A grim picture keeps unfurling

FROM PAGE 1

As of yesterday, 4,289 people have been tested, shows official data.

The data shows over 88 percent of the tests have been conducted in the nine labs in Dhaka. A total of 679 tests were carried out yesterday. Of them, 582 were done in Dhaka while 97 in the labs elsewhere.

One of the reasons for the low number of tests is the narrow case definitions for Covid-19, the sources said. It means the authorities were focusing only on those who were showing Covid-19 symptoms.

"For now, we're not testing anyone who is not showing the symptoms as instructed by the national technical committee," said Dr Moudud Hossain, an expert assigned to the government's Covid-19 prevention and control activities for Rangpur division.

"But we don't know whether all the people with symptoms are coming for test," he said.

Talking to this newspaper, Prof Nazrul Islam, a noted virologist and a former vice-chancellor of the BSMMU, said, "The infection rate and curve have not gone up as per our predictions. But there is no reason to remain assured as the scattered samples are not being tested notably.

"We will observe the curve this week. If the number of cases deceases, it will be a relief for the nation," he said but pointed out that since the authorities were not testing asymptomatic cases, the current data might turn out to be misleading.

Replying to a query, Prof Abul Kalam Azad, director general of the DGHS, said he disagreed with the claim that the number of tests being carried out outside Dhaka was low.

"Where the tests are being conducted does not matter; the main thing is from where the samples are being collected. Most of the samples have been collected from outside Dhaka," he said.

A number of labs in many places are still not in operation and that's why the samples are being brought to Dhaka, the DG said.

Asked whether the samples represent the whole coronavirus picture, he said, "Of course, they do."

According to DGHS officials, the laboratories are capable of conducting around 5,000 Covid-19 tests every day with the existing manpower.

However, the number of daily tests is yet to touch the 1,000 mark, they said.

The number is inadequate comparted to those in other countries that have succeeded in containing the spread of coronavirus through early detection of cases and ensuring adequate measures.

South Korea could be a case in point. It contained the spread of the highly contagious virus because it went for a massive testing programme. Nearly, 20,000 people were tested every day.

FIVE DEATHS, 41 NEW CASES

Speaking at a press briefing yesterday, IEDCR Director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora said of the five deceased, two died in the capital.

The five included one female. Two of the dead were aged over 60, two over 50 and the other over 40, she said.

The highest number of the new cases -- 20 -- were reported in Dhaka city. With it, the total of number of cases in the capital now stands at 74.

Narayanganj reported the second highest number of the new cases at 15. The total of number of reported cases there is now 38.

Besides, Keraniganj in Dhaka, Cumilla, and Chattogram has one new case each.

Addressing the journalists through videoconferencing at the briefing, the DGHS DG said, "Your [people's] protection is in your hand. Please maintain at least a three-feet distance from each other. Use mask while going out. Wash your hands using soap for at least 20 seconds frequently."

He urged those in quarantine to strictly maintain quarantine rules.

The authorities yesterday did not take any questions from journalists at the briefing at the IEDCR office.

Meanwhile, as there has been a spike in coronavirus cases, locals in different neighbourhoods in the capital imposed restrictions on movement of people and vehicles on their own, as part of efforts to contain the spread.

The Daily Star correspondent found this visiting different areas, including in Lalmatia, West Rajabazar and West Tejturibazar. They closed the gates at the entry to their localities and discouraged outsiders from going in.

They also prevented others from gathering at different places, including near grocery stores.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina exchanging views with public representatives and officials of 15 districts in Chattogram and Sylhet divisions on the coronavirus situation through videoconferencing from the Gono Bhaban yesterday. PHOTO: PID

Blood banks may run dry

FROM PAGE 1

About reserves, he said it has decreased at different hospitals. But he could not give any specific data.

The government on March 23 announced closure of all public and private offices from March 26 to April 4 and extended it till April 14. Besides, people have been advised not to go out unless it was for emergencies or buying essentials.

Last month, the Red Crescent collected 747 bags of blood. It had collected 2,527 bags in the same month last year.

The organisation supplied 1,170 bags last month. The amount was 3,536 bags in March last year.

