

BANGLADESH UPDATE



4,417
New cases in 24hrs



7,11,779
Total cases



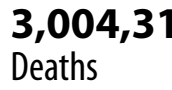
10,182
Deaths



6,02,908
Recoveries



3,004,310
Deaths



140,075,496
Total cases

Expired medical testing kits seized from 3 firms

Covid testing kits among those; nine held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A medical product supply company in the capital has been importing expired testing kits and supplying those to government and private hospitals tempering the expiry dates.

The testing kits were used for detecting Covid-19, cancer, diabetes, HIV, and jaundice.

Biolab International, a medical product supplying company, and two of its associate organisations -- Exon Technologies and Services Ltd, and Hi-Tech HealthCare Ltd -- were involved in the illegal activities and earned a huge sum of money allegedly joining hands with a section of government and private hospital staffers.

Rapid Action Battalion-2 got the sensational information after it raided three companies and arrested nine top executives and staffers of the firms.

A Rab-2 team, led by an executive magistrate, raided the warehouses of the companies from Thursday afternoon till yesterday.

Representatives from the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) assisted the drive, said Rab officials.

During the raid, the Rab team found staffers of the companies attaching expiry date tags using a special printing machine on different test kits, they added.

Members of Rab-2 also seized a good amount of date expired kits and reagents from the warehouses.

The arrestees include the proprietor of Biolab International Mohammad Shamim Mollah, 40, Managing Director of Exon Technologies & Services Ltd Mahmudul Hasan, 40, and Managing Director of Hi-Tech HealthCare Ltd SM Mostafa Kamal, 48.

During primary investigation and interrogation of the arrestees, Rab came to know that the accused in connivance with each other had collected medical test kits and reagents, which already expired or would expire soon, with minimal costs from local and foreign importers, said Rab officials.

They then temper the expiry date tags, attaching a fake expiry date with a special printing machine, and supply

the test kits and reagents to different pathological labs, the officials added.

DGDA representatives, who accompanied Rab officials during the raids, said they did not give permission to import such kits and reagents from those countries. The arrestees also admitted that they did not take permission, said Rab-2 Commanding Officer Lt Col Imran Ullah Sarkar.

"They import testing kits and reagents from little-known companies in China, Belgium, and Germany and supply those with a tempered expiry date to many known pathological laboratories," Rab-2 Assistant Director (media) Abdul Al Mamun told The Daily Star.

He said the companies could not show legal documents required to import and stock the pathological test kits and reagents.

Rab officials also said the top executives admitted that they in connivance with each other imported the kits and reagents for Covid-19 and diseases like jaundice, diabetes, pneumonia, and cancer from little-known companies.

"Even pathological test kits and reagents to test AIDS were also found in the warehouses and those were found to be expired," said the Rab officer.

The other arrestees are the manager of Biolab-International Shahidul Alam, 42, its engineer Abdullah Al Baki Sabir, 24, and staffers Ziaur Rahman, 35, Mohammad Sumon, 35, Zahidul Amin Pulak, 27, and Sohel Rana, 28.

The Rab-2 chief said during primary interrogation the top executives of the companies admitted that they have been doing illegal business since 2010.

The official said they were collecting information about the hospitals, which used to collect kits from the companies and trying to identify the hospital staffers' links with the syndicate.

Meanwhile, a case was filed with Mohamadpur Police Station around 11:30pm yesterday against the nine arrestees under the Special Powers Act, said Rab Director (legal and media wing) Commander Khandaker Al Moïn. The seized items include 35 types of test kits and reagents.



With his hands tied with a rope held by a BGB man, injured reporter Jahangir Alam Shahin is sitting on a chair at Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station yesterday. Shahin alleges that he was tortured by BGB men before he was handed to police. PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Journalist assaulted by BGB members

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Anwar Hossain, commander at BGB Kulaghat Special Camp, said a BGB patrol team caught Shahin with a bottle of Phensidyl and he got injured trying to flee the scene, adding that the BGB men had not beaten him up.

