

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



5,819
New cases in 24hrs



6,84,756
Total cases



9,739
Deaths



5,76,590
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



2,942,290
Deaths



136,280,873
Total cases

Testing should be doubled

Say experts as number of daily Covid deaths breaks record again

MOUDUDD AHMED SUJAN

Health officials reported 78 deaths from Covid-19 yesterday, the highest in a day since the first three cases of coronavirus were detected last year.

Despite this, Bangladesh has so far done 30 tests per 1,000 people, the lowest even among the South Asian countries. The Maldives has done 1,236 tests per 1,000, according to the ourworldindata.org.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) yesterday reported 5,819 confirmed cases, after testing 29,376 samples.

Experts say the number of daily tests should more than double, considering the positivity rate. Otherwise, the “lockdown” will not be of much benefit.

So far, 68,4756 people tested positive for the virus in Bangladesh.

“The number of daily tests should be raised until the positivity rate falls below 7 or 6 percent. The number of tests should be more than doubled if we are to detect and isolate the hidden cases,” Mushtuq Hussain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told The Daily Star.

The positivity rate reported yesterday was 19.81 percent.

This high level of positive rate means that there are many more undetected individuals, who are unknowingly spreading the infection, he added.

Among the other South Asian countries, Bhutan is in the second position with 835 tests per 1,000

people, India third with 184, Sri Lanka fourth with 113, Nepal fifth with 79, and Pakistan sixth with 48 tests.

United Arab Emirates is on top of the list with 4,022 tests followed by Denmark with 3,954 against per 1,000 people. The USA has done 1,163 tests and the UK 1,912 against per 1,000 people, according to the ourworldindata.org.

Bangladesh started witnessing the second spike in daily new cases in the second week of March. The positivity rate rose to 23 percent last week.

As of yesterday, the total reported death toll was 9,739, which is 1.42 percent of all confirmed cases in the country.

Of those reported dead yesterday, 53 were men and 25 women. One of them was dead by the time she was taken to a hospital. The rest died at different hospitals across the country. Forty-seven of them died in Dhaka and 20 in Chattogram divisions.

HOSPITAL SITUATION

The demand for ICU beds in the hospitals treating Covid-19 patients was still on the rise yesterday, the DGHS said.

At noon yesterday, only three out of 132 ICU beds in the 10 public hospitals for Covid-19 in Dhaka city were available. Of the 2,786 general beds at these hospitals, 311 were available.

At the nine private Covid-dedicated hospitals in Dhaka, only seven out of 377 ICU beds were empty. In Chattogram, 25 out of 51 ICU beds were vacant at seven public and private hospitals, according to the DGHS.

3 AL men sued

FROM PAGE 1

on Saturday, accusing five men. But they recorded the case around 2:00pm the next day with three accused,” said Saheda Akter Lipi, sister-in-law of Hasan Ali, whose body was found at AL leader Masud Rana’s house on Saturday.

“Police asked us repeatedly to drop the name of ASI [assistant sub inspector] Mossarof Hossain and Inspector Mojibur Rahman of Gaibandha Police Station,” she told The Daily Star.

Finally, Hasan’s widow Beethi Begum filed the case accusing three men, said Hasan’s brother-in-law AKM Mamunur Rashid Kollol.

Masud Rana, who was the deputy office secretary of Gaibandha AL, is the prime accused while the others accused are Rumen Haque, 38, and Khalilur Rahman Babu, 48. The duo helped Rana abduct Hasan, he added.

The plaintiff mentioned in the statement that the two police officers held a meeting with the victim, his family members, and local AL leader Rana in mid-March.

Police asked the family members to pay the money Hasan owed to Rana. When the family members refused to do that, Rana, aided by police, insisted that Beethi sign a blank cheque and a blank piece of paper to have Hasan released. When Beethi refused to do that, police handed Hasan over to Rana, the statement said.

Hasan was held captive at Rana’s home since then. Since Rana is a powerful man, he physically and mentally tortured Hasan at his house until Saturday, when Hasan’s body was found hanging in a bathroom of Rana’s house.

Contacted, Additional Superintendent of Police Elius Ziku said a probe body had been formed to look into the role of police.

He added that Rana was placed on a four-day remand by a court in the

district. Police are looking for the two other accused.

The three-member probe body is headed by an additional superintendent of police. It has been asked to investigate whether there was any negligence in duty on the part of the police and to submit a report in seven work days.

Superintendent of Police Touhidul Islam told a press conference yesterday.

DEMONSTRATIONS

The victim’s family members, local business owners, and the general public formed a human chain in front of Asaduzzaman Market in the town and demanded an impartial investigation into the death.

