

CRIME RISING AMID PANDEMIC
COPS BLAME
JOBLESSNESS,
INCOME DROP
SEE PAGE 12

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10
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REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXX No. 189

SRABAN 13, 1427 BS

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**
2,772
New cases in 24hrs

2,26,225
Total cases

2,965
Deaths

1,25,683
Recoveries

**GLOBAL
UPDATE**

653,864
Deaths

16,515,313
Total cases

Number of tests keeps dropping

Experts say delay in getting results, growing distrust over accuracy are to blame; DGHS cites levying of fees, decreasing infection rate

WASIM BIN HABIB and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The number of daily Covid-19 tests has continued to decline over the past three weeks, although experts have all along been saying that increasing the number is crucial to stem the virus infection.

In terms of total number of coronavirus cases, Bangladesh is now the 16th worst hit country in the world. The average daily test number here, however, has fallen down to only around 13,000.

As many as 12,423 samples were tested in 24 hours till 8:30am yesterday, according to Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data.

The DGHS cited imposition of testing fees at the government-run facilities, decision to not test people who have apparently recovered, decrease in infection rates and impact of floods, among other reasons, for the decline in daily test numbers.

On July 2, the government imposed fees on the testing, and the number of daily tests fell by about 4,000 the following day, shows DGHS data.



Experts, however, think otherwise.

Long delays in getting tested, receiving the test results, and growing public distrust on the accuracy of the results were the reasons why the number has decreased, they said, adding that the distrust stemmed from several recent scams involving fake Covid-19 tests and issuance of forged certificates.

With a continuous spike in fatalities and a total caseload of 2,26,225 as of yesterday, the country saw its highest daily cases between mid and late last month.

Then since the beginning of this month, there has been a downward trend in positive cases, despite the fact that the

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Two children try to ride their bicycles in an alley inundated with rainwater and water from upstream. The people of the neighbourhood of Rajarbagh under Shabujbagh Police Station in the capital have been enduring this stagnant filthy water for the last 10 days.

PHOTO:
ANISUR RAHMAN

Stay ready to help flood victims

PM asks govt officials

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the administration to stay ready to extend all kinds of assistance to the flood-hit people as the flood may prolong this time.

"There is an apprehension that the flood may prolong this time...the prime minister has given a clear instruction to the administration that it will have to provide people with whatever assistance they need," Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said at a press briefing after the cabinet meeting.

The meeting was held virtually, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

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COVID-19 TESTING Lab relying on volunteers

ZYMA ISLAM

Four months into the pandemic, a major coronavirus testing facility is still functioning with volunteer technologists who have begun to go on strike demanding payment.

And the result of running a lab with unpaid volunteers is starting to show.

On Sunday night, former shipping minister Shahjahan Khan's daughter was stopped at Shahjalal International Airport because the report that she tested negative for coronavirus, did not match the immigration's records.

Yesterday, the director of National Institute of Laboratory Medicine and Referral Center (NILMRC), which did the test, said there was a mistake on its part.

Former minister Shahjahan then wrote to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) demanding legal action against whoever gave the wrong report.

Its director Professor Dr Abul Khair Mohammad Shamsuzzaman told reporters that almost all the medical technologists, who are volunteers, had been on strike for three days, demanding pay.

"As you know, 55 of our medical technologists were on hunger strike because right now they are all providing voluntary labour. They want to be recruited. As a result, we were under a lot of pressure. On Saturday around 6:30pm, we emailed test results to the people. At 8:30pm, when we were entering the results to the server, we found a few records did not match. All the tests were rechecked, and a corrected email was sent later that night," said Shamsuzzaman. "It was a data entry mistake."

The lab tested 530 samples that day, according to DGHS data.

The medical technologists had abstained from work on Friday, Saturday

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Tackling outbreak first priority now

Says new DG of DGHS;
28 assistant surgeons transferred

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tackling the Covid-19 epidemic is now the first priority and issues like corruption come after that, the new director general of the health directorate said yesterday.

Some changes in the health sector will be visible within one or one and a half months, Dr Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam said at his first virtual press briefing three days after taking charge of the Directorate General of Health Services.