Shahin, also a teacher of Mahishkhocha School and College, said he and Sohag were traveling on a motorcycle when the BGB men stopped them near Kulaghat Bailey Bridge.

He told The Daily Star at the hospital that he was talking to the BGB men about drug smuggling in the area when Camp Commander Anwar assaulted him and Sohag.

The BGB men then took both of them to the camp and released Sohag after beating him up.

Shahin said, "Three or four BGB members, including Anwar Hossain, tortured me mercilessly. They hit me with sticks. They kicked me with their boots. I have apologised to them, but they kept swearing at me and torturing

me."

Shahin said he was then taken to Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station with his hands and waist tied with a rope.

He was handed over to the police with a bottle of phensidyl and a case was filed against him around daybreak yesterday.

Police sent him to the hospital later.

Shahin's companion Sohag told reporters that he was also beaten up at the BGB camp. He added that Shahin took him along because it was late at night.

Shaha Alam, officer-in-charge of Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station, said the BGB team handed Shahin's motorcycle to the police station when they filed the case against him.

The OC added that a court granted Shahin bail in a virtual hearing.

Medical Officer Jewel Rana of Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital told The Daily Star that journalist Shahin suffered injuries to his eye, face, nose, neck and waist.

Surge in deaths rings alarm

FROM PAGE 1

the hospitals that have been struggling to tackle an ever-increasing number of patients for the past several weeks, they added.

Many people seem to be considering their mild discomfort not related to a possible Covid-19 infection, experts said.

By the time the patients respond to their illness and turn up at hospitals, their lung infections turn severe, ultimately resulting in deaths of many of them, particularly the elderly ones, before doctors get a chance to treat them properly, they said.

"Denial of Covid-19 is one of the main reasons for the high number of deaths. People cared little about the virus and the fear of the virus had almost vanished," ASM Alamgir, principal scientific officer at the IEDCR, told The Daily Star.

He also said a lack of knowledge of comorbidity and delay in seeking medical assistance or treatment were turning the situation worse and complex.

Eminent virologist Prof Dr Nazrul Islam, however, said the rising number of deaths indicated inadequacies in the treatment facilities and patient management system.

The government might have arranged healthcare facilities in the capital, but the picture in many districts is dismal, he said.

"There are no proper treatment facilities in 36 districts. Not all the patients are serious, but those who are seriously infected need ventilation support. Many districts have no such system," said Prof Nazrul, also a member of the national technical

advisory committee on Covid-19.

"People are dying because of the lack of treatment," he said.

The record-setting surge of Covid-19 in Bangladesh is showing no signs of letting up as almost every day it is touching new heights of daily infections and death, despite the seven-day "strict lockdown".

Yesterday, 101 people, who had contracted the virus, were reported dead -- the first time that the reported daily death toll crossed the 100-mark in Bangladesh. Since the first fatality from the virus was announced on March 18 last year, the health directorate has so far reported 10,182 deaths in 395 days, averaging 25 deaths per day.

In the last 15 days, the health directorate recorded over 1,000 Covid-19 deaths. Previously, the lowest number of days taken for registering a thousand deaths were 23 when the country reached the 3,000-mark.

The worst part of the second wave of Covid-19 is that more patients with severe infections are coming to the hospitals and all of them need oxygen supply. Patients with mild and medium infections were also rushing to the hospitals, making it difficult for the authorities to provide treatment to all.

Muhammad Asaduzzaman, head of the department of critical care at Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Hospital, painted a grim picture of the state of ICUs amid the increase in hospitalisation.

"Our ICU beds are occupied all the time and patients have to keep waiting for ICUs. Only after a patient dies does a bed fall vacant, and the new patient gets the chance. But in the meantime, the condition of the critical patients turns

even more critical," he said.

He said if those patients could be brought to ICU earlier, the situation would have been better.

"People are reporting about their condition late and when they come to the emergency unit for treatment, their lungs are highly infected. So we have basically nothing to do. In Covid-19, the treatment is basically providing patients with oxygen," said Asaduzzaman, also an assistant professor.