“We went to the police to rescue my husband. But the police did not help us. They supported Masud Rana, who killed my husband. I demand punishment for the killer as well as the policemen who helped him,” Beethi said at the human chain.

Sirajul Islam Babu, general secretary of Gaibandha Bar Association, said, “It has been proven that a few police men showed sheer negligence in their duties. They must be tried.”

Leaders of Gaibandha Chambers of Commerce announced that they would hold another human chain today and submit a memorandum to the deputy commissioner and the SP demanding justice.

In another development, Gaibandha AL at a press conference announced that Rana was suspended from his post in the party.

“We came up with the decision following directives from our party high-ups,” Abu Bakkar Siddik, general secretary of the district AL, told reporters at the AL office in the town.

Meanwhile, an autopsy of Hasan’s body was not complete until last evening, said Harun Ur Rashid, resident medical officer at Gaibandha General Hospital.

JMB men lead 2 of 3 JMI

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Daily Star yesterday that “We have got some important information of the outfit’s Indian part activities and the network details from Reza.”

“We are now analysing the details to know the links,” he added.

Salehin went into hiding and took shelter in India after he was snatched from a prison van in February 2014, along with Boma Mizan.

After the two fled to India, the outfit’s activities got speeded up in the country and a new chapter -- Jama’atul Mujahideen India (JMI) -- was declared in 2018, say investigators.

But conflicts took place between Salehin and Mizan over ideology, as Salehin was busy establishing the outfit’s network between Bangladesh and India, while Mizan wants an immediate action.

For this reason, in 2017, Mizan formed a separate faction with Indian national Ezaj, said a high official of CTC unit, quoting Reza as saying.

“Mizan and Ezaj, however, again got separated and formed separate factions as Mizan started suspecting Ezaj to be an Indian intelligence agent,” said the official, requesting anonymity.

On August 6, 2018, India’s Intelligence Bureau and elite anti-terror probe body, National Investigation Agency, arrested Mizan from Bengaluru.

The CTC official in Bangladesh said they believed Ezaj was also arrested by Indian law enforcers, but did not get any confirmation.

“We are now trying to get the information who is leading the factions

of Ezaj and Mizan in their absence,” the official told this newspaper.

Of the three factions, Salehin’s group is the strongest in India and it has supporters in almost majority states of the country, the official said, quoting Reza as saying.

JMB leaders Soleman, Firoz, Tareq and Jamai were mainly working for the Salehin’s faction in India and spreading the network, said investigators.

However, Soleman and Jamai are believed to be in Indian jail, following their arrest by Indian law enforcers, while there has been no trace of Firoz and Tareq for a long time, they said based on the outfit’s international communication details.

Reza told the investigators that Salehin has been staying isolated for this reason for a long time and he has no connection with other leaders of the outfit in India now.

“We have learnt that Salehin did not take any financial support from Bangladesh to operate the outfit’s activities in India. We are now trying to find out from where and how money are going to JMI,” said another CTC official.

Salehin treated Bangladesh as an “Ansar Ground” for the outfit members, as they can easily move in the country and provide training or arrange shelter for the supporters in the country if needed.

Rahmatullah, also the additional deputy commissioner of CTC unit, said they are now trying to get details of JMB’s network between Bangladesh and India.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Young boys offloading shipments of watermelon from a boat in Diyabari Launch Terminal in the capital’s Mirpur yesterday. In normal times, these boys enjoy their days roaming around, but the economic fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic has meant taking up odd jobs to help their families make ends meet.

Govt outlines fresh curbs

FROM PAGE 1

Upon her approval, the Division would issue a gazette notification in this regard today, they said.

Chaired by Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam, yesterday’s meeting was attended by the secretaries of the ministries concerned.

Though the fresh restrictions will be imposed for a week, the authorities are thinking of keeping those in force till April 30, the sources said.

The country is going to be put under strict restrictions amid a worsening Covid situation as the ongoing restrictions have apparently proved less effective in containing the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday extended the ongoing restrictions on long-route transport services -- bus, train, launch and regular flights -- till 6:00am on April 14.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) has suspended around 500 international flights to and from Dhaka for a week from April 14.

Yesterday, people were seen leaving the capital in rickshaw vans, auto-rickshaws and pick-ups, assuming that the government would extend the ongoing restrictions.

Shopping malls and the stores selling essential goods saw a huge rush of shoppers trying to collect the necessary items.

All these developments came at a time when the country witnessed the highest number of Covid deaths in a day.

