

# A massive surge round the corner

Health minister sounds the alarm

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid a surge in Covid cases, Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday warned that the situation was set to turn grim, putting a strain on the country's healthcare system.

There will be a massive spike in daily cases and deaths in the coming days, he said, citing analyses of the current transmission trend.

"If the situation worsens and we have 40,000 or one lakh patients, where will we treat them?" he asked.

Hospitals across the country have around 20,000 beds in total for Covid patients, he said, urging all to strictly follow the health rules in order to avert a disaster.

DATE	CONFIRMED CASES	POSITIVITY RATE
Jan 6	1,140	5%
Jan 7	1,146	6%
Jan 8	1,116	6%
Jan 9	1,491	7%
Jan 10	2,231	9%
Jan 11	2,458	9%
Jan 12	2,916	11.68%

Around 1,300 Covid patients were admitted to hospitals as of yesterday, shows DGHS data.

"Patients have already started coming to hospitals. We will see a massive spike in the number of patients over the next five to seven days. It will put pressure on doctors and nurses. People will struggle to get beds and the death rate will also go up."

The minister was speaking at an event in the capital's Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS).

The DGHS reported 2,916 new cases and four deaths in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday. The positivity rate jumped to 11.68 percent from 2.43 percent on January 1.

Health officials said the transmission rate would be much higher than reported and urged everybody to wear masks outdoors, maintain physical distance, and more importantly, get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Otherwise, the situation might slip out of hand, they warned.

At an online briefing yesterday, DGHS spokesperson Prof Robed Amin said, "Many [infected patients] are not getting tested. If they did, the number of daily cases would be much higher."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Students of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College walk through the underpass next to the school on the capital's Airport Road after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina virtually inaugurated the walkway yesterday. In July 2018, two students of the school, Dia Khanam Mim and Abdul Karim, were killed on the spot when a bus ploughed into a crowd.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Assign staff to help students cross roads

PM asks schools



UNB, DHAKA

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said educational institutions up to higher secondary level must assign their own staff to make sure their students cross roads safely.

"Though traffic police will be there to help them, the school authorities must be careful and their own staff will have to be there so that students can cross roads safely ... I think our education ministry can issue a directive to the schools -- from primary to higher secondary levels -- in this regard," she said.

The PM said this while inaugurating the four newly constructed projects implemented under the Road Transport and Highways Division, joining a programme virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

The projects are: Pedestrian Underpass adjacent to Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College on Dhaka Airport Highway, Sylhet City Bypass-Garrison Link 4-lane Highway, Balukhali (Cox's Bazar)-Ghundhum (Bandarban) Border Link-Road, and 500-metre

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## RHD ROAD SAFETY DIVISION

# Dropped when needed most?

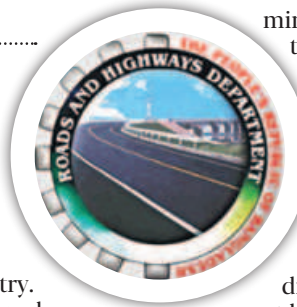
TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

At a time when there's a heightened public concern over traffic deaths and safety, the Road Safety Division of the RHD may soon cease to exist.

And it may happen despite a proposal from the RHD to rather expand and strengthen it, considering how reckless driving and violations of traffic rules are claiming lives every day throughout the country.

The division was formed under the Roads and Highways Department to deal with issues related to road safety. Currently, an executive engineer is at its helm.

In a proposal sent to the public administration



ministry in early 2020, the RHD suggested that the division be expanded into a circle under a new wing. It also proposed several changes in the existing organogram with additional manpower.

In October last year, the ministry partially approved some of the changes but did not give its nod to the new wing.

This means that once the new organogram comes into force, the road safety division will cease to exist and the RHD would not have any dedicated manpower to take road safety measures like conducting audits, investigating accidents or taking corrective steps.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Mask wearing is the exception rather than the norm while social distancing is ignored altogether at a roadside winter wear market in the capital's Gulistan. As the Covid-19 infection rate surges, such disregard for health guidelines could weaken the country's fight against the pandemic. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

## JAN 16 NCC POLLS

# Voters fear chaos, CEC pledges fairness

Ivy, Taimur believe polling will be peaceful

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA AND SANAD SAHA

With the Narayanganj city polls only two days away, voters fear there may be chaos on election day over taking control of polling centres by supporters of some ward councillor candidates.

However, two heavyweight mayor candidates -- Selina Hayat Ivy and Taimur Alam Khandakar -- hope the voting will be held peacefully on Sunday.

A total of 148 councillor hopefuls are contesting polls in 27 wards of Narayanganj City Corporation while 34 women are running for nine reserved seats of women councillors.

Meanwhile, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda yesterday said Sunday's election would be held in a free and fair manner as polls officials and the local administration were working sincerely.

He urged the presiding officers not to allow any voter in polling centres without wearing mask and to



ensure social distancing as the Covid-19 situation was getting worse in the country.

### CONCERN REMAINS

Wising anonymity, a voter in the city's Bandar area said all six councillor candidates in ward-22 are campaigning desperately to win the polls.

"Possibilities are there that there would be chaos centring the councillor elections. Supporters of a candidate are already intimidating voters into casting ballots for their councillor hopeful," he added.

Raihan Hossain, a voter in ward-1, said supporters of Omar Farooq and Mahmudur Rahman, two major councillor hopefuls in the ward, have clashed several times since the allocation of electoral symbols among the candidates on December 28.

"There are fears such a rivalry would lead to chaos on polling day," he added.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

**PREMIUM & ELEGANT**

INTRODUCING AKIJ TABLEWARE  
THE PERFECT COMBINATION  
OF QUALITY AND STYLE.

**AKIJ tableware**  
BRING OUT THE BEST

Hotline: +880 1728 017769 /akijtableware