

City





6,61,693 Recoveries







Experts warn daily cases can double in late May

They say 25,000 died over Covid-related issues in Bangladesh; toll to double by year end

Moudud Ahmmed Sujan

The daily Covid cases may double after the third week of next month if the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions are relaxed or withdrawn, a team of researchers has forecasted, based on epidemiological projection modelling.

The projection suggests that the present coronavirus transmission rate may follow the current trend till the second week of next month. The rate is likely to start going up in the following week due to increased public movement surrounding Eid and hit the ceiling in

the third week of June.
The number of Covid-19 casualties may rise accordingly, said the researchers, based on the modelling.

In 24 hours till yesterday morning, 3,306 people tested positive for Covid-19 while 97 coronavirus patients died, according to a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services

"The Covid-19 transmission rate has steadily been going down over the last few days. It will continue until the second week of May thanks to the movement restrictions in effect. As there will be increased public movement ahead of Eid, the transmission rate may go up again, Shafiun Shimul, one of the members of the Covid-19 International Modelling Consortium (CoMo Consortium) team, told The Daily Star yesterday.

CoMo Consortium, created by researchers at the University of Oxford and Cornell University, is partnering with infectious disease modellers and public health experts from over 40

According to the analysis of the CoMo Consortium, around 25,000 people died of Covid-19 or Covid-19-related issues since the viral infection was reported in

By the end of this year, the total number of such deaths will reach around

"As there was no reliable data on deaths in many cases, we have used data from different research papers and experiences from other countries. We have also taken into consideration those who died without getting treatment for other diseases due to the pandemic," said Shimul, who is also an associate professor at the Institute of Health Economics in Dhaka

The country has been witnessing the second wave of Covid-19 infection since the second week of last month, after the transmission rate remained under

Oxygen crunch may turn grave

But they warned that if the current Covid situation deteriorates to something close to what India is facing now, the existing capacity will be too little to meet the

Following a severe shortage of oxygen in India, the import of oxygen has ground to a halt and no tanker carrying

The last time an oxygen tanker was unloaded at Benapole land port was on April 22, said Biswajit Das, a representative of the Indian Exporters

Five companies, including Linde Bangladesh, Spectra Oxygen Ltd and

Contacted,

April 1 to 22. According to customs sources, about 30,000 tonnes of oxygen were imported through the Benapole port alone in the

Officials at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said around every day to ensure uninterrupted supply

Over the last six weeks, the demand situation is improving, easing a bit the pressure on medical oxygen supply,

"We don't have the capacity to increase production. We have already reached our

Asked whether they are looking for

The researchers in this team

adapted to each country's context.

the country on March 8 last year.

demand.

India is now seeing around 3.5 lakh Covid infections every day.

oxygen entered Bangladesh for the last

Association.

Islam Oxygen Ltd, import oxygen from India through the land port, said sources at the port.

Mustafizur Rahman, deputy commissioner at Benapole Customs House, said 1,815 tonnes of oxygen were imported in 29 tankers from India through Benapole port from

last one year.

160 tonnes of oxygen are now required at public and private hospitals.

The companies in the country produce 140 tonnes of medical oxygen and the rest is imported from India. Now that India has slapped a ban on oxygen export, these companies are now producing only medical oxygen to fill the gap, they mentioned.

Linde Bangladesh Ltd, a multinational company, supplies 90 percent of oxygen at public hospitals, while the rest comes from Spectra Oxygen Ltd, they said.

Talking to The Daily Star, Saiga Mazed, spokesperson for Linde Bangladesh, said, "Oxygen import from India has halted suddenly. To meet the demand, we have stopped producing industrial oxygen and now dedicated all our production for medical purposes," she said.

for medical oxygen at Covid hospitals almost doubled. But now the Covid mentioned Saiga.

"So far, we have met the demand under a strain. It's still manageable. But if the situation deteriorates in the coming days and if the Indian ban continues for a long period, we are not sure how long we will be able to meet the demand.

maximum production capacity.

alternative sources to import oxygen, Saiqa said importing oxygen from India

Nurul Islam Jihadi, secretary general of

participatory approach to provide decision-making support to policymakers, using evidence from epidemiological and economic models

50,000, the team said.

control during January and February.

is cost-effective and less time-consuming

as it can be transported by road.