The Red Crescent usually collects the highest number of blood bags in March when events are organised by organisations to mark the Independence Day and the birthday of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

But all the blood donation events were cancelled this year because of the spread of Covid-19, said Tarek Hussain, director (blood programme) of Red Crescent.

"Our outdoor blood collection has been stopped since March 26 and indoor collection is also decreasing," he told The Daily Star on Sunday. Besides, blood collection usually remains low during Ramadhan, he added.

"As many thalassemia, cancer, kidney and emergency patients depend on our regular blood supply, the shortage may put their lives in danger."

"Managing blood [for patients] would be a big problem if the situation worsens," he said.

They are appealing to the eligible blood donors -- through mobile phone and their website -- to donate blood.

Besides, they have asked thalassemia patients to bring blood donors with them.

Tarek, however, said demand for blood also decreased as most of the hospitals and clinics are now devoid of patients.

Red Crescent Society collected 70,000 bags of blood last year, he said.

Blood donations Badhan, a voluntary donors' organisation based in different educational institutions, received dropped 80 percent after the virus outbreak.

As the government declared all educational institutions closed, their operations in major institutions like Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Rajshahi University remained suspend, Johahid Chakder, general secretary of Badhan, said.

"Some of our units at districts are functioning. Besides, we try to reach donors over phone. Yet, the collection declined to 20 percent," he told this newspaper on Sunday.

Badhan, which has 136 units in 75 educational institutions in 53 districts, collected around 59,000 bags of blood last year, he said.

Moniruzzaman, coordinator of voluntary blood donation programme at Quantum Foundation, said they had collected 5,057 bags of blood in January. But it came down to 4,229 and 4,195 in February and March, he said.

"If the shutdown continues for a long time, it would be difficult for us to collect and distribute blood among the patients in need," he also said.

Last year, they collected 67,446 bags of blood and distributed 1,14,832 bags, some with separated blood content.

"We have a communication cell through which we are communicating with our listed donors to convince them to stand by critical patients who need blood," said Moniruzzaman.

Sub-Inspector Siddiqul Islam, in charge of Police Blood Bank, said they usually collect the most amount of blood in February and March by organising blood donation programmes.

"This year, we could collect only around 800 to 900 bags in the two months; it was 2,000 bags last year," he added.

They collected 12,000 bags of blood last year.

Md Ihsanul Karim Tanjeem, general secretary of Sandhani's Dhaka Medical College Unit, said the collection and distribution of blood have decreased amid the outbreak of coronavirus.

"We used to supply 550 to 600 bags of blood each month from our unit. In February and March, we could supply only 200 to 250 bags due to shortage of blood donors," he said.

"We are finding it hard to find donors now," he said, adding that it took them several hours to find donor for a relative of a minister.

10 more die

FROM PAGE 1

In Kishoreganj, a 30-year old medical representative died with coronavirus-like symptoms in Pakundia upazila of Kishoreganj yesterday noon.

Besides, a 60-year-old rickshaw puller who was suffering from respiratory issues died in Bajitpur upazila of this district this morning.

In Mymensingh, a 40-year-old woman died of cough and respiratory problems early yesterday at Ishwarganj Upazila Health Complex.

Samples were collected from her body and her husband for tests.

In a separate incident, a 42-year-old farmer died of fever, cough and respiratory usses at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital on Monday afternoon. Doctors collected samples from the deceased for tests.

In Rajbari, a 32-year-old man died after suffering from fever, cold and diarrhoea in Pangsha upazila of Rajbari on Monday.

Sample was collected from the his body and sent to IEDCR for tests.

In Chapainawabganj, a 46-year-old man died of fever, cough and breathing issues in Gomostapur upazila on Monday night.

In Khulna, a 55-year-old woman of Rupsha upazila died with Covid-19-like symptoms at Khulna Medical College Hospital (KHMC) early yesterday. Sample was collected from the victim's body for tests.

In Gazipur, a 65-year-old man died of respiratory disease at Kaliganj Upazila Health Complex yesterday morning. His sample was collected for tests.

In Cumilla, a 65-year-old woman, who hailed from Jiyapur village under Burichang upazila and died at a hospital in Dhaka on Sunday night, was infected with coronavirus.