"People need to be alert, not panicked. But people are panicked but not alert."

Prof Md Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology at BSMMU, said, "When infection rate is high, hospital admission goes up too. So, patients have to keep waiting for admission. That ultimately leads to delay in or inaccessibility to treatment, leading to the higher mortality and morbidity, some of which are preventable if treated on time."

He added, "Usually, the anticipated number of deaths may be projected by multiplying the weekly average of infection one week back with 1.4, which is the average fatality rate here in Bangladesh. So the more infection, the more death."

He said countries go for lockdown to give the healthcare workers and the facilities some breathing space to continue their fight against the disease with the available resources.

About the lockdown in Bangladesh, Prof Nazrul said it would reduce the infection rate, but not the number of deaths.

"If we can provide treatment to all the serious patients, only then the number of deaths will come down."

Adieu, legend of silver screen

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The news was confirmed by Zayed Khan, General Secretary of Bangladesh Cholochitro Shilpi Samity.

The National Award-winning actor had recently tested positive for Covid-19. Initially, she was admitted to the capital's Kurmitola General Hospital.

Later, she was shifted to the ICU in Sheikh Russel National Gastroenterology Institute & Hospital, as her condition deteriorated.

Kabori is survived by her five sons.

Before the nation's independence, when Urdu films had a hold on the audience, she entered the fray at the age of 13 in Subhash Dutta directorial "Sutorang", and soon, even before independence, she had become the most popular actor in Bangla cinema.

It was not that she confined herself to the four walls of the silver screen. She took part in the Liberation War, put on the director's hat, wrote songs for films and also became a member of parliament.

As a writer, she has penned her autobiography titled "Sritituku Thak" in 2017. It was a fulfilling life by any standards, yet her passing will leave holes in the hearts of so many.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed deep grief and sorrow over Kabori's death. The prime minister prayed for her departed soul and conveyed deepest condolences to the bereaved family members.

Born in Chattogram, Kabori started acting professionally at the age of thirteen, when she starred in

"Sutorang".

She acted in numerous films throughout the 70's and 80's, notably "Sujon Sokhi" and "Sareng Bou" with Farooque. In the 1970s, the duo of Razzak and Kabori became a household name.

She also performed with Bulbul Ahmed in "Devdas", which brought her critical acclaim. "Titash Ekti Nadir Naam", directed by Indian filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak, was also praised, as was her role in Urdu film "Bahana", directed by Zahir Raihan.

Her other notable films are "Shat Bhai Champa", "Arun Varun Kiran Mala" and "Lalon Fokir", among countless others.

Throughout her illustrious career, Kabori shared the screen with actors like Razzak, Alamgir, Sohel Rana, Ujjal, Wasim, Khan Ataur Rahman, Golam Mustafa, Anwar Hossain and ATM Shamsuzzaman.

She also actively participated in the Liberation War, donating blood to help freedom fighters.

Her stance, however, put her in danger, for which she had to later flee the country.

However, she met many artists, teachers and journalists throughout her journey. She also met many prominent writers and directors after she had fled to India, and even worked on a film, "Joy Bangladeshi", in Mumbai.

Kabori joined Awami League and became a member of parliament from a constituency of Narayanganj in 2008. She was also involved with several socio-cultural organisations.

BJP resolute in its bid to defeat TMC

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of 45 seats, TMC won 32, National Congress and the Left combined won 10 while the BJP scored a duck. The three remaining seats were won by Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, a political party which campaigns for a separate state -- Gorkhaland.

TMC got 44.6 percent votes in the 2016 polls, while BJP won 9.87 percent and Congress and the Left combined secured 37.25 percent (9.18 + 28.07).

But the picture went north in the last Lok Sabha (national election) polls in 2019. In the constituencies that consisted of these 45 seats, TMC got 41.36 percent votes while BJP secured 44.75 percent, more than a four-fold gain within three years.