"But if we now look to import it from other countries such as Singapore, the cost will surely increase, so is the time. Oxygen should be imported under a government-to-government arrangement like the Indian government is doing now. Linde can coordinate and support the government with logistics and expertise," she said.

Linde has two oxygen plants in Narayanganj and Chattogram which produce 90 tonnes oxygen a day. They provide oxygen to all government hospitals and some of the largest private hospitals in Bangladesh which need uninterrupted oxygen supply at the intensive care units (ICUs).

The Linde official said they have sought support from the authorities concerned for getting uninterrupted supply of electricity and gas for seamless

operations of its two plants.

Talking to this newspaper, Mustain
Billah, chief executive officer at Islam Oxygen Ltd, said they used to import 30 tonnes of oxygen from India per week.

He further said they stopped producing industrial oxygen 25 days ago and are

now producing medical oxygen only. "We produce 28,000 cubic metres [28 tonnes] of oxygen per day. The entire production capacity is now dedicated to medical oxygen," he said, adding that the recent fall in infection rate has eased

Seeking anonymity, an official at Spectra Oxygen Ltd said they used to import 20 tonnes of medical oxygen

from India a week. Farid Hossain Miah, (hospitals and clinics) at the DGHS, said, "We used to meet 15-20 percent of the demand for medical oxygen through import from India... We are still not facing problems as the Covid situation is improving and the suppliers have

stopped providing oxygen to industries. But if there is a sharp rise in the number of Covid patients again, we may

face problems.' Asked, what could be the alternatives if the situation turns bad, the DGHS director said they are thinking about engaging local companies in medical oxygen production.

Supply of medical oxygen to public hospitals has been under a strain as the demand for the life-sustaining gas

doubled in the last few weeks. With the second wave being much stronger than the first one, more and more patients are in need of oxygen support as the highly transmissible virus infects lungs severely, causing serious breathing problems among many, said doctors at public hospitals in the capital.

Uninterrupted oxygen supply is very crucial in saving lives of critical coronavirus patients. Most patients are coming with severe shortness of breath and need oxygen via a high-flow nasal cannula, they pointed out.



After he tested positive for Covid-19, Mohammad Yunus, a 70-year-old man from Brahmanbaria, was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital four days ago. He died there yesterday. This photo taken in front of the hospital shows his daughter and grandchildren taking his body to their home in an ambulance. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Jobs taken, benefits too

workers must be given a service benefit. This lump sum consists of 30 days of wages for each of the years the worker was in service, and is in addition to the provident funds that workers accumulate.

"Sitting at the ministry, we were forced to draw up a new contract that stated that instead of 30 days' wages, we would be given 15 days' money [for every year] and the money that was docked from our salary each month for the provident

fund," said Kuddus.
"We did not have a choice. The workers badly needed the money, any

This arrangement was only for the 89 workers of the company who were under the government-set wage board. Garment Workers' Trade Union Centre (GWTUC), the union that negotiated the settlement, said that according to the contract drawn up, the 269 "piece-rate" workers -- who get paid as per their production -- would get no service benefit, nor would 75 staff members who only got their provident

"The workers had to let go of a few things and the owner had to loosen his stance too; the contract was done mutually. The government cannot object when there is mutual understanding," said Deputy Inspector General AKM Salahuddin of the Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishments (DIFE), Dhaka, who

was present at the meeting. Meanwhile, four payment dates came and went, but Kuddus -- who was at the forefront of all the worker negotiations -is yet to get anything even though he had

worked at the factory for 18 years. "I didn't even get the money that was docked from my monthly salary as a provident fund. I have now filed a case with the labour court," said Kuddus.

