

# Dengue deaths finally confirmed after months of delay

HELEMUL ALAM

After months of stalling, Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) yesterday finally announced that 25 people died of dengue at different hospitals across the country this year.

Among the deaths, five are at Dhaka Shishu Hospital, six at Square Hospital, four at Ibn Sina Hospital, three at Bangladesh Specialized Hospital, two at United Hospital, one at Green Life Medical Hospital, and four outside Dhaka.

All of them died in July and August.

An official of DGHS control room said they have decided not to review the death as it is taking time. From now they will give the data collecting directly from hospital.

Earlier, authorities had said a review is required to confirm deaths due to dengue. Now, they will publish the numbers based on hospital records. They were reviewing the 25 cases but until yesterday were yet to confirm that they died of dengue.

Earlier, DGHS Director General Prof ABM Khurshid Alam had said, "In any epidemic, you have to verify the deaths officially, otherwise you cannot announce it."

When asked why it was taking two months to verify the data, he said, "As the same doctors are treating both Covid, dengue and non-Covid patients, the process is taking time."

Some experts had raised questions about the delay in the announcement. They said a death certificate should be enough in this case. Besides, a former high official of DGHS had said that there is no need to review any dengue-related deaths.

"A review is necessary when the government has to give compensation to a victim's family. Otherwise, there is no need for review before announcing the number of deaths," he argued.

"Once a hospital confirms that a patient has died of dengue, there is no need for a verbal autopsy, as the hospital authorities' statement is enough to determine how the patient died," he added.

"Verbal autopsy" is a method of interviewing one or more people who know about the symptoms and circumstances of the deceased.

In many countries, they carry out an autopsy at the hospital after the death of a patient to improve hospital services, but there is no such provision in this country, he said.

Asked, Dr Tahmina Shirin, head of the death review committee of the government and director of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, told The Daily Star last week that those involved with the committee

do not come to the IEDCR in-person due to the pandemic situation. To carry out a death review, physical presence of the committee members is a must, for which they failed to start the process, she added.

Manzur Chowdhury, entomologist and former president of Zoological Society of Bangladesh, said area-based report on deaths, dengue infection and its mapping is necessary, and it should be published to make people aware. Mentionable, during the dengue epidemic in the country in 2019, there was confusion over the death toll, after major government hospitals stopped providing information to journalists.

Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, who led the DGHS death review committee in 2019, told The Daily Star at that time, to release the numbers the committee members assessed medical documents and treatment records of a deceased. And several months later, they conducted a verbal autopsy. As per DGHS data, 179 dengue patients had died in 2019, and 276 death cases were reviewed.

## 221 more hospitalised in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 221 people with dengue fever were admitted to hospitals in the country during 24 hours till 8am yesterday, of which only 22 are from outside Dhaka.

With them, a total of 6,321 patients have been diagnosed with dengue this year, according to Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Of the total infected, only 330 are from outside Dhaka.

A total of 3,663 people were diagnosed during the running month till yesterday morning, which indicates the fast-rising trend of the disease.

At least 2,286 people were infected in July, 272 in June, while 43 were infected in May.

Although most of the patients who were hospitalised have so far been released, 1,032 are still undergoing treatment at hospitals in Dhaka, and 70 outside the capital, DGHS data shows.

As the capital's public hospitals are overwhelmed with Covid-19 patients, those with dengue were finding it hard to get admission.

DGHS spokesperson Dr Md Nazmul Islam recently said the dengue situation could turn alarming again, but the issue can be tackled, if necessary measures are taken immediately.

# 'Stop the blame game, take responsibility'

With dengue cases on the rise, experts slam Dhaka city corporations for failing to tackle mosquito menace

If the city corporations managed to clean the containers and tyres lying inside the nooks and crannies of the city, while citizens took care of their own premises, the dengue threat wouldn't have become so massive.

ENTOMOLOGIST  
PROF KABIRUL BASHAR

Instead of going for early prevention, we wait until the eggs are hatched. There's no point in trying to kill mosquitoes only after dengue cases start rising.

URBAN PLANNER  
MOBASSHER HOSSAIN

Tyres like these should've been cleared off roadsides before dengue season hit. Instead, they're still serving as larvae breeding hotspots as dengue cases keep rising. This photo was taken from Mohammadpur's Beribadh area last week.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

We are putting in all our effort, but we also need people's support. If they could even identify one unattended tyre or container lying around and inform us, we would take action right away.