Considering the voting ratio of the last Lok Sabha election, WB ruler TMC is leading in 23 of 45 seats, while the BJP is leading in the remaining 22 assembly seats.

According to political analysts, TMC will have to recover its lost foothold in this phase for Mamata Banerjee to win a third straight term.

In the fifth phase, a total of 1.13 crore voters will determine the fate

of 342 candidates. Considering the fourth phase's incidents, the election commission has decided to deploy 853 companies of central forces to guard 15,789 polling stations. In the last four phases, voting was held for 135 seats.

The incidents in the fourth phase last Saturday and the raging second wave of Covid-19 infections forced the election commission to take some strict measures.

Security has been heightened for phase five in view of the violence in the previous phase, which witnessed five people killed in Cooch Behar, including four by Central Security Force firing.

After the incident, BJP and TMC locked into a tug of war that forced the EC to impose bans on campaigns, including on Chief Minister Mamata, and WB chapter BJP President Dilip Ghosh, for 24 hours while campaign of WB BJP leader Rahul Sinha was banned for 48 hours.

After the incident, Mamata demanded resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, accusing BJP of hatching a conspiracy to intimidate voters.

Middle, low income

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"Excepting rare occasions, our menu contains rice, lentil, vegetables, eggs, fish or chicken. It usually takes Tk 350-400 a day to buy food," said Kafiluddin.

"But when the price shot up, I started spending less on medication, baby food and commuting. I had to take a loan and suspend the saving scheme after the salary cut last year. My daughters are still young, but they will start going to school next year."

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the average inflation rose to 5.47 percent in March from 5.02 percent in January this year.

In March, food inflation increased by 0.62 percentage points to 5.51 percent compared to January.

On Monday, the Department of Agriculture Marketing fixed retail prices of some essentials including oil, sugar, and dates.

Meanwhile, the price of cucumber shot up to Tk 140 a kg in retail stores. At Shyambazar wholesale market yesterday, a kg of cucumber was sold for Tk 60. Just a week ago, the price was Tk 25 in wholesale markets and Tk 40 in retail ones.

Wholesaler Mojibor Rahman said people usually shop more on Friday. Since there are restrictions, the retailers bought vegetables in bulk on Thursday, which increased the demand and prices.

Referring to be unnamed, a wholesaler said he had to bribe police at different checkpoints which also increased the cost of shipment of goods.

A day before the lockdown, police introduced "movement pass" for commuters. The cabinet division in a circular said shipping of farm products, food, and food grains will not be restricted.

"We know there is no restriction on trucks carrying food. But when we told this to the police, they asked us to open the boxes saying that we're hiding contraband goods. To avoid harassment, we gave them money," the wholesaler said.

He added that he had to bribe police at five checkpoints.

A fruit seller in Karwan Bazar echoed this.

Within the span of a week, the prices of brinjal, taro, teale gourd, bitter melon, string bean, ladies finger, onion, pointed gourd and other essentials went up by Tk 5 to Tk 60 or above per kg.

Chinese firm offers 60 lakh

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the approval of the vaccine. But the WHO advisory panel said Sinopharm has presented data on their Covid-19 vaccines indicating levels of efficacy.

Contacted, Health Minister Zahid Maleque told The Daily Star that the Chinese Sinopharm, through its trustee sources, offered 60 lakh doses of its Covid-19 vaccine called BBIBP-CorV.

"We are giving importance to this issue. The negotiation is going on. We wanted to know about the price of the vaccine, when they will be able to deliver it and how many they will deliver," the minister said.

He also said once Sinopharm gives those information, then they can move ahead about purchasing the Chinese vaccine.

In early 2020, the Beijing Institute of Biological Products created an inactivated coronavirus vaccine called BBIBP-CorV. China, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Pakistan and some other countries across the world are using this vaccine. The World Health Organization is yet to give

the approval of the vaccine. But the WHO advisory panel said Sinopharm has presented data on their Covid-19 vaccines indicating levels of efficacy.

