



COVID IN MUMBAI SLUMS Antibody tests reveal 57 percent of residents were infected SEE PAGE 6

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BLAST AT PALLABI POLICE STATION

IS claims credit, police see no link to militants

5 hurt as bomb 'fitted inside weighing machine' explodes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid an existing security alert, a bomb fitted inside a "weighing machine", which police seized, exploded inside Pallabi Police Station yesterday morning, injuring four policemen and a support staff.

Police ruled out the involvement of any militant outfit, but US-based terrorism analyst SITE Intelligence Group in a tweet last night said IS claimed credit for the blast.

SITE co-founder Rita Katz tweeted, "#ISIS claims attack in #Bangladesh... Marks the group's 1st attack in the city since Aug. 2019 & comes amid an attack surge as part of the 4th wave of its 'Battle of Attrition' campaign, in lead up to #EidAlAdha."

Asked about this, Saiful Islam, deputy commissioner of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said the claim was baseless.

"ISIS has made this type of fake claims before. This one is nothing but part of that process. We have so far found criminal intentions behind the incidents and we are analysing the motive. We are investigating the incident to check further," he told The Daily Star.

Another CTTC officer said ISIS simply tried to take the opportunity because the blast was widely covered by the media.

There was a blast in Paltan on Friday, but no one claimed the SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Muslim pilgrims maintain social distancing as they circle the Kaaba at the Grand mosque during the annual hajj pilgrimage amid the Covid-19 pandemic, in the holy city of Makkah, Saudi Arabia, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Downsized hajj begins amid pandemic

AFP, Makkah

Mask-clad Muslims began the hajj yesterday, circling Islam's holiest site along socially distanced paths in the smallest pilgrimage in modern history as the Saudi hosts strive to prevent a coronavirus outbreak.

The hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam and a must for able-bodied Muslims at least once in their lifetime, is usually one of the world's largest religious gatherings.

But this year only up to 10,000 people already residing in the kingdom are participating in the ritual, a tiny fraction of the 2.5 million pilgrims from around the world that attended last year.

Pilgrims walked into Makkah's Grand Mosque to begin the ritual with their first "tawaf", the circumambulation of the Kaaba, a large cubic structure draped in gold-embroidered cloth towards which Muslims around the world pray. SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Summary statistics: BANGLADESH UPDATE, 3,009 New cases in 24hrs, 2,32,194 Total cases, 3,035 Deaths, 1,30,292 Recoveries, GLOBAL UPDATE, 666,410 Deaths, 17,049,753 Total cases

Defrauded in Vietnam

Manpower bureau's role questioned after human trafficking in the name of labour recruitment

PORIMOL PALMA

After arriving in Ho Chi Minh City, they found that the Vietnamese company that sponsored their visas had no jobs for them. After a week, they were asked to work for a furniture factory though they were promised jobs at the seaport. They had no choice and as the days went by, they realised they were defrauded.

This was the story of 27 Bangladeshi youths stranded in Vietnam and experts say what happened to them in the name of labour recruitment was clearly a case of human trafficking.

"We had to work for 12 to 14 hours a day, but at the end of the month we were given less than 150 to 200 US dollars though in pay slip it was 300 dollars," said Shital Chandra Sarker, one of the victims.

The Vietnamese company owned by a Chinese actually worked as a labour supply agent, not an employer, in collaboration with two Bangladeshi brokers -- Mostafa and Jabbar. They ate up the rest of their wages, he said.

The factory provided meals twice a day and often the food items included pork, frogs and other meats that they were not used to. On holidays, they had to manage food on their own.

The Chinese agent made a rule that if anybody works less than ten days consistently, they won't get salaries, added Shital.

"Two had to sleep in a single bed. We had one bathroom for 16. Many of us got sick by not being able to eat properly." SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



HUMAN TRAFFICKING Higher rate of conviction may curb it

Say experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts yesterday said a higher rate of conviction in human trafficking cases could be an effective way to curb the crime in the country.

