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BANGLADESH  
UPDATE

9

infected in 24 hours



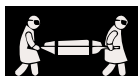
70

Total cases



30

Total recovery



8

Death

GLOBAL  
UPDATE

60,960

Total deaths



235,775

Total recoveries



1,141,190

Total cases

## Tests ramped up, but still not enough

Experts say as Covid-19 cases jump with higher number of daily tests; 2 more deaths

MOUDUDD AHMED SUJAN

With multiple coronavirus testing facilities now detecting more cases, experts feel even more people from every region need to be tested immediately.

In the 24 hours before yesterday morning, the authorities tested 434 people and confirmed nine Covid-19 cases, the highest in a single day in the country. The previous day, the authorities reported five cases after 203 tests.

Experts recommend conducting more tests of symptomatic as well as asymptomatic individuals with and without travel history from every region of the country.

That is how the level of spread could be measured more correctly, they add.

Since January 28, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) reported 70 positive cases after 2,547 tests.

"People are volunteering for the tests, mainly by contacting officials over phone. This is a passive survey, not an active one," Prof Nazrul Islam, virologist and former vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University told The Daily Star.

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>> 2,547 tests in last 2 months; of them, 434 done yesterday  
>> 9 labs in Dhaka, 5 elsewhere; capacity 4,000 tests per day



Hundreds of people, mostly RMG workers, walking to Dhaka in flocks at Patgram of Mymensingh yesterday to resume work. Many RMG factories were operational. Masses were seen, *inset*, on ferries in Mawa, ignoring the government's guideline to maintain safe physical distance, as they travelled to the capital.

PHOTO:  
STAR

## Sudden influx

Many RMG workers head for Dhaka to join work; BGMEA urges factories to stay closed until April 11

STAR REPORT

Many were walking for miles, many travelled in crammed pickup vans and trucks meant for carrying goods. There was no scope for maintaining social distancing, which is crucial to contain the spread of coronavirus.

They were mostly garment workers, desperate to return to the capital and its adjacent areas from different other parts of the country as their employers had been calling upon them to join work.

They returned in their thousands yesterday, suffering a lot on the road as transport services remained suspended amid the nationwide shutdown. They travelled from Manikganj, Barishal, Mymensingh, Gazipur, Sherpur, Jamalpur, Netrakona and other districts, reported The Daily Star correspondents.

Later in the night, Rubana Huq, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), requested all factory owners to keep their units closed until April 11.

She urged them to take the current situation into consideration, shows a WhatsApp text sent to journalists.

The workers had left their workplaces and gone home after the government

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## Every breath was difficult

DMCH nurse opens up after surviving Covid-19

RAFIUL ISLAM

"No one can imagine how difficult just trying to breathe can be ... This experience can't be explained ... It felt like I returned from the jaws of death."

This is how a senior staff nurse at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, who recovered from Covid-19, described her ordeal while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

"Had anyone known the extent of this pain, they would not leave home and would definitely make sure their family is safe from the coronavirus."

Before being diagnosed with Covid-19, the nurse, 32, was taking care of patients, knowing that she might be infected as well.

On March 21, she first showed symptoms of the disease. She was finding it hard to speak on her return home from work that day. "I couldn't sleep that night, I was not being able to breathe properly."

On being informed, the IEDCR took

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## Hunger sets in at slums

Informal economy crumbles due to shutdown; thousands end up with no work, income source, food

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and ZYMA ISLAM

Never in recent history has Dhaka city been this hungry. Even when disaster struck elsewhere in the country -- when crops failed, homes washed away by rivers, villages flooded -- the city always had space to take in more.

It has not always been the kindest; one had to sweat blood for food, but there was work to be found and food to be had. With steady work, one could even rent a shack in the many informal settlements around the city. Not anymore.

As the lockdown is extended until mid-April, the informal economy has come crashing down. While the rich have gone indoors, throngs of hungry poor residents lining the sidewalks for alms has become a common sight in the city.

Even a month ago, Nurjahan Begum and her daughter Morjina could be found indulging in a plate of fuchka on Satmasjid Road after a long day of cleaning homes. They got paid by the hour, and this combined with Nurjahan's husband's earnings as a rickshaw puller and her son's wages as a construction worker, allowed them a home in Rayerbazar -- and some occasional delights like the tangy fuchka.

