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Your Right to Know

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"BNP leaders at all levels are communicating behind the scene to join Awami League."
AWAMI LEAGUE GENERAL SECRETARY
OBAIDUL QUADER



"What kind of person is he [health minister]. Does he not have any shame? He never went inside any hospital to see what was happening."
JATIYA PARTY MP MUJIBUL HAQUE



"Now we would like to begin a new chapter in our lives. No longer as husband and wife, but as co-parents and family for each other."
BOLLYWOOD SUPERSTAR AAMIR KHAN AFTER SPLIT WITH WIFE KIRAN RAO

RT-PCR TEST IN DHAKA, ELSEWHERE

Disparities wide, WORRYING

ZYMA ISLAM

Nearly 70 percent of Bangladesh's RT-PCR testing facilities, needed for accurate diagnosis of Covid-19, are based in the Dhaka division -- a worrying discovery seeing that the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak has shifted out of the capital and its surrounding areas.

There are just 39 RT-PCR machines of a total of 128 serving the remaining seven divisions of Bangladesh, with Chattogram accounting for ten of the facilities.

In the absence of widescale testing and implausibility of contact tracing, it would be difficult to break the transmission chain of the more dangerous Delta variant that is engulfing the hinterlands of Bangladesh or even properly diagnose and then treat those with symptoms, according to experts.

"The pandemic was very Dhaka-centric for a while, but now it is all over the country," said Mushtaque Chowdhury, convener of Bangladesh Health Watch, a citizens' platform dedicated to improving the country's health system through evidence-based policy recommendations.

For instance, Bangladesh recorded the highest number of deaths from Covid-19 in the 24 hours to 8 am on June 30 and 75 percent of the fatalities were outside of the Dhaka division.

Similarly, of the total deaths reported in the 24 hours to 8 am yesterday from Covid-19, about 72 percent were from outside of Dhaka.

In Dhaka city, for those who can afford the prohibitively high price of Tk 3,500-3,700 for an RT-PCR test, considered the gold standard for Covid-19 testing, getting one is as easy as picking up the phone and calling for a home appointment from a private hospital.

A medical technologist would arrive, usually within the day, take the patient's saliva and mucus samples, with the results available in a matter of hours.

Compare that with Khulna city, which is reeling from the outbreak of coronavirus.

The city has two hospitals where a person can get tested: the publicly-owned Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) and the privately-owned Gazi Medical College Hospital.

Our correspondent reported long queues of people waiting for hours at KMCH on Wednesday.

The hospital has two RT-PCR machines that run three times a day and can do 94 tests each time, said Mehedi Newaz, vice-principal of KMCH.

So, around 500 tests can be conducted each day, meaning scores are failing to

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A Border Guard Bangladesh man putting a mask on the face of a rickshaw puller at the capital's Sat Rasta yesterday. Since some offices and production units opened yesterday, there were more people and vehicles on the streets than the previous days of the "strict lockdown" the government enforced amid runaway Covid-19 infections.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

People should have stayed put for Eid

Says PM, blames their going home for Covid situation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing frustration over people not paying heed to her call on celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr at their respective locations, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said had the people followed her call, the coronavirus situation in the country wouldn't have worsened like it is now.

In her concluding speech in the 13th session of the 11th parliament, the leader of the House said the virus spread to the district level due to disobeying the call and this was the reality.

She requested the people to keep themselves safe. "Please follow the health safety guidelines, and let coronavirus not

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OXYGEN CRISIS, SOARING COVID DEATHS MPs call for health minister's resignation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition lawmakers yesterday criticised Health Minister Zahid Maleque for what they said was his failure in ensuring oxygen supplies to different hospitals and the recent deaths of Covid-19 patients amid oxygen supply shortage in Satkhira and Bogura.

Jatiya Party MP Mujibul Haque Chunnun called the health minister shameless and said he must resign.

"What kind of a person is he? [He] does not have a [sense of] shame. Has he never gone inside a hospital to see what is going on? All he does is Zoom meetings," he told parliament.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was present at the session presided over by Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury.

But the health minister was not to be seen in the house.

Speaking on a point of order, BNP MP Gulam Mohammad Siraj from Bogura-6 brought up the topic, saying that at least 24 Covid-19 patients died in Bogura in just two days last week due to lack of oxygen support.

Mohammad Ali Hospital in Bogura, dedicated for Covid-19 treatment, has eight ICU beds, but only two high-flow nasal cannulas. This makes six ICU beds almost useless, he said.

