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Hidden cases now spreading virus

IEDCR says 23pc patients are without any symptoms; experts fear the number is far higher than that

PINAKI ROY and MOUJID AHMED SUJAN

Shafiu Alam, a worker at a garment factory in coronavirus-hit Gazipur, returned to his village home in Pirojpur's Bhandaria upazila on April 15.

Though he didn't have any Covid-19 symptoms, the upazila administration asked him to remain in home quarantine as a precaution and had him tested for the virus on April 22. The test results came positive.

"I still have no symptoms... I don't feel unwell. Upon my return from Gazipur, I have been in isolation in one of the rooms in my house," Shafiu (not his real name) told this newspaper over the phone on Friday.

Including him, six of the seven people who tested positive for the virus in Pirojpur till April 24 had no symptoms, Md Hasnat Yusuf Zaki, civil surgeon in the district, told The Daily Star.

Similarly, four members of a family in Tangail and two relatives of a virus-infected doctor in Brahmanbaria tested positive for the virus, but did not show any symptoms.

Of the 5,416 coronavirus cases detected till yesterday, 1,250 didn't have any symptoms, according to official data.

Experts see it as an indication of a big number of hidden cases who are silently transmitting the deadly virus across the country.

An official of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), shared a similar view.

"The IEDCR is conducting tests very selectively, mostly on those who have symptoms... It doesn't reflect the real picture as we are not carrying out enough tests," the official told The Daily Star yesterday, seeking anonymity.

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A garment worker takes hand sanitiser from the gatekeeper in front of a factory that reopened in the capital's Tejgaon industrial area with part of its workforce yesterday. Employees of the factory formed a queue maintaining safe distance among each other at the entrance.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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Some RMG factories reopen on a limited scale

STAR REPORT

A section of owners yesterday reopened their garment factories with a part of their workforce amid continued protests in different districts demanding arrears.

At least 1,427 out of 7,602 export-oriented factories have reopened, industrial police officials said.

The move comes although there is no sign that the coronavirus outbreak has been contained.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association had earlier issued a timetable for reopening the factories and guidelines on maintaining social distance inside the facilities.

Some 227 factories were open on the outskirts of Dhaka, 438 in Gazipur, 412 in Chattogram, 193 in Narayanganj, 75 in Mymensingh and 82 in

BANGLADESH UPDATE



418 New cases in 24hrs



5,416 Total cases



145 Deaths



122 Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



204,014 Deaths



2,945,893 Total cases

Social protection initiatives scanty in Bangladesh

UN report on Covid-19 response says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is coming up with the fewest social protection initiatives in the Asia Pacific region, finds a United Nations position report prepared by the organisation's regional bureau.

The report published on April 13 assessed measures adopted by governments in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in countries under the jurisdiction of the organisation's Regional Bureau of Asia Pacific (RBAP).

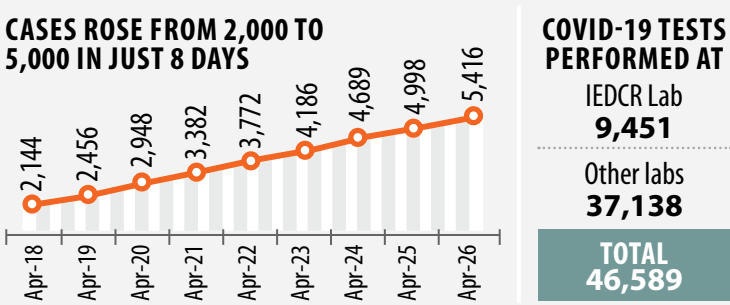
The organisation broke down "social protection" into eight categories: measures to boost affordable healthcare; sickness benefits ensuring income security during sick leave; unemployment protection, preventing job losses and supporting those who lost their jobs; old age, survivor and disability benefits; providing income support (i.e. social assistance, cash transfers and other support); family leave and care policies; modifying the payment of social security contributions and tax payments for enterprises; and an unspecified category called "other measures".

According to the report, Bangladesh is only providing income support, or social assistance.

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Another sad milestone passed

Number of infected crosses 5,000; Five more die



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Coronavirus cases in the country have passed the 5,000 mark, with health officials reporting 418 new cases yesterday.

The total number of detected cases now stands at 5,416 as the death toll reaches 145.

In the 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, five more patients died of the disease, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (admin) of the directorate general of health services (DGHS) said in a bulletin.

All the deceased were from Dhaka district -- four inside the city and the other from Dohar upazila.

Three of them were male and two female.

Three were aged between 51 and 60 while one over 60 and the other was a 10-year-old child who had kidney disease, Nasima said.

According to IEDCR website, Dhaka city has continued to be the worst affected area in the country.

As of yesterday, around 52 percent of all positive cases were from the

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Govt targets 5,000 tests a day from May

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Directorate General of Health Services has started working to scale up its coronavirus testing capacity with a target of testing over 5,000 people daily by the first week of next month.

Abul Kalam Azad, Director General of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), yesterday told The Daily Star that they had a plan to conduct 10,000 tests daily but they were initially eyeing for 5,000.

Currently, the country has a capacity of testing around 3,500 samples a day with the help of 30 PCR machines in 20 labs.

"We are preparing eight more labs for coronavirus tests and the number of tests will increase once it is done," Azad said, adding, "We are now thinking of scaling up the testing facilities at upazila-level."

He also said they were listing labs of different ministries that could be used for coronavirus tests.

As per insiders, if the existing PCR machines operate in two shifts then around 5,500 tests can be performed a day.

Besides, although the number of testing labs increased, but the lack of planning and manpower still remains, experts said.

People who collect samples on the ground are not well trained. Thus, many of the samples are not being collected properly, they added.

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CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

As informal as ignored

Delayed response from ministry, lack of database leave them in trouble amid coronavirus shutdown

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Though the ongoing shutdown has put informal workers in the construction sector in a tight spot as they are largely dependent on daily wages, the ministry concerned has failed to act promptly to address their hardships.

Only on April 12, the 18th day of the shutdown, the Ministry of Labour and Employment formed a crisis management committee to address food security for day labourers. It is now compiling a database of construction workers and rickshaw and van pullers so they receive the government's food and financial support.

Till April 19, the committee prepared a list of 40,000 workers -- 15,000 of whom are from the construction sector, according to the committee's convenor, Mohammad Aminul Haque, director of the Divisional Labour Office.

There is no exact count of construction sector workers or indeed, of informal workers, in the country.

Of these informal workers, around 24.51 lakh work in building construction; 5.75 lakh in specialised construction activities; 14,000 in plumbing, water and sewerage connection; 1.02 lakh in electricity connection and electrical equipment installation; and 7.7 lakh in furniture, according to the Labour Force Survey 2016-17.

Not just the ministry, but labour associations, which are vocal about the rights of day labourers, have reportedly failed to support them in their time of need.

"I don't know how long this shutdown will continue. All my savings

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