In Sirajganj, wife of a doctor at Ullahpara Upazila Health Complex was sent to institutional quarantine and her sample was collected for tests.

In Jashore, authorities concerned yesterday collected samples of 12 persons for tests from different areas on Monday night.

In Narsingdi, a 34-year-old was tested positive for coronavirus in Palash upazila on Monday night, the first confirmed case in the district.

In Manikganj, three members of Tabligh Jamaat in Singair upazila were tested positive for coronavirus.

In Barisal, four houses of Raghunathpur village under Bakerganj upazila were locked down suspecting that a woman in the area was infected with Coronavirus.

Our Narayanganj, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Khulna, Gazipur, Chapainawabganj, Pabna, Jashore, Brahmanbaria, Manikganj and Barisal correspondents contributed to this report

Incentives for doctors

FROM PAGE 1

infected with coronavirus while discharging their duties.

"If anyone dies, the coverage amount of the health insurance will be five times higher," she added.

The premier said the incentive would be applicable for those who were fighting the Covid-19 since last month, putting their lives at risk.

She said if any public servant got infected with Covid-19 while performing duties, the government would bear all the treatment costs.

The PM criticised a section of doctors for not providing treatment to patients on the pretext of keeping themselves safe from Covid-19.

"This incentive is not for those who fled for their own safety. This has left the patients moving from one hospital to another to get treatment."

Hasina said doctors would have to work first if they wanted to get the incentive.

"Work now, engage yourselves during this hard time. We will keep you under observation for the next three months. If anyone really provides service to the people, we will think about him."

She said there is no justification for engaging anyone who does not have the sense of humanity.

"If that type of hard days come, we will bring doctors and nurses from abroad if necessary. But we can't do anything with this type of weak mentality. This is the reality."

Hasina categorically said that doctors have to provide treatment if any patient comes. "Yes, you can take measures to keep yourselves safe. But why the patients will return? Why the patients will die after moving from one hospital to another for treatment. Why a student of Dhaka University will have to die?" she questioned.

Terming the death very painful and regretful, she said the student didn't get any treatment from any physician.

The PM said she instructed the authorities to collect the names of the doctors who were on duty when the student went for treatment.

"They don't have the capability to provide treatment. I think that they should be fired from their jobs."

She said she knew it very well that there was anxiety around the world over Covid-19.

"All have to remain safe. A doctor has his responsibilities and we have taken appropriate steps for them. We are providing them with all materials and if necessary, we will give more. We are producing safety gears at home and importing from abroad," the PM added.

Hasina, however, lauded the doctors, nurses and health workers of the government hospitals for their outstanding services towards patients.

"I am conveying my sincere gratitude to them. They have come forward and they didn't show any negligence. They worked hard knowing about the risks involved. They provided services to Covid-19 patients putting their lives at risk."

She thanked the field level government officials, employees, law enforcement agencies, army personnel and others for their efforts.

"As a result, so far we are able to keep this under control. This has not spread widely and the health situation is under total control due to everyone's efforts," the premier said.

She asked the officials concerned to prepare a separate list of those section of people who usually do not take any relief or help from the government's safety net programmes.

Hasina said she would not tolerate any irregularities in the distribution of relief materials.

China sees no Covid-19 deaths for first time

FROM PAGE 1

earlier. Total imported infections stand at 983, the commission said.

China faces the "dual risks" of imported infections and domestic cluster outbreaks, a commission spokesman told a briefing yesterday.

The northeast province of Heilongjiang reported 20 new cases, all in Chinese citizens returning from neighbouring Russia. It had reported 20 new infections on Sunday, all also cases imported from Russia.

The Chinese consulate in the Russian city of Vladivostok near the border with China said yesterday it strongly reminded Chinese nationals not to return home through the border port of Suifenhe, which was closed to all arrivals from yesterday.

China has shut its borders to foreigners as the virus spread globally, though most imported cases have involved Chinese nationals returning from overseas.

The number of inbound travellers through airports is fewer than 3,000 a day, down from about 25,000 in late March, before China slashed the number of international flights.

It also started testing all international arrivals for the virus this month.

