



Lying in an ambulance, Salma gasps for air as her sister sits by her side, and her husband frantically looks to secure an ICU bed at the Covid-19 unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday noon. There were none. The 26-year-old passed away around 2pm.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

A life lost for a vacant ICU

Covid patient dies as family rushes hospital to hospital in capital; experts stress for real-time info on occupancy

ANISUR RAHMAN and MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

Getting no space at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Salimullah Medical College Hospital (SMCH), relatives of Salma Akter (26) brought her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday noon.

Before coming to DMCH, they were somehow assured that they would get an ICU bed for her at the Covid-19 unit there. But the on-duty doctors could not arrange one for her as just like SMCH, they also had none available.

And just an hour and 22 minutes later -- at around 2pm, Salma's relatives came out of the hospital with her dead body.

"Mitford [SMCH] doctors referred my wife here [at DMCH]. After the duty doctors referred her to the ICU unit on the second floor, we took her there. But there was no space available," Dalim, husband of the deceased, Salma, told The Daily Star yesterday while preparing to take her body to their village home in Barishal.

They used to reside in the capital's Kamrangir Char area.

Dalim said on Wednesday,

Salma was admitted to SMCH as she developed moderate Covid-19 symptoms. She was tested positive for Covid-19 there. From Friday, Salma started to suffer from severe shortness of breath. As there was no ICU bed vacant, doctors referred her to DMCH yesterday.

For the last several days, such harrowing stories have become all too common at the DMCH -- the country's largest hospital.

However, while critical patients like Salma have been struggling for ICU support, 127 ICU beds out of 212 were vacant in DNCC Covid-19 dedicated hospital yesterday.

Experts said having no real-time information on the hospital bed occupancy available publicly has intensified the sufferings of patients during the fresh surge of Covid-19.

With the spike of Covid-19 critical patients, the DMCH authorities have again started struggling to ensure proper treatment to all.

Yesterday, all the 20 ICU beds at the hospital were occupied, according to the data from Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). Meantime,

410 general beds for Covid-19 patients also were occupied.

Including DMCH Covid-19 unit, there are 384 ICU beds in 15 Covid-19 dedicated hospitals or hospital units in the capital.

Of those, only 173 were vacant as of yesterday noon. Meantime, 2,069 general beds out of 3,455 were vacant.

Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, told The Daily Star, "When the infection turns to a prolonged disaster, there will be many such incidents like Salma. Providing real-time information to doctors working in the Covid-19 unit is very much urgent. But the authorities have been reluctant in this regard since the beginning."

It is unfortunate that a patient needs to run from one hospital to another to get an ICU bed, he added.

Asked, Dr Farid Hossain Miah, director of hospitals and clinics at DGHS, said, "We usually instruct the [hospital] directors to check the directorate database before suggesting any referral for a patient. May be some of the doctors do not know about it, but that should not be the case."

No one can build structures on banks of Karnaphuli

Says LGRD minister
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No one will be allowed to build structures on the banks of river Karnaphuli, said Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives Minister Md Tazul Islam yesterday.

Terming port city the country's lifeline, he said the government is giving Chattogram its due importance. "There is no scope for negligence regarding the development of the city," he said.

The minister was addressing a views-exchange on addressing waterlogging problem in port city, enhancing navigability of the Karnaphuli and steps taken to free the river from illegal occupation and pollution as the chief guest.

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'I have nothing more to ask for'

In conversation with Tofail Ahmed

GOLAM MORTOZA

Not just for Awami League, Tofail Ahmed is one of the most important personalities in Bangladesh politics. He was an elected vice president of Ducus, one of the central architects of the mass uprisings of 1969, a close confidante of Bangabandhu and one of the pathfinders of AL during tough times. The political icon recently announced that he has decided to donate all his liquid and non-liquid assets for the benefit of people. Why did he take such a decision? In an interview with The Daily Star, he talks about the decision.

The Daily Star (DS): The decision to donate all your wealth -- did you suddenly take it?
Tofail Ahmed: Not at all. It has been a



long-term plan that I will not keep anything.

Let me tell you a story that motivated me. One day, Alexander the Great called in some important individuals who sided with him, and gave them three instructions.

"If I die, four doctors should carry my coffin. Those will be the ones who have treated me. Secondly, whatever I have earned should be given away. It should be distributed in the area where I'm to be buried. Thirdly, both my hands should be hanging out of the sides of the coffin," he said.

People will ask you about the reasons behind these actions, right? The reasons are, doctors can treat and sometimes, cure people, but they cannot keep someone alive.

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Hunger, lockdown don't go together: GM Quader

Urges govt to ensure food security for poor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party chairman and deputy leader of the opposition GM Quader yesterday said lockdown will never be successful without ensuring food security for the extremely poor and working people.

In a statement, he said hungry people can never be kept indoors. Hunger and lockdown do not go together.

The JP chairman said it must be admitted that there is no alternative to lockdown if the coronavirus spreads in the form of an epidemic.

