

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1014
New cases in 24hrs



5,56,236
Total cases



8,527
Deaths



5,10,310
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



2,655,809
Deaths



119,913,215
Total cases

Number of critical patients

FROM PAGE 1
A consultant at the Kuwait-Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital, told The Daily Star yesterday. "Too many patients are in critical condition. We have no space left in the ICU, and are turning patients away," she said.

According to health ministry's supply chain management portal, the government health facilities have 228 ventilators, 393 oxygen concentrators, and 425 high-flow nasal cannulas. Fifty of those ventilators are in Dhaka. Public hospitals in Chattogram have 10 ventilators, according to the dashboard. There are no ventilators in 40 districts.

Health officials said they will be able to accommodate the increasing number of Covid-19 patients with the existing ICUs and oxygen support equipment.

"We can treat a rising number of patients on the existing ICU beds. Our oxygen supply is enough. We have already set up central oxygen supply systems in many medical college hospitals and the hospitals with 250 beds. We have increased the number of oxygen cylinders by many folds," Farid Hossain Miah, director (hospitals and clinics) at the DGHS, told The Daily Star yesterday.

At the peak of the pandemic, the government took an initiative to set up central oxygen supply systems at every hospital in the country. Unicef was to support 30 of those.

Farid said that that project will be implemented in a few months.

TRANSMISSION RISING
A total of 6,512 new cases were detected through 1,16,232 tests between March 6 and March 13.

In the week before that, 3,893 out of 1,01,497 people tested positive for coronavirus. The number of tests increased by 14.52 percent.

The percentage of positive cases -- termed as the positivity rate -- indicates a rise in infections. Between January 20 and March 4, the positivity rate stayed below five percent. Yesterday, the positivity rate was 6.26 percent, slightly down from 6.62 percent the previous day. It was 5.82 percent on Thursday.

IEDCR consultant Mushtuq Hussain said, "Transmission is definitely on the rise probably because of multiple reasons. More people are going outside these days. But we cannot dismiss the probability of the spread of a new variant."

Twelve people have died from Covid-19 in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release issued by the DGHS.

The total number of deaths has now reached 8,527 and the death rate stands at 1.53 percent.

At least 1,014 new infections were recorded in the meantime, taking the total number of people infected to 5,56,236.

At least 1,138 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 5,10,310.



Wounds on the bank of the Halda river as sand and earth litters wreaked havoc on the river in Fatikchhari upazila.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Named heritage, yet ravaged

FROM PAGE 1
The local WDB office, however, claimed they were taking sand from outside the river area.

Rampant sand lifting from the riverbed and cutting of the riverbank for earth could alarmingly "change the oxbow [a U-shaped bend] of the river", said a Halda expert.

In a visit to the area in Bhujpur union earlier this month, this correspondent came across dozens of dumper trucks carrying sand and earth from these sites to different areas of Fatikchhari.

One of the drivers, who did not give his name, told The Daily Star he was taking the truck loaded with sand for road construction. The driver refused to give any further details.

A resident of Khoiyachhora village under the union said this has been going on for months.

"The son of Bhujpur Union Parishad Ibrahim Talukdar chairman is behind all this. Ibrahim's son Masud Alam is a Jubo League leader," he said, on condition of anonymity.

Some other locals echoed the same. The Daily Star learnt that Masud was a member of the now suspended convening committee of Bhujpur union Jubo League. His father is the president of the Bhujpur unit of Awami League.

Masud Alam, denied the allegation, saying he was not involved in sand and earth lifting from Halda nor has any business with it.

"I just buy sand from the contractor for our building construction. I have a few brick fields. Sometimes, customers ask me for sand when they come to buy bricks at my field, I then supply them with sand after buying it from the contractor," he said.

His father Ibrahim Talukdar said the allegation against his son is politically motivated. "My son is in no way involved in sand lifting and riverbank cutting," he said.

Former chairman of Bhujpur union Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star this lifting of sand and earth has been going on for months, as the syndicate did not face any obstruction from any authorities.

The unbridled damage of the riverbank and riverbed endangered a nearby rubber dam -- a large crater has been created downstream from the dam, thanks to the sand lifting, he added.

"The sand and earth are supplied for various construction works. This is happening in broad daylight."