According to the calculations of the case, the factory owes him Tk 7.4 lakh, of which a third is money he himself saved from his salary as a provident fund. As of now, 25 other workers have also filed cases with the labour court alleging wage

Even workers who had received the money allege having been woefully

For example, female worker Romesa, who said she joined the factory in 1997, got only Tk 28,000. "I used to deposit Tk 200 of my Tk

8,600 salary each month, so shouldn't it be more?" she asked. She got less than half of her own savings for 23 years of service and Romesa did not even know that the factory also owed her 15 days of wages for each of

these years as per the negotiations. A report released two weeks ago by DC-based labour rights organisation Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) titled "Fired then Robbed" calculated that Dragon Sweaters still owes its workers

FACTORIES NOT COMPLYING WITH COMPENSATION LAWS

Between October and November of 2020, the Centre for Policy Dialogue surveyed 610 factories -- ranging from small to large -- and found that 96.4 percent of the factories did not comply with the compensation laws when retrenching workers -- essentially committing wage theft. CPD released these findings in the beginning of this year.

The organisation found that the larger the factory, the less likely it was to pay termination benefits to its retrenched

Around half of the surveyed sample comprised medium (500-2,500 workers) and large factories (more than 2,500

The study found that 84 percent of the medium-sized factories interviewed and all of the large factories only paid their workers their salary, but not the outstanding arrears or any compensation

Out of the 2,562,383 workers from the surveyed factories, 357,450 lost their jobs between January and September 2020 -- approximately 14 percent of total

"Almost 60 per cent (364 out of 610) factories have retrenched their workers. Other factories have either laid off workers or their number of workers has not changed," said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, the research director of CPD.

The majority of factories did not follow layoff and termination rules, the organisation also found.

"As per the instructions of DIFE, factories were not allowed to retrench or lay off workers if they received subsidised credit support under the stimulus package. However, most of the factories did not comply with that instruction," said Moazzem.

BRANDS RECORD PROFITS,

WORKERS FACE WAGE THEFT In the second half of 2020, 16 international apparel brands recorded profits of \$10 billion, while around 10,000 workers making clothes for these brands globally faced wage theft.

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, an organisation that works to identify abuse in companies and businesses, revealed this recently in a

"Á year into the pandemic, garment workers producing for major fashion brands are owed months of unpaid wages, benefits and severance pay while most brands record large profits," stated the report titled "Wage theft and pandemic profits: The right to a living wage for garment workers"

The apparel brands they investigated included Carter's Inc, Hanesbrands, H&M, Levi Strauss & Co, Lidl, L Brands, Matalan, Mark's, Next, New Look, Nike, PVH, River Island, Sainsbury's, s.Oliver, and The Children's Place.

Lidl is also one of the brands using Dragon Sweaters as a supplier, as were the New Yorker and Woolworths, claimed GWTUC. The Bangladeshi factory the study

team focused on was Stylecraft Ltd in

Gazipur -- its buyers include H&M, Next, New Look, and River Island. The report stated, "On December 25, 2020, approximately 3,000-4,000 garment workers staged a demonstration to protest over unpaid wages and benefits

from Stylecraft "The protesting workers were demanding 35 percent of their wages and arrears for September and October, full pay for November, overtime pay and other owed allowances."

Stylecraft's managing director Shams Almas Rahman stated that they had mutually agreed on the payments to be made, after negotiations with the workers.

"They also accepted a schedule of when these payments will be made. We will be paying their wages over the next few months," he said.

As much as \$5.17 million worth of orders were cancelled or deferred by various international brands from Stylecraft during the pandemic.

They told us that with the pandemic going on, they could not be sure about customers visiting their stores, and told us they would take the orders later. There were certain cases where buyers made orders and I bought the raw materials but then all of a sudden the orders were cancelled," said Shams, who chose not to divulge how many buyers cancelled

In their responses to the study team, the brands stated that they were engaging with the supplier to ensure payment of the owed wages.

"Full wages for December and January have now been paid and 17.5 percent of outstanding wages for September and October will be paid over the coming months, well below the 35 percent the workers called for," said the report.

The report also states that while at least two-thirds of the 16 brands and retailers it surveyed are once again turning a profit after the initial disruption caused by the pandemic, "However, staggeringly, over a third have still not yet committed to paying for all orders."

"Even an employer that does not wish to cheat workers of severance may be placed by brands in the position of not being able to avoid doing so," stated WRC's report.

The workers of A-(One) BD Ltd for example, have not yet received a taka, a year into getting laid off. A total of 1,100 workers were left unemployed overnight when the factory, located in the Savar export processing zone, closed on March 26, 2020.