"But there are millions of working people in the country who do not have food stocks at home. They live from hand to mouth. Almost every such family has to buy medicine along with food and in some cases food for infants. They also have to pay rent."

He said if millions of people cannot go to work every day due to the lockdown, their families will be in serious crisis. Humanitarian catastrophes could occur across the country, he added.

In addition, the law and order situation may break down. In the statement, the JP chairman further said it has to be made sure that the government aid for the extremely poor is not stolen.

VACCINE FROM CHINA Will come soon, can't tell exactly when: minister

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said the government will set up a vaccine production plant in Gopalganj soon.

"We are taking the issue of manufacturing vaccine in the country seriously. The prime minister is very sincere on this issue. She instructed us to take steps immediately to produce vaccine locally," he said.

Talking to journalists at his residence in Manikganj, the minister said, "We have taken initiative to set up a factory in Gopalganj. Although it will take some time, the process of work has started."

Maleque said China's Sinopharm

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Indian national arrested near Padma Bridge

11th such incident: police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested another Indian citizen on charge of entering Bangladesh without proper documents and visiting the Padma bridge site in Shariatpur's Jajira late at night.

"Some army personnel detained Rupsa Roy while he was roaming around in the Padma Bridge project area in Jajira without proper documents and handed him over to us," Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Jajira Police Station, told The Daily Star.

"A case was filed against Rupsa under the Control of Entry Act for illegally entering Bangladesh today (yesterday)," he said.

Police pressed charges against Rupsa (40) in the case after completing the probe, the OC added.

Earlier, Bijoy Kumar Roy, another Indian citizen, was arrested from Jajira over the same charges on June 24. He was charged under section 4 of the Control of Entry Act for illegally entering Bangladesh after a case was filed against him with Jajira Police Station on the same day.

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DU readies guideline to hold online exams

SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

As the Covid-19 situation has deteriorated in the country, Dhaka University (DU) authorities have decided to take its postponed examinations online instead of in-person.

The examinations were scheduled to start from the first week of July. But amid the current lockdown situation -- which will be strictly enforced from today -- DU authorities said they will meet today to decide whether they can start the exams from the announced date.

Pro-VC (Academic) Prof ASM Maksud Kamal told The Daily Star that they have already sent a guideline to the departments to hold the exams online.

"We are going to hold honours and masters final examinations online instead of in-person. We have taken the decision following our previous Academic Council decision," Prof Kamal said.

According to the decision of

- ➔ Google Classroom will be used for exams.
- ➔ Students have to be connected on ZOOM platform for invigilation.
- ➔ Exams will be half in duration and carry half of usual marks.
- ➔ Students must keep video switched on during exam.
- ➔ Students should write answers in A4 paper and write their roll and page number in every page.
- ➔ They have to scan or take photos of their answer sheets and upload it right after exam.

the Academic Council meeting on June 1, honours and master's final examinations will begin from the first week of July, if the coronavirus situation in the country does not

deteriorate.

At that time, the council hadn't finalised whether they would take the exams in-person or virtually.

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Keep labour migration out of lockdown purview

Recruiting agencies urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different platforms of recruiting agencies yesterday urged the government to keep labour migration sector out of the purview of "lockdown" to be enforced from Monday.

They also urged the government to not suspend international flight operations, saying it will jeopardise opportunities of overseas job for thousands of workers who were waiting for flights.

They said many migrant workers waiting to fly to Saudi Arabia have already made non-refundable payment for hotel quarantine there.

Moreover, thousands others were in the pipeline having completed their visa-stamping process, and received emigration clearance card from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), they added.

In a letter to the expatriates' welfare ministry, Recruiting Agencies' Oikya Parishad said thousands of migrant workers have already paid about Tk 150 crore as hotel booking fee for quarantine in Saudi Arabia, which is non-refundable.

If the sector remained closed during lockdown, travel of workers already obtaining visa will become uncertain while those who came home on holiday will also face uncertainty to rejoin their workplaces, it said.

Moreover, receiving countries might stop issuing new demands which will create a negative impact on the sector in future, it added.

The platform urged the government to declare labour migration as "emergency service sector".

In a statement, Recruiting Agency Welfare Organisation of Bangladesh urged the government to not suspend international flights considering overall interest of workers and the country.

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WHOSE FOOTPATH IS IT ANYWAY? Dhaka ranked as one of the least liveable cities in the world again this year. While it is presumable that there is a multitude of reasons why that is, not all of them are complicated. Footpaths being encroached is an all-too-common sight in the capital, but is it really a difficult problem to solve? Whether it is construction materials, parked cars, full-blown makeshift shops or even a heap of sandbagged garbage, pedestrians are faced with obstacles all around the capital. The photos were taken over the last week from the capital's Mohakhali, Dhanmondi, Panthapath and Eskaton areas.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN, PRABIR DAS, PALASH KHAN