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Infection surges in border dists

3 districts have positivity rates above 30pc; Chapainawabganj under one-week lockdown

MOUJID AHMED SUJAN

With the Covid positivity rate rising above 30 percent yesterday in three districts bordering India, health officials warned that the virus transmission may surge again in the country due to increased public movement and disregard for the health safety rules.

They also said the resumption of inter-district public transport could contribute to further spread of the virus.

The daily Covid positivity rate has been on the rise over the last one week. It was recorded at 8.15 percent in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, which was 6.95 percent on May 15.

But the rate was abnormally high in three bordering districts -- 55 percent in Chapainawabganj, 42 percent in Satkhira and 33 percent in Rajshahi -- yesterday. It was 20 percent in Jashore, according to data collected by The Daily Star from the civil surgeons and health officials in those districts.

All the three districts share borders with India, which has been seeing a surge in Covid cases and deaths following the detection of a double mutant variant of the virus.

In this situation, the Bangladesh government has kept the borders with the neighbouring country closed since last month.

In Bangladesh, nine cases of the Indian variant have so far been confirmed by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

The World Health Organization has classified the variant as a "variant

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People getting on a train at Chattogram Railway Station after trains started operating yesterday. Passenger train services had been suspended in early April to curb the spread of coronavirus across the country.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

BANGABANDHU BRIDGE Vehicle data shows futility of restrictions

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Although long-haul bus services remained suspended since early last month, it had very little impact on the number of vehicles which travelled between Dhaka and the north-western districts via Bangabandhu Bridge last month.

Around 5.72 lakh vehicles crossed the country's largest bridge in April, down from 6.14 lakh the previous month, according to the monthly traffic report released by Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA).

Some 3.10 lakh vehicles used the bridge in April last year amid suspension of public transport services, shows the report.

The number of cars and motorcycles using Bangabandhu Bridge saw a sharp rise during the "lockdown" as these light vehicles apparently replaced buses as modes of transport, sources said.

The government had imposed restrictions on the movement of people and public transport from April 5 to contain the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Two black fungus cases detected

Doctors find the fungal disease in patients who recovered from Covid; experts call for alertness

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Two cases of black fungus have been detected at Birdem Hospital in patients who have recovered from Covid-19, a worrying sign as neighbouring India reports widespread infections.

One of the patients, aged 45, was detected with black fungus, known among doctors as mucormycosis, on May 8 and the other, aged 60, was detected on May 23, officials of the hospital said.

Those with uncontrolled diabetes and compromised immune system are at high risk, they added.

"In our lab, we confirmed two patients with mucormycosis. We are treating them and trying to control their blood sugar," said Lovely Barai, associate professor at the department of microbiology at Birdem.

The two individuals are the first Covid-recovered patients detected at the facility with the rare fungal disease, she told The Daily Star yesterday.

"A black fungus infection can turn critical in someone who has a compromised immune system. They need to be treated carefully... We are

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Small businesses see stimulus funds at last

REJAUJ KARIM BYRON and DWAIWAPAN BARUA

The cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises, who were among the worst hit for the pandemic, appears to have started seeing the stimulus funds of late after initial reluctance from banks in disbursing credit to the sector.

So much that the disbursement to the sector has overtaken that to the large industries, which had started on a blistering pace.

As of March, 72.3 percent of the Tk 20,000 crore announced for the CMSME sector on April 13 last year has been disbursed to 91,427 firms, according to a finance ministry document.

"There was much outrage about the slow disbursement in the media and at the policymaking level," said Zaid Bakht, chairman of Agrani Bank.

This prompted the central bank and the finance ministry to crank up the pressure on the banks and non-bank financial institutions to meet their disbursement targets. The deadline for disbursement was extended several times, with the

latest deadline being June 30.

"It roused the banks into action, so the situation improved," said Bakht, whose bank overshot its disbursement target.

Initially, many CMSMEs were unsure whether they qualified for funds from the stimulus package, which came at 9 percent interest but they have to pay just 4 percent, with the government footing 5 percent by way of subsidy.

Normally, CMSMEs have to pay as much as 25 percent interest for loans.

But later, banks started raising awareness and many firms came forward, Bakht added.

On the other hand, banks have taken their feet off the gas on their disbursement from the Tk 40,000 crore package announced for pandemic-hit large industries.

As of March, 66.5 percent of the package has been disbursed to 3,118 firms.

Bakht says the slower disbursement is because the private banks are showing reluctance now in

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KSA TRAVEL ADVISORY

Ministry doing little to address workers' plight

RASHIDUL HASAN and JAMIL MAHMUD

Bangladeshis are facing huge obstacles to joining work in Saudi Arabia following a travel advisory from the Middle Eastern country. The expatriates' welfare ministry has not yet taken any visible steps to address their issues.

Besides, expatriate workers alleged that Biman Bangladesh Airlines did not cooperate with them to ensure their journey, and also kept suspending flights, which ultimately aggravate their sufferings.

The challenges appeared after the Saudi Arabia issued a fresh travel advisory effective from May 20 for citizens of non-restricted countries, including Bangladesh. It sought medical insurance for Covid-19 and hotel reservations for institutional quarantine.

Following this, different recruiting agencies wrote to the

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Mystery shrouds DU student's death

Family demands proper probe; DU VC requests DMP commissioner to take steps

SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

The Dhaka University student's death remains shrouded in mystery as his family members and friends demand an impartial investigation.

Hafizur Rahman's brother identified his body at Dhaka Medical College morgue on Sunday, over a week after Shahbagh police found the fatally wounded young man on DU campus.

He was a student of information science and library management in 2015-16

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Yaas gaining pace, landfall tomorrow

STAR REPORT

Cyclone Yaas, over 600km away from Bangladesh, is gaining momentum and is likely to make landfall somewhere on Odisha-West Bengal coast tomorrow, according to the Met office.

It said Yaas had wind speeds between 62kph and 88kph and that it could turn into a very severe cyclonic storm with wind speeds from 89kph to 117kph before making landfall.

The Met office said the cyclone was likely to move towards the Indian coast but it could change course and come towards Bangladesh.

"Earlier, cyclone Bulbul that was initially moving towards Bangladesh changed its course and moved towards India. So we need to be alert about the cyclone with full

preparation," said Abdul Mannan from the Storm Warning Centre of Bangladesh Met office.

Mannan has been monitoring the cyclone since its formation.

"Even if it does not move towards Bangladesh, coastal areas near the Sundarbans will face peripheral effects of the cyclone during the full moon, when the normal high tide will be at least 12 feet high," he said.

The Met office said the sea would be rough and advised all maritime ports to hoist cautionary signal number two, which means all fishing boats and trawlers should move close to the shore.

Enamur Rahman, state minister for disaster management and relief, yesterday said the government was ready to deal with Yaas.

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Bhasan Char ready for Yaas

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA, from Bhasan Char

After a day of heat at Bhasan Char yesterday, the winds began to pick up towards the evening and there was some rain.

This is the first time after Rohingyas were resettled there that Bhasan Char would see a cyclone in the Bay.

Although the storm was far away yesterday, the authorities at Bhasan Char were taking no chances and were adhering to their standard operating procedures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the refugees.

"We have already started making people aware of the cyclone. All the shelter centres are ready," Commodore Rashed Sattar, project director of Ashrayan-3 Project, popularly known as the Bhasan Char project, told The Daily Star.

The PD said various law enforcement agencies, volunteers and Rohingya representatives were working together to this end.

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