Three such hospitals in Bogura with 450 beds combined have been at capacity, turning new patients away, he said and demanded that the government provides each hospital with 20 high-flow nasal cannulas.

Jatiya Party Chairman and Deputy Leader of the Opposition GM Quader then said the health ministry is still in the place where it was a year ago. "There has been no progress."

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Murder suspect accuses cops of sexual assault

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A murder case accused has brought allegations of sexual harassment and physical torture against some policemen in Barishal.

During her remand, the investigation officer of the case sexually harassed her and some other policemen tortured her physically, she said.

She made the statement before Judicial Magistrate Mahfuzur Rahman when she was produced before his court on Friday afternoon.

Taking the allegations into cognizance, the court directed a health checkup on the woman and asked Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital's director to submit a report within 24 hours.

Contacted, Inspector Mainul, the investigation officer of the case, denied the allegations and termed those "false".

SM Aktaruzzaman, deputy inspector general (DIG) of Barishal range police, said, "I have heard about the incident. The district's superintendent of police is looking into the matter."

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THIRD DAY OF LOCKDOWN City streets see more vehicles

621 people detained in Dhaka for violating stay-at-home order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Public and vehicular movement seemed to have increased on the streets of Dhaka and elsewhere on the third day of the countrywide "lockdown".

People mostly left home to either go to offices or factories, provide emergency services, or to go to kitchen markets. Rural areas and alleys were more crowded than main thoroughfares.

Meanwhile, some low-income people were leaving the capital using different modes of transport despite a lockdown being imposed.

On the roads, there were checkpoints, manned by teams of the army, BGB, Rab and police. There were executive magistrates at some of the posts.

They stopped traffic and those who failed to explain why they ventured outdoors were detained or fined.

More people were detained and penalised for violating the rules yesterday compared to the previous two days.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday detained 621 people in Ramna, Lalbagh, Motijheel, Wari, Tejgaon, Mirpur, Gulshan, Uttara and other places in the capital, according to DMP's media wing.

Among them, more than a hundred people were detained and fined at different parts of Old Dhaka.

Besides, mobile courts fined 346 people with a total of Tk 1.06 lakh. At least 855 vehicles were fined with a total of Tk 19.22 lakh, the DMP said.

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Daily Covid cases up 51pc in week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of new cases of Covid-19 rose by 51 percent in the past week from yesterday compared to the previous one, said a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

During the same period, the number of deaths has also increased by 46.34 percent.

There was over a hundred deaths every day this week, including the all-time high 143 on Thursday.

With 134 Covid-19 deaths in the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, a total of 859 Covid-19 patients died, up from 587, in the week.

Meanwhile, 53,118 people tested positive for the virus including 6,214 new cases yesterday. In the previous week, 35,111 cases were positive.

With the latest count, the total number of deaths rose to 14,912 which is 1.59 percent of all cases detected since March 8 last year.

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Shahriar, who has Covid-19 symptoms, and his wife Poppy wait in front of Shaheed Sheikh Abu Naser Specialised Hospital in Khulna city. They were waiting there for almost six hours before they left without treatment yesterday. Poppy said her husband got tested for coronavirus on Wednesday, but the result was yet to be out. And the hospital would not take any patient without the result.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

HOSPITALS IN KHULNA Oxygen, bed crises severe

Covid facilities overrun

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

With Covid-19 cases continuing to surge, health facilities in Khulna are grappling with an acute crisis of hospital beds and oxygen due to the influx of patients.

Some patients coming to Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) were seen failing to get admitted to the hospital due to the lack of beds in the hospital's overflowing Covid-19 unit.

Thirty-five-year-old Nadia Sultana from Damodar of Phultala upazila was brought to the hospital yesterday morning.

"She could not get admitted due to the lack of beds. We are now taking her to Dhaka for treatment," her brother Habibur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said that her situation was deteriorating fast, adding that her oxygen saturation had dropped to 85 percent on Friday night.

Khulna division has become the country's new Covid-19 hotspot with the number of deaths and cases increasing every day. According to the Directorate General of Health Services, 39 Covid-19 patients died in the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, while 35 people died on Friday.

Yesterday, the positivity rate in Khulna was 33.56 percent against 1,606 tests, while it was 38.19 percent against 3,145 tests on Friday.

KMCH is one of four hospitals treating Covid-19 patients in Khulna city, where patients from almost all districts of the division come for treatment.

As of yesterday, 423 people were admitted against 365 dedicated Covid-19 beds at the city's three hospitals.

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