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VIRUS TRANSMISSION

At least 50 dists now at high risk

MOUJIB AHMED SUJAN

The Covid situation is now going from bad to worse even beyond the bordering districts, raising the spectre of widespread virus transmission all over the country.

With both infections and deaths seeing a surge over the past two weeks, the number of high-risk districts rose to 50 yesterday from 36 on June 3, according to the health directorate data.

A district is considered a high-risk zone if the infection rate there is 10 percent and above.

Of the high-risk districts, the situation in those in Khulna and Rajshahi divisions is alarming in terms of deaths and cases.

Yesterday, the health directorate reported 60 deaths -- the highest since May 4 -- and 3,956 new cases -- the highest since April 22.

Alarming, the countrywide positivity rate jumped to 16.62 percent yesterday from 10 percent two weeks ago. The positivity rate was 14.27 percent the previous day.

Amid the rise in virus transmission, the government yesterday extended the nationwide restrictions on public and vehicular movement for a month, but allowed all government and private offices to stay open maintaining the health safety guidelines.

Experts say the government measures to tackle the Covid crisis are inadequate and a lack of coordination among its agencies could deepen the crisis.

To curb the virus transmission, they suggested "cluster-wise

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Armed with a megaphone, a volunteer of Red Crescent Society warns people at Doratana intersection in Jashore town not to enter an area locked down to curb Covid-19 spread. Behind him, however, several vehicles are seen in one of the busiest part of the town.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Living cost up by 6.8pc in the capital

Rising prices of essentials to blame, says consumers association report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cost of living in Dhaka shot up by 6.8 percent in 2020 mainly because of the rising prices of daily essentials amid the pandemic, according to a report by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh.

Besides, the prices of different goods and services increased by 6.31 percent in the capital last year, it said.

CAB President Ghulam Rahman announced the findings of the report at a virtual press conference yesterday.

Last year's jump in living expenses was the highest in three years, he said.

As the cost of living increased, the income of lower- and lower-middle class people drastically fell due to the economic fallout from the pandemic, he said, adding that this has affected their living standards.

The CAB report was prepared mainly on the basis of information collected at 15

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Govt moves to set up vaccine institute

In talks with South Korea, says PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government was going to sign an agreement with South Korea to set up an international standard vaccine institute in order to produce vaccines, including those against Covid-19, in the country.

"The present government has taken an initiative to set up an international standard vaccine institute aiming to produce vaccines, including those against coronavirus, in the country," she told parliament while replying to a question from Awami League MP Ahasanul Islam Titu from Tangail-6.

The premier said "ratification, accession and approval" of the agreement by the Cabinet were under process.

Hasina said the government has taken steps to produce Covid vaccines in the country alongside collecting jabs from abroad with a view to check the spread of the virus.

She said talks at the government-to-government level continued with the countries, who have developed Covid vaccines, for transfer of technology to Bangladesh to this end.

The Leader of the House said the capacity of three local firms -- Incepta Pharmaceuticals, Popular Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare Pharmaceuticals -- for production of Covid vaccines has already been assessed.

She said Globe Biotech Ltd is carrying out research on Covid vaccines. "The vaccine is now at the trial stage."

Responding to another question from Jatiya Party MP Fakhru Imam, the PM said the government has so far given emergency use authorisation

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ATTEMPT TO RAPE, MURDER Accused Omi now a trafficking suspect

Sued under passport act after police conduct raid of recruiting agency

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tuhin Siddique Omi, an accused in an attempted rape and murder case filed by actor Pori Moni, was sued yesterday under the passport act by police who suspect he is involved human trafficking.

Omi, 33, known as an influential businessman in Dhaka's Dakshinkhan area and at different posh clubs in the capital, had tricked Pori Moni into going to the Dhaka Boat Club around midnight on June 9.

There, according to the statement of the case filed by the actor, businessman and former president of Uttara Club Limited Nasir U Mahmud physically assaulted her, and tried to rape her with the assistance of Omi and four unidentified persons.

While Nasir and Omi are currently being interrogated on remand by Detective Branch (DB) in a case filed under the narcotics control act, Savar

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SOCIAL SAFETY NET SPENDING

It is 0.97pc of GDP, not 3.1pc

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and WASIM BIN HABIB

In a circus, whenever an artist is performing a tightrope walking stunt, underneath him/her is a wide net to prevent him/her from falling to the ground and avoiding potentially life-threatening injuries -- lest he/she loses her balance on the thin rope and falls over.

In the same manner, the social safety nets are meant to stop people from hitting rock-bottom.

But if one looks at Bangladesh's social safety net programme, a large

chunk of it are not designed for that end and are actually meant for the non-poor.

For instance, 29.5 percent of the Tk 107,614 crore-social safety net budget for fiscal 2021-22 are for providing pensions for the 7.5 lakh government employees and honorarium for freedom fighters' families -- people who are not facing destitution.

Then comes the allocation for the money kept for interest payment on national savings certificates and interest subsidy for loans to small and medium enterprises (including cottage industries), which took up

another 9 percent of the social safety net budget.

If the educational stipends and the agriculture subsidy are taken out, the pot becomes even smaller.

On paper, social safety net spending accounts for 3.1 percent of the GDP.

However, if the fat is trimmed, what actually goes to the truly poor account for 0.97 percent of the GDP.

It was 0.73 percent of GDP, according to a 2018 study of the World Bank titled 'The State of Social Safety Nets'.

The spending had reduced the

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Fishmongers and vegetables traders occupy the entire pavement width on Dhanmondi Road 6/A in the capital, forcing many pedestrians to use the street or deal with the smelly, wet, and narrowed down pavement to pass. The photo was taken around 4:45pm yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



টেকসই ও নবায়নযোগ্য জ্বালানি উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষ (স্রেডা)
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