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ICU demand keeps rising

Infection rate still over 10pc; WB gives \$500m loan for vaccination

MOUJIB AHMED SUJAN

As coronavirus transmission has been rising from the second week of this month, the demand for ICU beds in the capital's hospitals has also increased.

As of yesterday morning, only 76 ICU beds out of 281 in Covid-19-dedicated hospitals in Dhaka were vacant, according to a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Meanwhile, the World Bank's board of executive directors yesterday approved \$500 million in financing to help Bangladesh vaccinate 54 million people against Covid-19. Bangladesh's ongoing vaccination drive with the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine entered its 40th day yesterday.

Many ICU beds remained vacant during January and February this year as the transmission went down with the daily positivity rate dipping below five percent.

After March 9, however, the positivity rate started rising again with 10.04 percent of samples testing positive in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

"Over the last two months, there was no extensive demand for ICU beds in our Covid-19 unit. But now, we receive many requests every day. Today [Friday], I received at least 10 phone calls for

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50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Sri Lankan counterpart Mahinda Rajapaksa, along with other guests, stand for the national anthem of Bangladesh on the third day of the 10-day celebrations programme, marking the Mujib Borsho and the golden jubilee of independence. The photo was taken at the National Parade Square. PHOTO: PID

"We are pledge-bound to enlighten all with education and ensure food, housing, clothes and healthcare for them." SHEIKH HASINA

Bangladesh is flourishing

Lankan PM Rajapaksa says at Golden Jubilee celebration

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The success of Bangladesh and its people is the best honour to the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Sri Lankan Prime

Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa said. "Bangladesh continues to flourish ... It is an economic powerhouse in South Asia. That's the best honour to the name of Bangabandhu," he said at the twin celebrations of Mujib

Borsho and the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence at the National Parade Ground yesterday.

He joined the event as the guest of honour, after arriving in Dhaka

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MIGRANT WORKERS IN LEBANON

Caught in the crunch

Economic, political fallout and US dollar shortage deal them a heavy blow in a foreign land; over 5,000 applied for repatriation at Bangladesh mission

JAMIL MAHMUD

In the space of two years, Rubel Miah has seen the value of his wages at his job in Beirut plummet to one-fifth of what he could earlier convert to US dollars and send home to his family.

His wife, elderly parents, and siblings back home in Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar depend on his monthly remittance to pay for food and other needs.

But Rubel, a migrant worker in Lebanon since 2015, could remit money home only twice this past year as a crippling liquidity crunch in the crisis-hit country drastically limited access to US dollars, with workers like him suffering the brunt of the backlash.

"I earn around six lakh Lebanese pounds a month, which is supposed to be equivalent to around \$400 as per the regular exchange rate. But that amount has been slashed down to almost nothing," said the 29-year-old cleaner.

The rapidly depreciating Lebanese pound used to be exchangeable for dollars at a fixed rate, but banks have now restricted withdrawals of the US currency and its value has plummeted on the parallel market.

This devaluation means Rubel actually gets only one fifth of his salary. "Two years ago, my monthly income could be converted to around Tk 32,000. But the same earnings now fetches around Tk 6,000. It's hard to live here," said the frustrated youth, who sought the Bangladesh embassy's support to return home.

Like Rubel, around 1.30 lakh Bangladeshi migrant workers in Lebanon have been facing acute financial hardship amid an economic downturn,

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WALTON DAY

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