, deputy inspector general of the CID, disclosed the arrests while addressing reporters yesterday. He, however, would not divulge the time and place of the arrests.

Azam and those who worked for him would lure in girls aged 18-20 saying they would be provided with good jobs in Dubai.

They would never take money from the girls for travel and would instead pay them Tk 20,000-30,000 as advance salary.

Once the girls would reach Dubai, they would first be given jobs as receptionists or waitresses at three- or four-star hotels. A few days later, they would be forced to work at dance clubs and then as sex workers.

The girls would be tortured with electric shocks if they refused. Dubai authorities recently informed the Bangladesh embassy in United Arab Emirates about Azam's criminal activities, said Imtiaz.

"After coming to Bangladesh, Azam was trying to manage another passport to leave the country. On information, the CID arrested him with two associates," he said.

CID officials said Azam owned three four-star hotels and one three-star hotel in Dubai.

The hotels are Fortune Grand Hotel (four stars), Fortune Pearl Hotel

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Sharpest rise in coronavirus cases in July

Report says the number of infections worldwide doubled in just a month and a half

AGENCIES

The coronavirus pandemic, which has killed more than 565,000 people out of nearly 13 million registered cases worldwide, has been accelerating sharply since the start of July, according to a count carried out by AFP from official sources.

The three biggest daily worldwide increases in new cases were seen on Saturday (more than 230,000), Friday (more than 225,000) and Thursday (nearly 220,000).

Since July 1, nearly 2.5 million new cases have been officially declared, a record level since the outbreak was first reported in China in December. The number of declared cases worldwide has doubled in just a month and a half, according to the report.

The United States (3,247,782 cases), Brazil (1,839,850), India (849,553), Russia (727,162) and Peru (322,710) account for more than half of the global total.

Worldwide, a total of at least

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MP'S ARREST IN KUWAIT

Expatriates may suffer the fallout

Say speakers at webinar organised by Kuwait Transparency Society and TIB

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The arrest and trial of a Bangladeshi lawmaker in Kuwait on charges of human trafficking, money laundering and bribery is damaging the reputation of Bangladesh's politics, society and the people as a whole, Transparency International Bangladesh has said.

It may affect the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Kuwait, as well as the reputations of the expatriates working in other countries, the anti-corruption watchdog observed.

"Bangladeshi migrants in Kuwait may face job losses and repatriation," TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said at a webinar titled "Role of Civil Society in Combating Organized Crimes," jointly organised by the Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS) and TIB yesterday.

Shahid Islam Papul, the lawmaker from Luxmipur-2, was arrested by Kuwait CID on June 6 and sent to jail after being interrogated by Kuwait's Public Prosecution.

Papul co-owned Marafie Kuwaitia Group with a Kuwaiti citizen. He is the managing director and CEO of the group and is accused of trafficking of some 20,000 foreign workers, mostly Bangladeshis, in exchange for Tk 7-9 lakh each.

Migrants alleged that many of them were not provided with jobs and wages as contracted and were instead charged money for work permit renewal. He also stands accused of bribing Kuwaiti officials for contracts for his company, the recruitment of foreign workers and laundering

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Cattle traders travelling towards the capital riding on the tailgate of a truck loaded with cattle. They are neither following the basic safety measures on roads nor the health guidelines for Covid-19 prevention. The photo was taken on Dhaka-Aricha highway in Radio Colony area of Savar.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

COVID CRISIS

Buzz gone missing at book bazaars

NILIMA JAHAN

As the coronavirus pandemic has taken its toll on almost every business in some way or another, bookstores and book cafes in the capital are no exception.

Although the book markets in Nilkhet and Banglabazar, along with the book cafes in different areas of the capital, reopened in early June, they have been seeing a very few number of visitors, which has forced many owners to give up on their businesses.

Bookworms expressed their heartache on social media after the recent closure of Nilkhet's age-old Mostofa Boighor.

Fifty-five-year-old popular bookseller Golam Mostofa, who never tried his hand at any profession except selling books, had to sell his 30-year-old book store in the last week of June. He was not being able to pay the rent of Tk 45,000 as for his small shop with five depots.

"I thought the reopening after three months might help us to survive. But I was wrong. Our business is linked with the presence of students, especially university students. But you see, everyone is now in their village home, the nearby halls are empty, and we don't know when the educational institutions will be opened," said Mostofa.

He said it was getting impossible for him to wait for the uncertainty to end as his

sales dropped to Tk 1,500 per day in June as opposed to the regular daily sales of Tk 15,000-20,000.

Mostofa sold his store with around 15,000 books at Tk 14,50,000 and is now planning to go to his village home.

Staffers at these stores were pitchforked into an even more difficult situation as many of them are facing salary cuts and fearing job losses in the coming days.

For example, Rafiqul Islam, who has been working at the Barnali Boighor of Nilkhet Islamia Market for the past 25 years, is already facing a pay cut.

"We sell guides for BCS and other recruitment tests. I don't find more than two to three customers every day since the reopening of the market," he said, adding "I don't know how long the owner will pay the rent and give our salaries."

The situation is quite similar at the wholesale bookstores in Banglabazar.

For instance, Mojibur Rahman, owner of Muna Book Depot, is not opening his stores regularly for the last few days due to the decrease in sales. He supplies books to almost 30 book stores of Nilkhet every day. But he hardly received an order after reopening this time.

Reopening couldn't help the popular bookshop cafes like Dipanpur, Nalonda or Kobita Café as well, although these

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