DNCC MAYOR  
MD ATIQUUL ISLAM

We cannot clean every single place. This is why we called upon people to keep their own establishments clean.

DSCC PUBLIC RELATIONS  
OFFICER  
MD ABU NASER

SIMON ALI

Certain areas within the jurisdiction of the city corporation require intensive care when it comes to Aedes mosquitoes. They need to be cleaned, fogged, and sprayed regularly -- something the city authorities have failed to do. Some experts say this is the prime reason behind the rise in this year's dengue cases.

Most of these areas are outdoors, meaning they're beyond the scope of citizens' intervention. But rather than taking responsibility, the city corporations are shifting the blame on to the people, they added.

"Instead of going for early prevention, we wait until the eggs are hatched. There's no point in trying to kill mosquitoes only after dengue cases start rising," urban planner and architect Mobassher Hossain told The Daily Star.

"The outdoor fogging and spraying they do is mostly eyewash. Instead

of actually killing off the adults and larvae, they are pushed to the roadside, and even into people's homes. Fogging should reach inside the houses," he added.

"There needs to be synergy. The city authorities need to adopt long-term plans to deal with dengue. For their part, the citizens' need to clean their toilets, air conditioners, flower vases etc. too. Only then we can contain the threat," he argued.

Entomologist Touhid Uddin Ahmed opined that often government offices themselves are breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

"If Aedes larvae are found in police-seized vehicles and inside government offices, only a city corporation can do anything about it. If they had managed to keep those places clean throughout the year, the rate of dengue infections would be much less," he said.

"For example, if you ask the city corporations, they'll tell you the police stations should control the larvae

breeding inside their premises and adjacent areas. But where will they get the insecticide and the machinery?" Ahmed asked.

"This is nothing but a blatant 'blame game'."

Ahmed also said, "If we want to stop the rising rate of infections, we will need to kill adult mosquitoes immediately, which requires effective fogging. And nobody but the city corporations have the means to do it."

"But instead of doing that, they are only focusing on the larvae, while threatening and imposing fines on people (as a way to shift the blame). This is a waste of people's time and money," Ahmed opined.

Entomologist Dr Manjur Chowdhury, former president of Zoological Society of Bangladesh, spoke of more such areas under the sole jurisdiction of the city corporations. "There's nurseries, graveyards, parks, car garages, and more," he said.

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## Raushan Ershad admitted to ICU

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition leader Raushan Ershad was admitted to the ICU of the capital's Combined Military Hospital (CMH) on Sunday due to respiratory problems and increased levels of carbon dioxide in her lungs.

Raushan went to CMH on that day for a regular health check-up, when she was diagnosed with the carbon dioxide issue. She was then admitted to the ICU, Md Mamun Hasan, assistant private secretary to the leader of the opposition, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Wife of former Bangladesh president late HM Ershad, Raushan (78), an elected lawmaker from Mymensingh-4 (Mymensingh Sadar), has been suffering from respiratory problems for

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AN OBSTACLE COURSE NO ONE ASKED FOR... Dangling electric, telephone, and internet cables have been around for so long that citizens have become desensitised to them. But ever so often, one will come off the entanglement and hang low, causing a significant but barely noticed hassle for commuters passing by, along with the electrocution risk that comes with it. On top of this, other obstacles on footpaths, like the loaded pickup-van pictured on the right, cause additional difficulty for pedestrians. This photo was taken from the capital's Kazi Nazrul Avenue near Karwan Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## EVACUATING PEOPLE FROM AFGHANISTAN Biman offered to run charter flights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several charter flight companies have contacted Biman Bangladesh Airlines for its services to evacuate several thousand people, including Afghans who worked for the American troops, from war-torn Afghanistan.

A charter flight company usually rents entire aircrafts for specific purposes.

"Several charter flight companies initially offered us to evacuate around 45,000 people from Afghanistan. In the last 15 days, we had talks with them several times on this issue," a top official of Biman told The Daily Star yesterday.

Biman Managing Director and CEO Dr Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal said they are observing the overall situation in Afghanistan and will decide soon.

"Before deciding, we will have to know whether Kabul airport has the ground handling facilities, and who will carry out passengers' immigration formalities," said the Biman MD.

Moreover, the Biman boss said, "We have also informed the insurance companies concerned, seeking their opinion on operating evacuation flights in Kabul at this time."

"We want to know from the insurance companies whether we will get insurance money, in case of any unwanted incidents involving the aircrafts," he also said.