WRC, along with multiple workers interviewed by The Daily Star, identified Benetton and Next as the brands sourcing from the factory at the time of closure. WRC estimated that a total of \$585,200 is still owed to the workers in its report "Fired then Robbed".

The factory went into the red after yers cancelled their orders and its Italian shareholder Alessandro Ferro left the country.

'We learnt that the factory fell into financial trouble because their orders stopped coming due to the pandemic, said the General Manager (public relations) of BEPZA Nazma Binte Alamgir.

The Italian ambassador told us to let Ferro leave so that he can return to Italy and search for business for his factory. He assured us that this is a genuine case of bankruptcy, and that the factory is in its current situation because it is not getting orders.' According to a count kept by

Bangladesh Garment Workers' Solidarity, the workers were given 22 dates to collect their arrears, but each date came and went with broken promises. 'We are thinking of auctioning the factory and its assets to pay back the

workers, but that has not been done yet. We will pay the workers their dues, once that is completed," Nazma added. Workers visited BEPZA as recently as

February hoping for money, but were told that they will not get anything until the factory is sold. "How can I wait that long for the money? I am unemployed and I have not found a job in one year," said Md

Abdur Razzak, a former worker of the factory furniture of my home, but now I have

nothing left to sell."

"I have been surviving by selling the

Shafi followers out to reclaimHefajat helm

the dissolved committee, announced the convening committee in a video Uddin Nanupuri and

made members of the committee. Around 11:30pm on Sunday, Junayed Babunagari in a video message from Hathazari madrasa in Chattogram announced that the 249-member central committee of the

Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury were

organistation has been dissolved. Speaking to The Daily Star, wishing anonymity, several Hefajat leaders yesterday said the government was putting pressure on the outfit to include leaders having no direct involvement with any political party in the new committee.

They said Hefajat has been under tremendous pressure from the government to restructure its central committee by removing those involved in last month's violence in different parts of the country.

Hefajat men clashed with law enforcers in several districts of the country, especially in Brahmanbaria, from March 26 to 28 during demonstrations protesting Modi's visit. On November 15 last year,

Babunagari was declared Hefajat

amir at the end of its council held at Darul Ulum Moinul Islam Hathazari Madrasa in Chattogram. Before that, he was the secretary general of the organisation. The council was held around

Ahmad Shafi in September. Hefajat again hit the headlines when it opposed Modi's Bangladesh visit on March 26, the day the country celebrated golden jubilee of its independence.

two months after the death of Shah

government launched a crackdown on the Islamist outfit. MAMUNUL PLACED ON FRESH

REMAND Former Hefajat joint secretary

At least 17 people were killed as general Mamunul Haque yesterday claimed he went to Baitul Mukarram national mosque on March 26 at the request of a DIG-ranked police official, reports our court correspondent.

Asked if he had anything to say, Mamunul told a Dhaka court that he was in a mosque in the capital's Banglabazar when the police official called him and requested him to go to Baitul Mukarram after a clash between police and Hefajat men broke out

He said he went to Baitul Mukarram where he was requested to deliver a speech to pacify Hefajat men. He addressed Hefajat supporters

Syed Zainul Abedin Mesbah told The Daily Star quoting him as saying. "But now I have been shown Following the Hefajat mayhem, the arrested in the case," Mamunul told Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate

and pacified them, Mamunul's lawyer

Sadbir Yasir Ahsan Chowdhury. Mamunul claimed that he did nothing wrong. He said they would not be able to go anywhere if police requested them to do so in future.

Opposing Mamunul's comments, the state lawyer said he could not make such a statement. The court, however, allowed Mamunul to continue his

"You [judge] can check my call records of that day if you want," Mamunul said.

The magistrate placed Mamunul and former Dhaka city Hefajat president Junayed Al Habib on sevenday remand each in two cases filed with Motijheel and Paltan police stations over the 2013 mayhem and recent violence in Dhaka after the investigation officers of the cases submitted 20-day remand prayers for

Habib, who was arrested on April 17, was also placed on three-day remand in another case filed with Paltan Police Station over the March 26 violence.