Speaking at a webinar, they said poverty is one of the root causes of irregular migration and it often leads people to fall victim to human traffickers. They called for government steps to address the problem adequately.

The experts said seven tribunals, which were set up in the country to dispose of human trafficking cases, have to be "properly functional" to reduce the number of pending cases significantly. They also stressed the need for ensuring the protection of the victims and witnesses.

Brac and Winrock International's "Ashshash" project jointly organised the webinar on "Combating Human Trafficking: Scope and Challenges of Promoting Safe Migration and Protecting Trafficking Survivors" ahead of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons today. SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

HOME TRIPS DURING EID Crowds may help spread virus

Experts warn of rise in transmission

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Experts warn of worsening Covid-19 situation as thousands are leaving city areas in crowded vehicles to celebrate Eid in their village homes, ignoring social distancing and sometimes not wearing masks.

When they will return after the festival, the virus transmission rate may spike above 1 on the R-naught scale, warn experts.

R-naught, also called R0, is a representation of the number of new infections estimated to result from a single case. Lower R-naught score means fewer new cases and higher score means the opposite. It gives insightful information that helps policymakers decide when to enforce strict lockdowns and when to lift the restrictions, said experts.

An R value of 1 means the infection rate is stable, while anything above 1 means the disease has become an epidemic, according to health experts.

An R value below one means that each infected person transmits the pathogen to less than one person, thus eventually fizzling out the contagion. Since confirmation of the first Covid-19 case in the country on March 8, the highest R value was registered on April 9 at 2.1, according to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

The average R value went below one for the first time on July 4. On July 9, the value was 0.938. It was around that level till last week. But then the R value started rising and on July 27 it reached 0.951.

Talking about data from the IEDCR, its Principal Scientific Officer ASM Alamgir said, "It seems people have suddenly forgotten health rules and don't care much about the pandemic."

The scientist feels that many people have become nonchalant about maintaining social distancing and using protective gear.

Alamgir also observed that people's movement centring Eid have increased. SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Infection rate still over 20pc

35 more die, 3,009 infected in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirty-five people died of coronavirus infection and 3,009 tested positive for the highly transmissible virus in the 24 hours till 8:30am yesterday.

The death toll from Covid-19 has now reached 3,035, while the total number of confirmed cases rose to 2,32,194.

The overall death rate now stands at 1.31 percent, and the positivity rate is 20.17 percent, Prof Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the Directorate General of Health Services, said during a briefing yesterday.

Some 14,127 samples were tested in 82 labs across the country in the 24-hour period, and the positivity rate was 21.30 percent.

Bangladesh is currently the 16th worst affected country in the world in terms of confirmed cases -- one place above Turkey and one place below Italy, according to worldometers.info.

Meanwhile, 2,878 Covid-19 patients recovered in the same 24 hours.

The total number of recoveries rose to 1,30,292, and the recovery rate was 56.11 percent.

Among yesterday's deceased, 30 were SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



Flood engulfs over a third of Bangladesh

STAR REPORT

Around 37 percent of the country's total area has been flooded, said Prof AKM Saiful Islam, of Buet's Institute of Water and Flood Management, after analysing satellite images.

People of low-lying areas are the worst affected victims of this natural disaster. Some of them have been waterlogged for over a month, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

In 1998, around 68 percent of the country was inundated, 61 percent in 1988, 42 percent in 2007 and 2017, and 38 percent in 2004, Prof Saiful mentioned.

Over 50 lakh people of 150 upazilas in 31 districts have been affected by the flood, said the latest report of National Disaster Response Coordination Centre.

Meanwhile, the flood situation may deteriorate further in the northern region as well as in the low-lying areas around the capital. SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

A woman trying to walk in her flooded front yard holding her two babies in Jhautia area of Munshiganj yesterday. She could save very little of her belongings from being soaked as the Padma swelled and inundated vast areas along its banks. Officials said over 5 million people across the country have been directly affected by the floods.

WALTON Smart Fridge advertisement featuring 'World's Most Smart Featured Refrigerator' and 'Crowds of Millionaire!' with testimonials and product details.