

TAKING 'ADVANTAGE' OF PANDEMIC
GRABBERS TAKE
UNGUARDED PLOTS
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The Daily Star

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BANGLADESH
UPDATE



3,057
New cases in 24hrs



2,10,510
Total cases



2,709
Deaths



1,15,399
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



615,045
Deaths



14,925,194
Total cases

Flood to prolong up to mid-Aug

More than a third of the country already affected; this year's flood may turn out to be the longest in 2 decades, experts fear

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The sufferings of more than 25 lakh people in 24 districts are likely to linger as experts predict floods will continue till mid-August.

Experts fear this flood is going to be one of the worst the country experienced in recent memory as it may outlast the record 33-day flood in 1998.

"The 1998 flood lasted 33 days. This flood is likely to continue for more than 40 days," said Prof Saiful Islam of the Institute of Water and Flood Management at Buet.

Flood situation in several northern and north-eastern districts has deteriorated further with flash floods ravaging many areas for the third time this year. Sea storms in the Bay of Bengal made things worse in some flood-hit areas in the southern region yesterday.

Since June 26, floods have claimed 24 lives, damaged standing crops, thousands of houses, roads and embankments in at least 90 upazilas of 24 districts, said officials of the Department of Disaster Management.

- » Floodwater will increase till end of July
- » 24 people died in flood so far
- » 25 lakh people of 5.5 lakh families affected
- » 24 districts flooded; some more are at risk
- » 1,126 flood shelters opened in 18 districts
- » 25,000 people now at flood shelters
- » 593 medical teams formed

"The water level of the rivers in the northern and Sylhet regions is likely to keep rising till the end of this month. As far as we understand, flood water may start receding from the second week of the next month," Md Arifuzzaman, executive

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A young girl enjoying the rain while selling flowers in the capital's Shahbagh area yesterday. With all the gloom brought forth by the Covid-19 pandemic, the little joys of life still remain.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bump up daily test numbers

Experts urge again; positivity rate now 23.7

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the number of tests declined yesterday, the number of confirmed cases rose from the previous day as 3,057 people were found infected with coronavirus and 41 people died of the virus.

On Monday, a total of 2,928 people or 21.91 percent of all the 13,362 tests were found to be positive for Covid-19.

Yesterday, the positivity rate rose to 23.70 percent over the 24 hours till 8:30am after conducting 12,898 tests, according to the health directorate.

Experts said the transmission of Covid-19 is on the rise and stressed on adequate tests daily.

"If we consider positivity rate over the last 10 days, it is clear transmission is on the rise and we should increase testing," Dr Mushtaq Hussain, a consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) told The Daily Star.

Between July 5 and July 15, the day-on-day positivity rate rose from 19.57 to 25.23 percent.

Since then, the rate has not dipped below 21 percent, DGHS data shows.

Forty-one people have died from

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DGHS chief Azad quits amid scams

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid severe criticism and scams related to Covid-19 tests, Prof Abul Kalam Azad has stepped down as the director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

He tendered his resignation letter to the public administration ministry yesterday, Abdul Mannan, secretary of Health Services Division, confirmed to The Daily Star last night.

"The DG was a contractual appointee and he tendered his resignation letter there," he said, declining to say anything further. Shaikh Yusuf Harun, secretary of the public administration ministry, told The Daily Star that he is yet to receive the letter.

"I came to know from the media. I did not get any such copy [of a resignation letter]. If he [the DG] tendered his resignation letter in the later part of the day, I may get it tomorrow [today]," he said.

Prof Azad had been the chief of the DGHS since September 2016.

In his resignation letter, he cited health grounds as he has been suffering from chronic kidney disease for long, said a highly-placed source.

The resignation came amid a rift between the health ministry and the health directorate over signing a deal with Regent Hospital, which has been at the centre of the Covid-19 testing scam.

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

The DGHS was aware that the hospital's licence had expired six years ago.

On July 7, a Rab mobile court raided Regent Hospital's Uttara branch and sealed it off. The court said it found proof that the hospital issued several thousand fake Covid-19 test reports, which prompted the rift.

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Wearing mask now mandatory outdoors

UNB, Dhaka

The government yesterday made it mandatory for people to wear masks whenever they go outside homes to limit the transmission of coronavirus.