Last month, she had enough money to take a few days off work, and grab a bus to their village in Kishoreganj for a holiday. She came back with

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## Licences of hospitals, clinics could be revoked

Minister warns those refusing treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said the government will be forced to revoke the licence of private healthcare service providers who refuse to treat patients during the coronavirus crisis.

"The matter is very disappointing. People are now in danger. If they refrain from treating patients in this crisis, the government will be forced to take tougher action, including cancellation of their licence in the future," he said.

The minister made the comments while visiting the ward dedicated for

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## HELPING THE POOR IN SHUTDOWN

## Every MP still not on board

TUHIN SUBHRA ADHIKARY and  
PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

While organisations and individuals keep coming up with support for the poor amid the countrywide shutdown, many lawmakers are yet to be seen on the ground.

The civil administration and police, with the assistance of upazila and union parishad chairmen, have been distributing relief materials among the needy.

The army has also started assisting local administration in divisional cities and district towns in ensuring social distancing and implementing other protective measures.

But there are lawmakers who are still nowhere to be found, though Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked all local representatives, including MPs, to stand by the people in this time of crisis.

Some briefly visited their areas only to take part in "token" relief activities. A few lawmakers are, however, taking some initiatives in their localities.

Hasina, on Tuesday, exchanged views with public representatives and field-

level government officials through videoconferencing from the Gono Bhaban.

Besides, in her 31-point directive issued on Friday, she said, "Local public representatives, political leaders, people of all stages of the society will have to work together. The administration will have to work engaging all the people."

On March 23, the government announced the closure of all public and private offices from March 26 to April 4 -- later extending it till April 11. Operations of all public transport services were also suspended.

### GROUND REPORTS

Only one out of the five lawmakers in Sunamganj district visited their constituencies since the country reported the first three coronavirus cases on March 8, according to a local journalist of a Bangla daily.

Mouazzam Hossain Ratan, the lone MP to visit the district, however, drew criticism on social media as he was wearing PPE while distributing leaflets to create

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## BNP wants Tk 87,000cr coronavirus special fund

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday demanded that a special fund of Tk 87,000 crore should be allocated to tackle the impacts of coronavirus on the country's economy.

The party has proposed allocating Tk 61,000 crore for "short-term sector", Tk 18,000 crore for "medium-term sector" and Tk 8,000 crore for "unforeseen sector", said Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the BNP, said.

Addressing a press conference at the party chairperson's Gulshan office, Fakhrul presented a 27-point-package proposal.

"A special fund of Tk 87,000 with the three percent money of the GDP will have to be declared to implement some short-term and long-term initiatives to protect the economic sector," he said.

He also suggested that the government announced a revised financial package after the shutdown so that the economic activities can

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Underprivileged people maintaining physical distance while gathering on Dhaka's Solmaid High School playground to receive relief goods from members of Bhatara Police Station.

PHOTO:  
DMP

## India braces for an 'onslaught'

Says report as coronavirus cases, deaths begin to surge; infections doubled in south Asia last week

AGENCIES

India yesterday reported its biggest jump in number of new coronavirus cases as top doctors warned of an "onslaught" that could cripple the health system to levels far beyond what Europe and the United States are experiencing.

The warning came as global death toll from the coronavirus pandemic crossed 60,000 since it emerged in China in December.

In South Asia, which so far hasn't faced crisis like that of Europe and America, the number of cases neared 6,000 yesterday, even after the countries tightened restrictions on movement and warned lockdowns could be extended in a bid to rein in the pandemic.

The number of COVID-19 cases have more than doubled in South Asia in the last week. Health experts warn an epidemic in the region, home to a fifth of the world's population, could overwhelm its already weak public health systems.

But Muslim-majority Pakistan and Bangladesh, and India, home to the world's largest Muslim minority, have struggled to convince conservative religious groups to maintain social distancing.

On Friday, Pakistanis at a Karachi mosque clashed with baton-wielding police trying to enforce new curbs on gatherings to prevent Friday prayers and contain coronavirus infections, officials told Reuters.

India has been hardest hit by the disease in South Asia with some 3,072 cases, of which 75 have died, according to NDTV.

The country, which saw its first case on January 30, experienced an unprecedented surge in the number of COVID-19 cases over the last one week. From 900 cases

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