

Covid cases over 100 after 2 months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After around two and a half months, the number of Covid-19 cases surpassed 100-mark yesterday as the health directorate reported 119 cases countrywide.

On March 25, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) reported 102 cases.

Since then, the numbers of daily confirmed cases under the 100-mark and hit the lowest, four cases, on May 5.

Despite an increase later, the numbers remained below 50 until June 6. The number has continued to rise since then.

In the past week ending yesterday, the number of cases has increased by around 81 percent compared to the preceding week.

The positivity rate has also increased.

Yesterday, the DGHS reported 2.06 percent positivity rate against 5,280 samples tested in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

No Covid-19 patient, however, died yesterday.

So far, the Covid-19 has claimed 29,131 lives in the country.

The first cases of Covid-19 were reported on March 8, 2020. Since then, more than 19.54 lakh confirmed cases of Covid-19 were reported as of yesterday.

Russia opens rebranded McDonald's restaurants

REUTERS

It might look and smell like McDonald's but now it's Vkusno & tochka. The golden arches are gone, the Filet-O-Fish is simply a fish burger. The Big Mac has left Russia.

A new era for Russia's fast-food and economic scene dawned on Sunday, as McDonald's MCD.N restaurants flung open their doors in Moscow under new Russian ownership and with the new name, which translates as "Tasty and that's it".



An SUV goes against traffic on Hare Road in the capital yesterday. Drivers, especially those employed by people with influence, are often seen putting other road users in danger.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Reshuffle in ACC to hurt high-profile probes

Say officials transferred en masse

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

The recent reshuffle in the Anti-Corruption Commission would hamper investigation of many high-profile corruption cases, said officials who have been transferred.

In an order issued on June 1, the ACC transferred 39 assistant and deputy directors to different districts from its headquarters in Dhaka. They have also been asked to join their new workplaces by June 15; they will otherwise be released, the commission said.

Many of the 39 mid-rank officials are involved in probing high-profile graft cases and the investigations would now be delayed, the officials said, adding that they were transferred in the name of serving at a workplace for at least three years.

They alleged that the rule was not followed for officials who have come from admin and judicial cadres.

Although the commission pointed out that the transfer was nothing but a regular process, the officials alleged that the authorities made the decision as a punishment for forming an association.

An ACC deputy director, preferring to be unnamed, said after the sacking of deputy assistant director Sharif Uddin in February over "violating ACC rules", the officials became united in protests. They

also formed Dudak Service Association the same month for their welfare.

"We're preparing for registration with the Department of Social Welfare and awaiting permission from high-ups in this regard. But instead of giving us permission, the authorities transferred the association

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members."

"All the 39 officials belong to the association," said the deputy director.

In February, the association was formed with 139 members, including first-class and second-class officers, from the headquarters and districts.

At that time, officials said they were having a hard time keeping faith in the high-ups, who came on deputation from admin cadre and have been playing vital roles in decision-making at the commission.

"They have transferred us as a

punishment for forming the association," the deputy director added.

Another official, wishing not to be named, said, "The commission's decision will hamper the ongoing probes of the high-profile corruption cases as the new officials will find it difficult to move forward with the investigations."

Contacted, ACC's Secretary Mahbub Hossain rejected the claim and said in a short text, "It's not right."

This correspondent tried to get his explanation over phone, but he did not pick up.

ACC Commissioner (Investigation) Jahurul Haque, however, said transfer was a regular process. "We've recently opened some new offices in some districts. We need experienced officers there."

He added that the transferred officials had been at the same workplace for over three years and they were getting involved in other activities. "They have become disappointed as their interests are hurt."

According to ACC website updated on April 10, 2019, out of 629 deputy, deputy assistant and assistant directors, 431 work in the ACC headquarters, from where major corruption cases, scrutiny, intelligence, hotline service and graft prevention activities are dealt with.

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Hundi at play again

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Talking to this newspaper, several economists said banks are losing fast the advantage they enjoyed at the height of the pandemic when the informal channels mostly remained closed. But as the Covid situation improved, remitters switched to informal channels again.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said exchange rate management is crucial in encouraging remitters to use the formal channels.

Pointing to the recent volatility in the forex market, he said there was a difference of Tk 6-7 between the kerb market rate and the official exchange rate of the dollar.

Such a gap should not be more than Tk 2-3, he said, adding that the persistence of a gap bigger than this raises concern over remitters opting for informal channels.

Yesterday, the central bank depreciated the exchange rate of the greenback to Tk 92 per dollar, the 12th depreciation this year, in an effort to stabilise the forex market.

Earlier on June 2, the BB decided to allow the exchange rates of the taka to float against the US dollar for the first time in a decade.

On the central bank move, Mustafizur said, "This will significantly reduce the tendency for remitters to switch to informal channels from the formal ones."