A circular was issued by the health ministry in the afternoon.

Bangladesh has been recording a high number of Covid-19 cases in recent weeks, even after the number of tests has gone down.

The country has now more than 200,000 officially confirmed cases and over 2,700 deaths.

Health experts suggest strictly maintaining hygiene rules and wearing masks as effective ways to stop the highly contagious virus from spreading.

The government order came only days before Eid-ul-Azha.

LOAN FROM NRB BANK

No rules meant for Shahed

MAHBUUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

You have probably heard about people getting caught in the web of intricate banking procedures to secure loans. But have you ever heard of bank high-ups coming up with recommendations to sanction loan to a newbie businessman with no account and transaction records with the very bank?

Regent Hospital Chairman Mohammad Shahed made it possible back in 2014 when NRB Bank approved him a loan of over Tk 2 crore, according to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

Without depositing any money, Shahed, on behalf of Regent Hospital, opened a current account with the private bank's SME department on November 17 that year.

Shahed, who was arrested by Rab last week over a Covid-19 test report scam, did not have any prior transaction history with the bank. Nor did NRB check his transaction records with other banks. The bank also did not take enough collateral for the loan, said ACC officials.

Despite all these, a former vice president of the SME department and a former principal officer of the bank recommended sanctioning him the loan on November 16, a day before the account was opened, according to the anti-graft watchdog.

Both the officials are accused in two graft cases filed by ACC last year. The former vice president of NRB Bank is now the head of a department at another private bank, said sources at the ACC.

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THE BUSINESS



Project implementation delays draw PM's ire

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed disappointment over delays in the implementation of development projects, which are often designed without proper planning or feasibility studies. Her latest displeasure aimed at two projects, taken in 2013 and 2017 respectively, that were up for the first revision at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council.

STORY ON B1

Eid-ul-Azha on August 1

UNB, Dhaka

Eid-ul-Azha, the second largest religious festival of the Muslims, will be celebrated in the country on August 1.

The decision came from a meeting of the National Moon Sighting Committee after reviewing information about the sighting of Zilhaj moon.

The meeting was held at the office of Islamic Foundation at Baitul Mukarram at 7:15pm, with Religious Affairs Secretary Nurul Islam in the chair.

The moon of the holy month of Zilhaj was not sighted in the sky of Bangladesh yesterday.

Muslims celebrate the Eid-ul-Azha on the 10th of Zilhaj to commemorate the true spirit of sacrifice made by Prophet Ibrahim (as).

On this day the Prophet had offered to sacrifice his son Ismail, who willingly submitted to the will of his father to please Allah.

But the Almighty in His benign mercy spared Hazrat Ismail and instead sent a ram to be sacrificed.



With their bus broken down on a road submerged in rainwater in Old Dhaka's Doyaganj area, some passengers go to a dry place on a rickshaw van, right. Many roads, lanes and by-lanes of the capital went under water yesterday following a downpour. More photos on page 3.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

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Poor drainage sinks Dhaka

HELEMUL ALAM

Many parts of Dhaka went under knee-to-waist-deep water after monsoon rainfall in the last two days, once again exposing the dilapidated state of the city's drainage system.

Experts told The Daily Star that Dhaka's waterlogging problem could not be solved without an integrated master plan and coordinated work of various authorities concerned.

Apart from Wasa, six other authorities deal with Dhaka's drainage system on a piecemeal basis without much knowledge about who is doing what.

"We will not achieve anything until five government organisations and two private bodies work under an integrated management with an integrated master plan," said Iqbal Habib, joint secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon.

He said canals of Dhaka belong to the deputy commissioner office and Rajuk, but they are maintained by Dhaka Wasa.

On the other hand, two city corporations maintain surface drains while underground drains are maintained by Wasa.

Water Development Board pumps out the rainwater from retention areas to rivers, he said, adding that Bashundhara and Cantonment have their own managements to deal with the issue.

Five things, he said, are very important to solve the problem -- an integrated master plan, a coordinated management involving solid waste management and sewerage management with the plan, a time-based plan involving public representatives so that people can know about every development of the work, and making every organisation responsible for cleaning their water bodies and drains to ensure their maximum retention capacities.