JAPAN DECLARES EMERGENCY

Announcing the emergency measures, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe urged the Japanese people to draw on the sense of togetherness seen after the country's devastating earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown in 2011.

"We are again facing a great difficulty. However, if we work together once again with hope, we will rise to the challenge and move forward," he said.

"We will beat the virus, we will defeat the virus and we can overcome the ordeal of this state of emergency."

The move allows governors in seven affected regions including Tokyo to ask people to stay indoors and request that businesses close, but there are no enforcement mechanisms and no penalties for those who fail to comply.

In Europe, Spain's daily coronavirus death toll shot up to 743 yesterday after falling for four straight days, lifting the total to 13,798, the health ministry said.

However, it emphasised that the rise was due to weekend deaths being tallied and that the overall "downward trend" is continuing.

Doctors in Lombardy, the Italian region hardest hit by the coronavirus epidemic, have criticised local officials for their handling of the crisis and said the mistakes they made should be a lesson for everyone.

More than 16,500 people have died from the coronavirus in Italy, the biggest death count in the world, with Lombardy accounting for 55% of the tally. The region also accounts for 39% of the country's 132,547 confirmed cases.

The particularly large death toll in Lombardy, the wealthiest region in Italy, has raised eyebrows, with local officials suggesting that both the high urban density and considerable elderly population might have played a part.

Poor people are facing the brunt of global pandemic. In Malaysia, two men who usually earn about 100 ringgit ($23) a day fixing roofs have been jailed for three months after they were caught fishing for food in violation of an official stay-home order, sparking a public outcry.

Convicted killer held, sent to jail

FROM PAGE 1

The CTTC, in its forwarding report placed before the court, said Majed was arrested near Gabtoli Bus Terminal.

In the report, the CTTC mentioned that a team was on duty in Gabtoli area as a part of regular patrol. Around 3:45am, a man was seen passing the Gabtoli Bus Terminal area on a rickshaw. While talking to the officials, he gave confusing answers and finally disclosed his identity, read the report.

In a video message, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said convicted accused Majed, Nur, and Risaldar Moslehuddin and some others were present on Dhanmondi Road-32 on August 15, 1975, when Bangabandhu and most of his family members were assassinated.

"We have information that Abdul Majed was not only involved in the killing of Bangabandhu, but also in the killings of four national leaders inside jail," said the home minister.

After the killing of Bangabandhu, Majed performed his duties at the Bangabhaban and some other places as per the instructions of late Ziaur Rahman, he said.

The minister added that late president Ziaur Rahman's government awarded the killers in many ways.

Majed went into hiding after the Awami League government came to power in 1997, he said.

"We hope we will be able to execute the verdict … I think it is the best gift for the people during Mujib Borsho," said the minister, adding that all kinds of efforts to bring back the other killers would continue.

According to a home ministry press release, Majed's wife is now living in Cantonment area of Dhaka.

Majed directly took part in the killing of Bangabandhu with other accused, and he was on duty at the radio station with another accused Major Shahriar.

Majed then went to Libya via Bangkok with other officers involved in the killing as per the directive of then army chief Ziaur Rahman, read the release.

Majed was appointed at the Bangladesh embassy in Senegal. He retired from the army to become a deputy secretary and get appointed at the BIWTC on March 26, 1980, by the Ziaur Rahman government, according to the release.

Majed later got promoted to secretary and joined as director of youth development at the youth development ministry. He was later transferred to the national savings department as director, the release added.

APPEAL?

Majed can file a petition with the Supreme Court's Appellate Division through the jail authorities, seeking exemption from the murder case.

Abdullah-Al-Mamun, a defence lawyer of Bangabandhu assassination case, said, "If the apex court allows Abdul Majed to move a leave to appeal petition, the process for executing him will be halted. If the Supreme Court dismisses the leave to appeal petition, the authorities can execute him."

He said Majed could move a regular appeal before the SC against the High Court verdict if the apex court granted his leave to appeal petition.

However, Law Minster Anisul Huq said, "After completing the relevant procedures, the court verdict against Abdul Majed will be executed."

In a video message from his house in Gulshan, he said Majed was directly involved in the conspiracy and killing of Bangabandhu and his family members.

