

COLD SUPPLY CHAIN
BANGLADESHI
EXPERTS LINK UP
WITH UK INITIATIVE
SEE PAGE 12

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BANGLADESH
UPDATE



2,202
New cases in 24hrs



3,27,359
Total cases



4,516
Deaths



2,24,573
Recoveries



GLOBAL
UPDATE

894,024
Deaths



27,356,692
Total cases

COVID-19 IN BANGLADESH

Muddled response marks 6 months

A look beyond daily counts may draw a grimmer picture, say experts

MOUJUD AHMED SUJAN

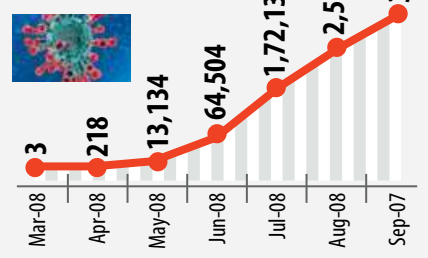
The present Covid-19 situation suggests actions taken by the government made little impact on containing the virus, say public health experts as today marks half a year since the first novel coronavirus cases were reported in the country.

A glimpse at the present daily case counts may give an impression that the situation is under control, but a deeper look, the experts say, would reveal otherwise: a large number of cases remain hidden and those help the virus spread fast.

Bangladesh was the 14th worst affected country in terms of total caseload as of yesterday. With a total of 327,359 confirmed cases, it remained, as of yesterday, between France and the UK, according to worldometer.info.

The country reported the first three Covid-19 cases on March 8. The number of casualties, however, still remains comparatively low at 4,516 with the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) reporting 37 new deaths in 24

RISE IN COVID-19
CASES SINCE
MARCH 8



hours till yesterday morning.

The percentage of daily tests that come out positive (positivity rate) is still high compared to the global trend. The positivity rate was 14.29 percent yesterday, though the World Health Organisation recommends achieving a positivity rate lower than 5 percent for two weeks before lifting Covid-19 driven shutdowns.

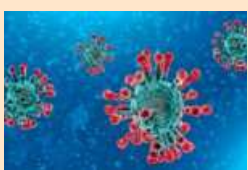
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Vehicles, mainly motorcycles, stop on a zebra crossing on the capital's Gulshan Avenue. Such violation of traffic rules, which is quite common across the city, forces pedestrians to walk on busy streets, putting their lives at risk. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BUSINESS



IS RECOVERY IN SIGHT?

The economy of Bangladesh appears to recover slowly from the crisis created by the Covid-19 pandemic just six months ago, on the back of rebounding exports, record flow of remittances and the uptick in private credit.

OTHER STORIES ON B1

Stimulus loans elude many

Apparel leads export recovery

Govt reducing Covid-19 hospitals

Cites low number of patients

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government has decided to gradually suspend coronavirus treatment in the dedicated Covid-19 public hospitals and facilities though the pandemic is still going strong in terms of infections and deaths.

The death toll from Covid-19 has crossed the 4,500-mark with 37 new deaths reported yesterday. The death rate stood at 1.38 percent, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

And as part of that move, the health ministry on Sunday directed the DGHS to suspend coronavirus treatment at Dhaka's Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College Hospital and resume their normal services there.

The ministry acted on a DGHS proposal, which mentioned very low turnout of Covid-19 patients in those dedicated healthcare facilities. The DGHS added that those facilities could be better used for general patients.

"We have sent the letter to the ministry with opinions to suspend operations of Covid-19 hospitals as there is an acute patient crisis," Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, DG of DGHS, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The letter was sent to the health ministry on August 27 requesting to suspend operations of the 10 dedicated hospitals, one partially allocated and a temporary facility in Bashundhara. Those facilities have more than 3,000 beds, said Prof Khurshid.

He added that due to bed crisis, general patients were suffering.

"For instance, in a 300-bed hospital, there are only 10

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Fire lasted just seconds

Finds bomb disposal unit probe; says trapped gas was ignited by electrical spark

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Cooking gas trapped in the Narayanganj mosque was ignited by a spark at an overloaded circuit-breaker, and the inferno didn't last more than a couple of seconds, explosives experts said yesterday.