On December 30 last year, Sinopharm announced that the vaccine has an efficacy of 79.34 percent, which led the Chinese government to approve it. However, the United Arab Emirates, which approved a Sinopharm vaccine earlier that month, said the vaccine was 86 percent effective, based on interim results of its phase-three trial.

Apart from this, the Bangladesh government is also communicating for Russian vaccine Sputnik V.

Asked about whether there is any update about Russian Sputnik V vaccine, the minister said, "Bangladesh ambassador in Russia is in talks with the Russian authorities. It is also in progress."

Russia approved the Sputnik V vaccine for domestic use in August 2020.

The government has signed an agreement of purchasing three

crore doses of vaccines from Serum Institute of India through its local agent Beximco. As per the agreement, the government was supposed to get 50 lakh doses of vaccines each month. But till yesterday, the government has only received 70 lakh doses of vaccines in two installments.

In the meantime, New Delhi reportedly imposed a temporary restriction on all major exports of the AstraZeneca vaccine made by SII to meet demands at home, reported global media.

Contacted, Nazmul Hassan Papon, managing director of Beximco, said Serum informed them that they were ready to export, but were yet to get government clearance.

Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of Directorate General of Health Services, said they were trying desperately to get the same Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from alternative sources to keep the ongoing vaccination campaign smooth.

Streets empty

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Police carried out duties mainly on the major streets. As a result, some shops other than groceries and pharmacies in the alleys were found open. Many people were seen walking in alleys without wearing masks.

In Signboard area of Jatrabari, many people were seen leaving the capital in the morning as there was no police check post.

Traders at the kitchen markets said they saw large crowds in the morning. People opted to visit markets before 12:30pm as the shopping time would end at 3:00pm with a break for Juma prayers, they added.

The town hall market in Mohamadpur was crowded with shoppers from morning till about 1:00pm. Physical distancing was maintained at the market.

Most of the shoppers were wearing masks at the kitchen markets in Shewrapara, Kazipara and Mirpur. Some salesmen who were not putting on masks said it was difficult for them to breathe and talk with customers while wearing a mask.

The overall "strict lockdown" situation was almost similar in many other cities, Chattogram, Sylhet and Barisal.

Mosques in the capital were crowded with devotees yesterday as they offered the first Juma prayers in the holy month of Ramadan.

Several mosques in Mohamadpur, Panthapath, Kalabagan and Farmgate areas did not follow the instructions given by the religious affairs ministry regarding maintaining health rules.

With no space left inside the Shaheed Park Central Jame Mosque adjacent to the Town Hall Bazaar in Mohamadpur, many people were seen offering Juma prayers outside.

Although the imam of the mosque requested devotees through loudspeakers to offer prayers following health rules, the situation there was not in favour of maintaining the guidelines.

The situation at Allah Karim Jame Mosque, Baitus Sujud Jame Mosque, and Baitur Rahman Jame Mosque in Mohamadpur was almost the same.

The religious affairs ministry on April 12 instructed that a maximum of 20 people, including the khatib, imam, hafez, muezzin and khadim, can attend Tarabi prayers at a mosque during the holy month of Ramadan. It also said people can attend Juma prayers maintaining social distancing and hygiene rules.

The local administration, law enforcement agencies, Islamic Foundation officials and the management committee of the mosques concerned were requested to implement the guidelines.

However, no such efforts by the authorities concerned were seen yesterday.

Meanwhile, police have issued 421,789 movement passes until 7:00pm yesterday, according to data of the Police Headquarters.

The number of total registrations with the "movement pass" app stood at 5,86,745 till yesterday evening.

Country sees

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A total of 18,906 samples were tested across the country in those 24 hours.

At least 5,694 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the period.

The total number of recoveries now stands at 602,908 and the recovery rate at 84.7 percent.

Among the 101 deceased, 67 were men and 34 were women. Of them, seven were within 31-40 years old; eight between 41-50; 23 within 51-60; and 63 were above 60 years old, added the release.