"After examining the documents, evidence, and statements from the witnesses, the trial court convicted Abdul Majed and sentenced him to death for the killing. The appellate courts [SC and HC] later upheld the death sentence in the Bangabandhu murder case," he said.

Contacted, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam refused to comment on the legal procedure over executing the SC verdict that upheld the HC judgement confirming the death sentence of 12 killers, including Majed.

On April 30, 2001, the HC confirmed the death sentence of 12 killers -- Syed Farooq-ur Rahman, Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Muhiuddin Ahmed, AKM Mohiuddin, Bazlul Huda, Shariful Haque Dalim, Khandker Abdur Rashid, Rashed Chowdhury, Nur Chowdhury, Abdul Majed, Moslem Uddin and Aziz Pasha and acquitted three others from the charges of the case.

On November 19, 2009, the SC upheld the HC judgement in the case.

The government executed Farooq, Rashid, Muhiuddin Ahmed, AKM Mohiuddin, and Bazlul on January 28, 2010, after finishing all legal procedures as the then president had rejected their clemency petitions.

Of the six other absconding convicts, Aziz Pasha reportedly died in Zimbabwe. Nur Chowdhury is now in Canada, and Rashed Chowdhury is in the US.

Act wisely

FROM PAGE 12

and rumors."

She said that googled and searched additional information on internet could misguide people and unnecessarily worry them, so it should be avoided.

"Internet is a good option to pass the time but we have to be careful at the same time about the danger of the internet."

Keeping a positive attitude and maintaining mental strength is very important as it will help protect the immune system. "Negative thoughts have been shown to depress your immune system and make it weak against viruses."

Crucial month

FROM PAGE 1

Covid-19 spread to 202 countries and territories.

"From the beginning, we tried to stem the outbreak of the disease and protect the people from its impact," she said.

"If we see the trend of its spread in the world, it's like mathematics and if we gather the experience of other countries, the country may face massive blow of it in this April and we're getting this symptoms and reports," she said.

She went on to say: "In this situation, we've to remain more cautious and move in such a way so that the people are less affected by its impact."

Hasina exchanged views with ministers, MPs, deputy commissioners, police superintendents, mayors, chairmen, civil surgeons, imams, doctors, nurses and others.

Cabinet Secretary Khandaker Anwarul Islam, PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus, Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim and PMO Secretary Tofazzel Hossain Mian were present.

Operators incur loss

FROM PAGE 1

"After analysing the losses in the last three months, we have estimated that we, the tour operators of Bangladesh, may incur a loss of about Tk 6000 crore this year – from January to December – if the situation does not improve," TOAB President Md Rafeuzzaman told The Daily Star over phone.

Thanking Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the declaration of her financial package for various service sectors, including tourism, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Toab president requested the government to disburse the loan immediately so that the tour operators can pay salaries and other expenses including office rent.

Earlier on Monday, Toab in a letter to the Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry said around 40 lakh people are currently employed in the sector which includes tour operators, travel agents, hotels, motels, resorts, airlines, transportation, cruising and tour guide businesses.

In the report, Toab also presented some emergency, short and long term recommendations before the government to save the tourism sector.

The recommendations include VAT waiver and making sufficient allocations for the tourism and hospitality industry for the next three fiscal years.

Toab also suggested the government to create a fund of Taka 500 crore for promotion of tourism at home and abroad as a long-term initiative.

On March 13, the World Travel and Tourism Council said that up to 50 million jobs in the global travel and tourism sector are at risk due to the global COVID-19 outbreak.

The Bangladesh government has already formed a 14-member tourism crisis management committee headed by BTB Chief Executive Officer to find incentives, tourism stakeholders need, to tackle the crisis.

To contain the outbreak, both international and local airlines have been suspending almost all flights to and from Bangladesh, including those with India, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman the UK and Turkey.

Replicating travel bans imposed by many countries across the world, since March 16, Bangladesh, too, placed a month-long ban on all travelers from Europe and a number of countries in the Middle East and South Asia.

The government also suspended visa-on-arrival facilities for all nationals entering Bangladesh to stem the virus outbreak.