"My first priority is to tackle the epidemic. We have to stay alive first; then we will concentrate on other issues," he noted.

Meanwhile, the DGHS transferred 28 assistant surgeons, asking them to turn up at their new workplaces in the capital by this noon.

At the virtual meeting, DGHS high-ups said it was a "routine reshuffle" for proper utilisation of manpower.

Replying to a query on coordination between the DGHS and the health ministry, Khurshid said the ministry has formed a steering committee to coordinate all the efforts to tackle the pandemic.

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Shahed bribed Chisty, got loan

Then Farmers Bank approved Tk 2cr for buying MRI machine which Shahed never bought

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Bribe and take a loan -- that is how Mahbubul Haque Chisty operated the now defunct Farmers Bank as its former audit committee chairman.

The borrowers' financial health or ability to repay loans were not factors. Therefore, it was easy for Regent Hospital Chairman Mohammad Shahed, accused in a case filed over issuing fake Covid-19 certificates, to get away with a loan of Tk 2 crore.

Shahed bribed Chisty -- accused in five cases filed last year for illegally amassing Tk 135.45 crore -- Tk 35 lakh to get the loan, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) found in its enquiry.

Yesterday, ACC's Deputy Assistant Director Mohammad Sahajahan Meraz filed a case against Shahed, Managing Director of Regent Hospital Ibrahim Khalil, Chisty and his son Rashedul Haque Chisty.

Rashedul was the managing director of Bakshigan Jute Spinners and founding shareholder of Farmers Bank, which is now known as Padma Bank.

Shahed was recently arrested by Rab and is accused in several forgery cases.

According to ACC's case statement, Shahed opened a current account with Gulshan Corporate Branch of Farmers Bank on January 11, 2015.

On the same day, he applied to the manager of the branch for a Tk 2 crore loan to buy an MRI machine worth around Tk 3.4 crore for his hospital.

In his application, Shahed pledged to keep Tk 1 crore FDR as mortgage

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LOCKED UP IN KL
Rayhan said nothing that breaks law

Says LFL; Bangladeshi officials meet him

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

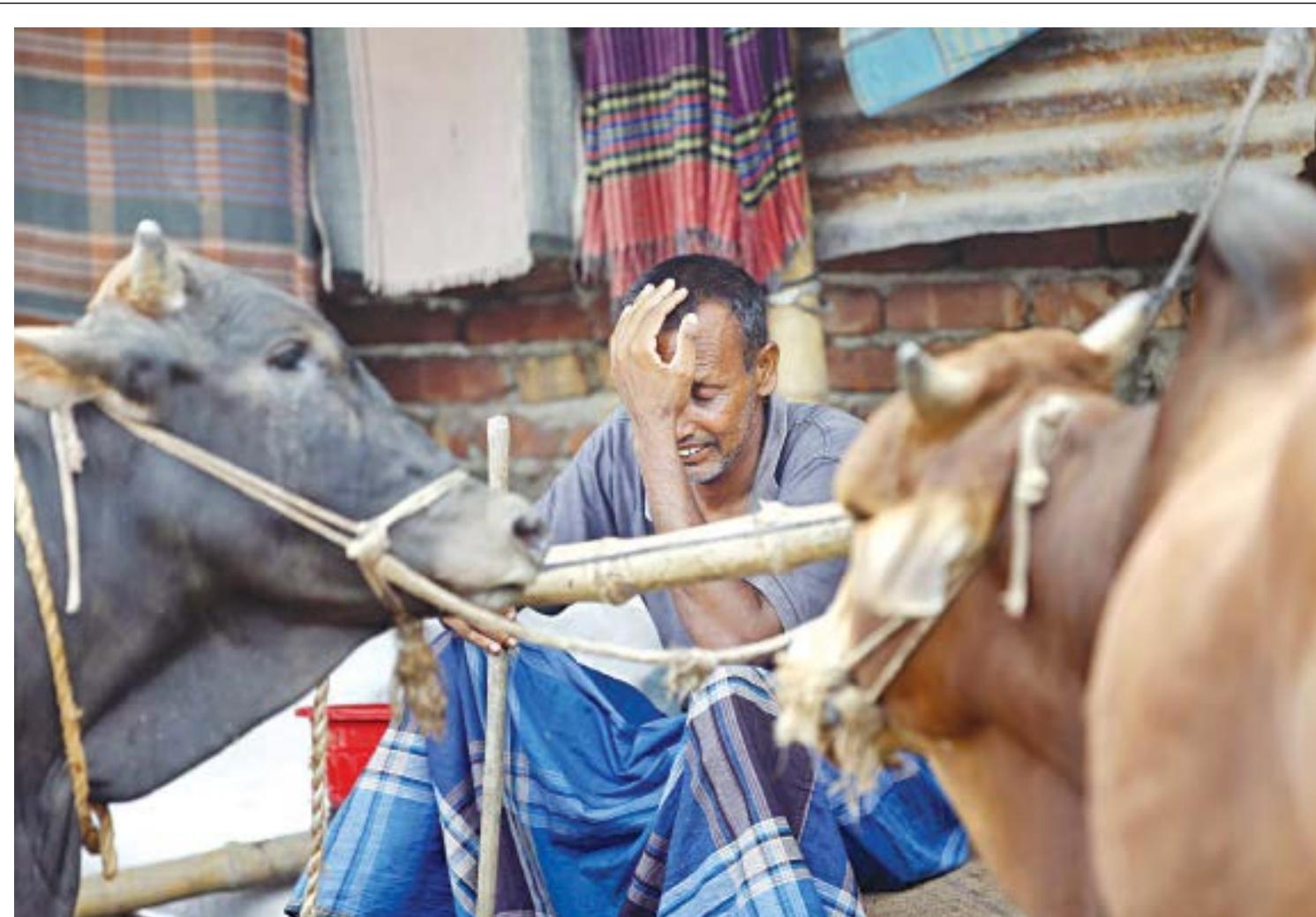
Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia said it would do everything necessary for Rayhan Kabir, who was arrested by Malaysian immigration on Friday for speaking on mistreatment of migrants during the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia.