Contacted, Professor Dr Manzoarul Kibria, eminent Halda researcher, told The Daily Star that the river has been experiencing such an onslaught at a time when government declared Halda River Bangabandhu Fisheries Heritage.

"The way the riverbank and riverbed are being damaged for sand, it will change the shape of the oxbow of the river, and the current that comes with torrential rain will become

weak. Brood fish production will be hampered due to the weak current during the spawning season," he said.

Zissan Bin Mazed, assistant commissioner (land) of Fatikchhari upazila, told The Daily Star that the Water Development Board was cutting the riverbank for a project in the Bhujpur rubber dam area along the Halda river. It stopped after the administration intervened.

"We also stopped sand lifting and riverbank cutting at other spots including Paindong and Narayanhat. We kept it under surveillance so that no one can damage the river further."

Executive engineer of the WDB in Chattogram Toyon Kumar Tripura, however, claimed they were collecting sand and earth from outside the river area.

"A section of unscrupulous people in the name of building embankments are cutting the riverbank and lifting sand. With the help from a mobile court, we sentenced a man for it to one month in jail," he added.

Deputy Commissioner of Chattogram district administration Mohammad Mominur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday that Halda has always been high on their agenda. "We will take action no matter how powerful the miscreants are."

"As Halda has been declared Bangabandhu Fisheries Heritage, we will remain uncompromised in saving the unique waterbody," he added.

Curse on the Sutang

FROM PAGE 1
Natus Bazar area in Madhabpur, said due to the low price of agricultural land, and easy availability of gas, electricity and a good communications system, large companies have been buying land and setting up factories along the river.

"But nobody cares about how those factories are polluting the river and canals," he added.

A total of 44 factories are operating in Habiganj Sadar, Madhabpur, and Sayestaganj upazilas in the district, according to Department of Environment (DoE) data.

Habiganj Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) Tareq Mohammad Zakaria told this correspondent that the factories in question are not under any EPZ [export processing zone].

"It has been established by people buying land in private," said the ADC.

Director of the Sylhet divisional office of the DoE Amran Hossain told this correspondent that DoE officials are monitoring whether those factories are running their effluent treatment plants (ETP).

"But usually we find their ETPs running," he said.

However, he added, it is possible that untreated industrial waste is being discharged through less visible streams into the canal at night and other times.

Narayan Saha, former head of the Department of Forestry and Environmental Science at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, said, "If the industrialisation around Sutang is not strictly regulated, it will destroy all including wetlands, agriculture, and the rivers."

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) recently served legal notices to 20 different officials of the government -- including the secretaries of the land ministry and the environment, forest and climate change ministry -- urging them to save the environment by putting a stop to industrial pollution of the river in three upazilas of Habiganj.

Bela's Chief Executive Syeda Rizwana Hasan said a full list of all the industrial establishments occupying and polluting the Sutang river has been prepared and the organisation strongly demands that these be evicted.

"Considering the current condition of the river, it is requested to declare the river as an environmentally critical area and take necessary steps to maintain it as an environmentally sensitive area," added the Bela chief.

Dhaka to ink flurry of deals

FROM PAGE 1
National Parade Square ground on March 17, marking Bangabandhu's birth centenary and the Golden Jubilee of Independence.

About health protocols of the programmes, Momen said the events will be arranged maintaining all precautions as local and foreign guests will take part in those.

Among the programmes, theme-based discussions and cultural events will be held, and audio-visual and other presentations will be screened to pay tributes to Bangabandhu every day.

President Abdul Hamid will be present at the programme on March 17, 22 and 26, while Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on March 17, 19, 22, 24 and 26.

Heads of state and governments of different countries will be present as guests of honour at the programmes on March 17, 19, 22, 24 and 26.

Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih will be present at the programme as the guest of honour on March 17, while Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa on March

19, Nepalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari on March 22, Prime Minister of Bhutan Lotay Tshering on March 24 and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 26.

Besides, recorded speeches from heads of state and governments of different countries, chiefs of international organisations and eminent personalities will be screened during the events.

Television channels, online media and social media will broadcast the programmes live every day.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will deliver welcome speeches at the programme on March 17, while Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen on March 18, OIC Secretary General Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimen on March 20, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on March 22, Pope Francis on March 24, South Korean Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun and Japanese friend of Bangladesh Takashi Hayakawa's son Osamu Hayakawa on March 25.

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