Mamunul, who was arrested on April 18, was produced before the court yesterday on completion of

seven-day remand in an attempted murder case filed with Mohammadpur Police Station on March 6 last year. TWO CASES AGAINST BABUNAGARI Police on Thursday filed two cases

with Hathazari Police Station accusing

Junayed Babunagari and some other

local Hefajat, BNP and Jamaat leaders,

reports our staff correspondent in Chattogram. Asked about the delay in filing the cases, Chattogram Superintendent of Police SM Rashidul Haque told this newspaper that police had to verify the identities and addresses of the

accused before filing the cases. Babunagari and other Hefajat leaders were sued over attacking policemen, and vandalising the police station. The cases were lodged under the Special Powers Act, the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Penal Code, the SP added.

With this, a total of nine cases have so far been lodged with Hathazari Police Station over the March 26 violence by Hefajat men.

Runaway Covid patients tracked down, returned

STAR REPORT

Officers tracked down the 10 Covid-19 patients, who fled from Jashore General Hospital from April 18-24 and sent them back to the facility last

Seven of the 10 Covid-19 patients recently came back to the country from India through Benapole border where they tested positive for coronavirus. They were taken to the hospital police surveillance from

there, said Resident Medical Officer Arif Ahmed, adding that many of them gave false phone numbers and addresses at the time of the admission and slid out of the hospital later. Hospital Superintendent Dilip Kumar Roy said he contacted the

deputy commissioner, superintendent of police and civil surgeon of different districts to find the patients. Law enforcers and administration

officials had to raid different areas to find them, officials said.

[Our Benapole correspondent and a correspondent from Jashore contributed to the report]

PM for stronger role

FROM PAGE 1

The premier called for inclusive development approach, efficient policies and strategies on universal public health system from the Asia-Pacific region.

The three-day session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) began virtually yesterday under the theme -- "Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific."

Hasina urged the international community to remain focused on sustainable repatriation of the 1.1 million forcibly displaced Rohingyas. In her first proposal, she said the developed world, development partners

and international financial institutions

should come forward in attaining quick

recovery from the pandemic. The second proposal says the development approach should be more inclusive, resilient and environment friendly to build back better from any

The Asia-Pacific region should take efficient policies and strategies for a strengthened and universal public health system, Hasina said in her third proposal. "We need to establish seamless

technology," the PM said in the fourth proposal. She said the coronavirus pandemic has devastated the health systems and

connectivity in the areas of trade,

transport, energy and ICT, science and

economies across the world. Noting that nearly 2.95 million are dying of the deadly disease every day, the PM said the pandemic has made many people poorer while many

others are sliding back to poverty. Highlighting her government's measures to offset the onslaught of the pandemic, Hasina said it has announced stimulus packages worth about \$14.6 billion for widening social protection, retaining jobs and bolstering

The PM said the government has continued to move forward with

environmental management. "Adaptation efforts to climate change have been supported by programmes funded through the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund." Hasina said Bangladesh sees

regional cooperation as the most viable

option for shared prosperity. "We're engaged in Saarc, BIMSTEC, BBIN

[Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal]

BCIM-EC [Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor] and trilateral highway initiatives. She said "South-South Network for Public Service Innovation" helps Bangladesh through partnership with

other countries. "We're an ardent supporter of ncreased connectivity and ESCAP's initiative of the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway," the PM added. Hasina said Bangladesh is also

actively engaging with the cross-border paperless trade, Asia-Pacific Trade

Agreement, PPP networking, renewable energy and other initiatives of UN-ESCAP. "We're committed to achieving

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration." The ESCAP is one of the five regional commissions under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It was established in order to increase economic activity in Asia and the Far East, as well as to foster economic relations between the region

and other areas of the world. The commission is composed of 53 member states and nine associate members, mostly from the Asia and Pacific regions.

Presidents

Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Kiribati, Kyrgyz Republic, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, and Tajikistan, and the prime minister of Tuvalu virtually spoke at the function. Earlier, UŃ Secretary-General António Guterres, among others, made

Afghanistan,

opening remarks. ministers of Bhutan. Prime Cambodia, Fiji, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan also addressed the session virtually.