Bangladesh High Commissioner Shahidul Islam said Rayhan had consular access yesterday at the immigration's deportation centre when two Bangladeshi officials listened to what happened to him since the beginning and what he needs.

"We will do all that's necessary for Rayhan, maintaining diplomatic norms," he told The Daily Star by phone yesterday.

"We have very good relations with Malaysia. I

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A dejected farmer sits near his bulls at a temporary cattle market in the capital's Kamalapur area yesterday. The man brought three of his cattle to the market from Jhenidah a couple of days ago, hoping to get a good profit by selling them ahead of Eid. Hardly any buyers, however, have visited the market since Friday, when it was set up.

PHOTO:
FIROZ AHMED

SELLING BULLS ONLINE A relief for female farmers

NILIMA JAHAN

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the livelihoods of most farmers who have reared cattle for months for the upcoming Eid-ul-Azha and are now facing a scarcity of customers.

However, some female farmers from remote villages in Sundarganj and Sadullapur of Gaibandha and Gabtoli of Bogura have been selling their cattle online.

Despite the fact that women perform an overwhelming majority of the tasks in livestock rearing, it is always a big challenge for them to market their cattle and get a fair price.

According to them, women don't go to cattle markets due to social stigma. They either need to sell their cows to local brokers at lower prices or take help from men in transporting the cattle. Thus, the money often goes to the men and women cannot reap the benefits even after a year of hard work.

ActionAid Bangladesh, an international charity organisation that works with women and girls living in poverty, has linked Daraz Bangladesh, along with "Food for Nation" -- the online market placed by the ICT Division -- and these agro-based rural women entrepreneurs, under its "Making Market Work for Women (MMWW)" project.

According to Md Shawkat Akbar Fakir, project coordinator of MMWW for ActionAid Bangladesh, women entrepreneurs got better prices by selling bulls through Daraz last year. For the second consecutive year, they have targeted selling a higher number of bulls and branded them "Rakhalbari Agro".

Madhu Rani, an entrepreneur from the Chandpur union of Sundarganj upazila of Gaibandha, targeted selling four cows online this year and by July 24, she had sold three cows for Tk 1,86,000 (Tk 48,000, 54,000 and 84,000). Last year, she sold four cows through Daraz.

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