Seventy-eight people died from the virus in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the total number to 9,739. Besides, 5,819 new infections were recorded during the period, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

Earlier on April 4, the Cabinet Division issued an 11-point directive with a set of restrictions to be effective from 6:00am on April 5 to 12:00am on April 11 to contain the spread of Covid. It said violators of the directives would face punishment.

Various offices, mills and factories were exempt from the restrictions and the government allowed resumption of bus services in all 11 cities from April 7.

On April 8, the government announced that shops and malls could be kept open for eight hours from April 9 to April 13 despite concerns from health experts.

People in large numbers were

seen coming out on the streets to buy commodities from shops or to go to offices and businesses. People began hanging out at tea-stalls in their neighbourhood. Very few steps by the authorities were noticed in enforcing the restrictions.

Experts doubted whether the half-hearted enforcement of restrictions would be effective at all.

On Friday, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader and State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain said the country would be under a strict “lockdown” for a week from April 14.

SUSPENSION OF INT’L FLIGHTS

CAAB has suspended international flights for a week from April 14 as it will be very difficult for passengers to reach Dhaka Airport during the strict restrictions all over the country.

“It would not be possible for air passengers to reach the airport to catch flights,” CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

He, however, said there would be no restrictions on chartered flights, cargo flights, air ambulance and special flights.

Khaleda tests Covid positive

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daughter-in-law of the BNP chief, who has been staying in London with her husband Tarique Rahman since 2008, is arranging all possible medical facilities required for Khaleda.

“If needed, she [Khaleda] would be shifted to hospital,” said the relative.

Fakhrul in the briefing said Khaleda urged the country’s people to pray for her speedy recovery. “I, especially urge our party’s leaders and activists at every level to seek divine blessings for our leader’s quick recovery.”

Asked whether Khaleda’s domestic help, Fatema, and others who stay in her Gulshan residence, underwent the Covid-19 test, he said he has no idea about it.

“I only got information about our leader.”

Earlier in the day, the health ministry’s senior information officer Maidul Islam Prodhan said the BNP chief underwent the test on Saturday evening and the results came positive.

Khaleda’s personal physician Mohammad Mamun told The Daily Star that around five-six days ago, a staffer at her house started feeling feverish. Three days ago, he tested positive for Covid-19.

Later, all six staffers living with there at that time also tested positive.

Two persons who stay with the BNP chief were also tested positive for Covid-19.

He said a cabin has already been booked for Khaleda at a private hospital. Moreover, all the arrangements, including oxygen, have been ensured at her home.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, the government freed Khaleda Zia from jail for six months through an executive order suspending her sentences on March 25 last year.

She was released from the prison cell at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) the same day and, since then, has been staying at her Gulshan residence.

On August 27 last year, the government extended her release for six more months and it was extended again for the same amount of time on March 15.

On February 8, 2018, Khaleda was sent to the Old Dhaka Central Jail after a lower court sentenced her to five years’ imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. The High Court later doubled her jail term.

Khaleda was found guilty in another corruption case the same year. Her party claims both the cases are politically motivated.

Provide food, cash aid to ultra poor

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Sobhan, CPD Distinguished Fellow Mustafizur Rahman, former Bangladesh Bank governor Dr Atiur Rahman and former finance minister M Syeduzzaman were among 30 economists who took part in the meeting.

Discussants at the meeting informed The Daily Star that the economists suggested the government for more allocation in health sector specially in the tertiary and mid-level health in the upcoming budget.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Dr Atiur Rahman said he told the meeting that steps should be taken to provide money to the poor through mobile financial services with the help of local representatives.

If not, the poor people would not heed the lockdown, he said at the meeting.

“Those who are facing food crisis can call the hotline and the government will get the food to them,” Dr Rahman said at the meeting.

Bangladesh Bank can take steps in this regard the way it earlier provided salary to garment workers during the first phase of lockdown last year, he said.

“This year’s budget should be aimed at saving people’s lives. Let’s save people first so that they do not die from hunger,” said Dr Rahman.

Terming the average five percent

annual increase in the budget for the health sector as the “business as usual” format, Dr Rahman said such incremental increase in expenditure for health will not do; instead, the sector requires a major jump this time.

Earlier, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said intensive care units (ICUs) would be set up in every district but it could not be implemented, he informed.

Eminent economist Dr Binayak Sen, research director at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), supported Dr Rahman’s proposal of taking steps to send money digitally to the ultra-poor suffering during the lockdown.

He said it would be enough if there is six percent GDP growth.

Dr Sen said Instead of putting greater focus on growth, steps should be taken so that more people can be reached digitally.

Finance Minister Kamal at a press briefing following the meeting said the upcoming budget would not be formulated as usual, but it would be made considering the exceptional time of pandemic.