The gas accumulated there from a leaky pipe underneath the building, the bomb disposal unit of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime of police said in a report.

There were signs of sparking and the circuit board inside the mosque was burnt, officers said, adding that the incident happened following a power cut.

The officers came up with the findings following a two-day long investigation at the mosque in Narayanganj city's Talla area where a fire left 27 dead and 10 others critically injured.

According to the report, an almost unscathed ceiling fan indicated that the fire lasted only a couple of seconds.

The degree of burns suffered by most of the victims indicate that they were exposed to similar levels of flame, "which only

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Titas finds leaky gas pipes

Suspends officials, points at mosque committee too

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Officials found two holes in an underground gas pipe adjacent to the Narayanganj mosque and expert teams were examining a second pipe last night about six feet under its stairwell.

The pipe with two leaks was on the northern side of the three-storey building, said Md Mofizul Islam, deputy general manager, Narayanganj, at Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited.

Soon after the news, the company suspended eight of its officials and employees over negligence.

The authorities also issued them show-cause notices, but refused to say exactly why the actions were taken.

A fire at the mosque in Narayanganj city's Talla area killed 27 and critically injured 10 others.

The gas pipe under the stairwell was about an inch in diameter, officials digging the site said, adding that there may be more leaks.

The pipe with the holes was three inches in diameter. Mofizul Islam could not say whether the gas pipes were set up illegally. The mosque management committee members said they do not have a gas connection and they never even applied for it.

"There is no need for gas at the mosque," management committee president Abdul Gafur Mia said.

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ZIAUDDIN TARIQ ALI
(1945-2020)

He sang for freedom, and fought bigotry

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Liberation War Museum trustee Ziauddin Tariq Ali, a freedom fighter and social activist, died from Covid-19 yesterday. He was 75.

Tariq breathed his last around 11:00am yesterday, said Sarwar Ali, a fellow trustee of the museum.

He had been admitted to Bangladesh Specialised Hospital in the capital around a week ago.

Tariq was buried at the Martyred Intellectuals Graveyard in Mirpur

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Discard 'martial law' from military terminology

Says PM

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today called for discarding the term "martial law" from military lexicon, saying that it never brought any good to the country or the armed forces.

"We should exclude 'martial law' from military terminology as it never brought any good but bloodbath, for the country and armed forces as well," the PM told the Armed Forces Selection Board Meeting 2020.

Referring to the 19 coups that took place during the military rule of Ziaur Rahman, Sheikh Hasina said a number of officers and soldiers were killed during these coups.

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Workers hired by Titas Gas dig the ground in front of Pashchim Talla Baitus Salam Mosque in Narayanganj yesterday. Later in the day, a pipeline of Titas was found there. A fire at the mosque on Friday night, believed to be caused by gas from a leaking pipeline, killed 27 people and burnt a dozen others.

PHOTO: SANAD SAHA

SIPHONING Tk 3,500CR FROM 4 NBFIs PK Halder wants to return home

Writes to ILFSL that he wishes to settle liabilities if he is given security

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Proshanta Kumar Halder, who fled the country after allegedly siphoning around Tk 3,500 crore from four non-banking financial institutions, now wants to return home and refund the money he embezzled from one of those.

Halder, former managing director of NRB Global Bank and Reliance Finance, recently wrote to International Leasing and Financial Services (ILFSL) -- one of the four NBFIs -- saying he would return home and settle liabilities with the firm if he is provided with proper security.

ILFSL's counsel Mahfuzur Rahman Milon submitted the letter with an application to the High Court yesterday for its directive in this regard.

The HC ordered the firm to inform it when Halder would return to Bangladesh for settling his transactions and liabilities with the firm.

According to Canadian media reports, Halder is now staying in Toronto. He is director of P&L Hal Holding Inc, a Canadian corporation.

The court said it would pass necessary orders for ensuring Halder's security if it is informed of the specific date of his return. Orders will be given in the presence of the attorney general and the lawyers of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Bangladesh Bank and the ILFSL.

He would be in custody of the court upon his return to make sure that he refunds the public money, the HC said.

The three other NBFIs from which Halder allegedly embezzled crores of taka are People's Leasing and Financial Services, FAS Finance and Investment, and Bangladesh

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