A top Biman official, wishing anonymity, said apart from Biman, Air Asia of Malaysia and Garuda Indonesia were also offered to operate evacuation flights from Kabul.

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## MAKHULIA IN DHAMRAI

# HC questions earth filling in croplands

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday questioned the earth filling in agricultural lands by a housing company at Dhamrai in Dhaka.

The court issued a rule asking the authorities concerned of the government to show causes in four weeks why their inaction to stop earth filling in croplands at Makhulia Mouja in Dhamrai by Kaizen Limited under Aksir Nagar Land Development Project should not be declared illegal.

Officials concerned including land secretary, deputy commissioner of Dhaka, upazila nirbahi officer of Dhamrai and managing director of Kaizen Limited Touhidul Islam have been made respondents to the rule.

The HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Kamrul Hossain Mollah issued the rule after hearing a writ petition filed by five villagers of Makhulia, including Badrul Sarder, challenging the legality of earth filling in agricultural lands by Kaizen Limited under the project in Makhulia.

The HC also asked the Dhaka DC to dispose of in 60 days the application submitted by the petitioners on May 24.

Lawyers AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon and HM Shanjid Siddique appeared for the petitioners while Deputy Attorney General Nawroz MR Chowdhury represented the state.

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## Parliament goes into session Sept 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 11th parliament will go into its 14th session on September 1.

President M Abdul Hamid yesterday convened the session of parliament through exercising power bestowed upon him as per the Article 72 (1) of the constitution, said a press release of the parliament secretariat yesterday.

The session will begin at 5pm.

Before commencing House proceedings on the day, the Parliamentary Business Advisory Committee is likely to hold a meeting, with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the chair, to fix the duration and agenda of the session, added the press release.

The 13th session of the 11th parliament, which was the budget session, was prorogued on July 3 after 12 sittings.

## ETHICAL CODES FOR NEWSPAPERS

# Why it should not be formulated, HC asks govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday asked the government to explain why it should not be directed to formulate an ethical code of conduct for newspapers, form a broadcasting commission for electronic media, and stop operation of all unregistered online news portals.

The court sought the explanation from the respondents through issuing a rule upon them.

Information secretary, and chairpersons of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) and Bangladesh Press Council have been made respondents to the rule. They have to respond in a week.

The HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Kamrul Hossain Mollah issued the rule, following a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyers Rasida Chowdhury Nilu and Zaren Rahman.

In the petition, they said the body of a 21-year-old college student was recovered from her rented flat on April 26 this year, for which her family filed a case under section 360 of the Penal Code, 1860 for instigating or abetting suicide.

But some mainstream media organisations, particularly online news platforms, published the victim's photograph without blurring it.

Some news portals posted numerous reports, suggesting that the victim was of "questionable character", and due to

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# She got trafficked to save her daughter

## 3 members of trafficking gang held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab yesterday arrested three members of a gang, which allegedly trafficked more than 200 girls and women to India, including a mother and daughter.

The arrestees are Md Kalu alias Kallu (40), Md Sohag alias Nagin Sohag (32), and Billal Hossain (41).

Sohag is Kalu's nephew, while Billal was his key agent. Both Sohag and Billal have been involved in the trafficking racket for six years, said Khandaker Al Moin, Rab's Legal and Media wing director, quoting the arrestees, at a press briefing at Rab Media Centre yesterday.

A team of Rab-4 arrested them from Dhaka and Madaripur after the story of a mother rescuing her trafficked daughter from India went viral on social media.

The gang lured the 17-year-old girl from Dhaka's Mirpur with promises of a job in India. But once there, they sold her off to a brothel in Bihar. All of this took place in January this year.

After her mother came to know of her ordeal, she tried to do everything in her power to get her daughter back, but to no

avail. Finally, to rescue her daughter, the mother communicated with the gang -- without disclosing her identity -- asking for a job in India, knowing that she was going to be trafficked like her daughter.

She was soon taken to Delhi by the gang, but she was prepared for this and managed to flee their grip. Once free, she made her way to Bihar and with the help of locals managed to rescue her daughter.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees admitted their crime.

They admitted that they used to lure girls from poor families in Dhaka's Mirpur and Gazipur with jobs in beauty parlours in India, Rab's Al Moin told reporters during the briefing.

The gang, having at least 25 members, used to traffic women to India through the Sathkira border. Billal used to coordinate operations at the border, while Sohag used to hand the victims over to mastermind Kalu, he said.

The girls were sold at various brothels in India, the Rab official said. The trafficked victims were kept confined to Billal's safe

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