“We need to formulate the budget keeping the current problem which is prevailing globally,” said the minister. “We usually do not face such adversity.”

All sectors related to life and livelihood would get priority in the budget, he said, adding that they

would focus on rural infrastructure and have plans for more allocation for agriculture and health.

“On one side we have to spend more in the health sector and to expand resources, [but] we also need to ensure quality service out of that resource for the people,” the minister said.

During the initial outbreak of coronavirus in March last year, poor people were the worst sufferers during the 66-day countrywide shutdown.

The government is again going for a complete lockdown for seven days from April 14.

Last year, Tk 1,258 crore was allocated under a stimulus package targeting providing the poor Tk 2,500 each.

Although the government had initially planned to provide the cash incentives to 50 lakh families under this package, only 35 lakh families received the incentives. And the initiative had to be stopped midway following allegations of anomalies over the list of beneficiaries.

An OMS rice programme was also undertaken last year to allow 50 lakh families to buy rice at Tk 10 per kg but that programme was also abandoned.

A survey carried out by South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM) in November and December last year found that 42 percent of 5,577 households went below the poverty line due to the pandemic.

BSF shoots teen in Kurigram

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Indian Border Security Force shot and injured a citizen of the country when he was entering Bangladesh through Kurigram’s Fulbari border on Saturday night.

Nageshwari police rescued and admitted the youth to Kurigram General Hospital with bullet wounds, said Lt Col Touhidul Alam, commanding officer of BGB-15 Battalion in Lalmonirhat.

The victim, Milon Miah, 18, of Shahidalar Kuthi village in India’s Cooch Behar, was illegally crossing the border to visit his maternal grandfather’s house in Nageshwari upazila, police said.

Talking to reporters at the hospital, Milon said after being shot, he took treatment at Nageshwari Upazila Health Complex and went to his grandfather’s house.

When police came to know that, he was rushed to Kurigram General Hospital around 3:30am.

His condition is now stable, said Pulol Kumar Sarkar, resident medical officer of the hospital.

Bangladesh Border Guard will take further decision on whether any legal action will be taken against the youth.

“We are looking into it. We will convey our decision through a press release later,” said Lt Col Touhidul Alam.

Egypt train crash driver was ‘not at the controls’: prosecutor

AFP, Cairo

Neither the driver nor the assistant of an Egyptian train that crashed at speed into another last month were at the controls during the deadly accident, the prosecution service said yesterday.

The prosecutor also alleged that the assistant of the stationary train and a track signalman were under the influence of the powerful painkiller tramadol, while the former had also used cannabis.

At least 20 people died and 199 were injured in the March 26 crash near Sohag in southern Egypt, according to the authorities’ latest count.

According to an investigative report cited by the prosecutor yesterday, the driver and his assistant “were not in the driver’s cabin” at the time of the crash, “contrary to their claims”.

Video images caught on a surveillance camera show the moving train hitting a stationary train at speed, sending one carriage high into the air, in an immense cloud of dust.

Egypt has suffered several deadly train accidents in recent years.

Egypt’s Transport Minister Kamel el-Wazir -- a former general named to the post after a deadly 2019 collision -- had already blamed last month’s crash on “human” error.

He has pledged to put in place an automated network by 2024.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has vowed to hold to account those responsible for the crash.

At least eight people, including the driver and his assistant, were arrested shortly after the crash that happened in the village of Samaa Gharb, 460 kilometres (285 miles) south of Cairo.

Blinken warns of China’s ‘increasingly aggressive actions’ against Taiwan

REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday the United States is concerned about China’s aggressive actions against Taiwan and warned it would be a “serious mistake” for anyone to try to change the status quo in the Western Pacific by force.

“What we’ve seen, and what is of real concern to us, is increasingly aggressive actions by the government in Beijing directed at Taiwan, raising tensions in the Straits,” Blinken said in an interview with NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

Beijing on Thursday blamed the United States for tensions after a U.S. warship sailed close to Taiwan.

The United States has a longstanding commitment under the Taiwan Relations Act to ensure that Taiwan has the ability to defend itself and to sustain peace and security in the Western Pacific, Blinken said.

Asked if the United States would respond militarily to a Chinese action in Taiwan, Blinken declined to comment on a hypothetical.

“All I can tell you is we have a serious commitment to Taiwan being able to defend itself. We have a serious commitment to peace and security in the Western Pacific.”

“We stand behind those commitments. And in that context, it would be a serious mistake for anyone to try to change that status quo by force.”

Taiwan has complained over the last few months of repeated missions by China’s air force near the island, which China claims as its own.