He, however, said the country is seeing a growth in inward remittance in the current fiscal year compared to the pre-Covid period (FY19-20), maintaining the "historical trend".

The BMET data shows Bangladesh saw annual growth in inward remittance for five consecutive years since 2017.

Mustafizur also said the recent outflow of a high number of fresh migrant workers is likely to boost inward remittance within a year, but there is a need for enhanced monitoring and a robust campaign highlighting the risk of sending remittance through informal channels.

With a robust campaign targeting fresh migrants, inward remittance in the next fiscal year could even touch \$24.7 billion received in 2020-2021, he hoped.

According to government data, 7.99 lakh fresh migrant workers went to different countries in 10 months of this fiscal year.

Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, said the increase in inward remittance in fiscal 2020-2021 was mainly due to the remitters switching to formal channels from informal ones amid the pandemic.

Besides, many returnee migrants brought all their savings home, boosting inward remittance, he noted.

As the Covid situation improved and activities in informal channels got back to normal, many switched

back to the informal channels for sending money, he said.

Zahid further said "visa trade" is also another reason for which remittance is sent through unauthorised channels.

"There is a 'grey area' in such visa trade," he said, adding that host countries have to come forward to stop such malpractices since Bangladesh cannot stop it alone.

The economist suggested that the National Board of Revenue improve its intelligence capabilities to detect under-invoicing -- an act of showing the price of an item on an invoice lower than the actual one.

Through under-invoicing, many importers try to evade tax by making a part of payment through informal channels, he said.

Md Serajul Islam, executive director and spokesperson for Bangladesh Bank, said migrants sent their earnings through proper channels at the height of the pandemic as their mobility was restricted at that time. Besides, many migrants had to return home permanently.

He further said the government has been trying to fuel growth in inward remittance by giving cash incentives.

The cash incentive for remitting through the banking channel has been raised to 2.5 percent from 2 percent, Serajul pointed out.

The central bank has recommended a further increase in the incentive, he said without elaborating.

Kamal takes flak in JS for amnesty

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the country legally, then there is no need for a money laundering law in Bangladesh, he further said.

"This [amnesty] will encourage people to amass money through illegal means," he added.

Meanwhile, another JP MP Shameem Haider Patwary asked the finance minister to rethink the matter.

Govt to invite Khaleda, Yunus

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Stages were being set at the Mawa end in this regard.

He said Hasina will inaugurate the bridge at 10:00am and then take part in a rally at the Mawa end. Other politicians, dignitaries and foreign diplomats will also be present there.

The PM will then cross the bridge and then take part in another rally at then Janjira end, Quader said.

At a June 4 programme, Quader verbally invited Mercy Tembon, World Bank's country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan, to the opening ceremony.

That day he told reporters that BNP

This amnesty should not be availed if there is any specific allegation of money laundering, he said.

Such an amnesty was given in India but that failed to bring any success, he added.

Gonoforum MP Mokabbir Khan demanded punishment of the top 12 corrupts in the country.

"By doing this, the government will be able

to bring down 50 percent corruption in the country. If not, I will resign from the parliament," he said.

Pran Gopal Dutta, MP of the ruling Awami League, also asked the finance minister to revise the proposal.

"There is no positive impact of this amnesty. If the money launderers were honest, they would have kept the money in the country," he said.

Chairperson Khaleda Zia would also be invited to the inauguration ceremony "if the relevant law permits". Law Minister Anisul Huq later said there was no legal bar in this regard.

In 2012, the World Bank backtracked on its \$1.2 billion money-lending deal for the Padma Bridge construction on allegations of corruption, which were later rejected by a Canadian court.

The decision deteriorated the relations between Bangladesh and the WB.

On several occasions, the PM accused Yunus of playing a role behind the cancellation of the WB loan.

Minibus bomb attack kills four in Afghan capital: police

AFP, Kabul

A bomb blast on a minibus killed at least four people and injured several others in the Afghan capital on Saturday, police said.

The explosion in an eastern district of Kabul was the latest in a series of deadly attacks that have rocked Afghanistan in recent months, a little under a year since the Taliban takeover.

A team of Taliban security personnel had been deployed to the area to investigate the bombing, police spokesman Khalid Zadrar told AFP.

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the bombing that occurred in a district mainly inhabited by members of the Sunni Pashtun community.

HC questions legality of ACC rule

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday questioned the legality of a section of the ACC rules that curtailed individual's right to directly lodge corruption case with the court.

The court issued a rule asking the ACC and the government to explain in 10 days why section 13(3) of the Anti-Corruption Commission (Amendment) Rules 2019 should not be declared illegal and scrapped as the section allegedly damaged the individual's right to directly file corruption case with the court and curtailed the court's authority to directly accept such case for trial.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Kazi Md Ejarul Haque Akondo came up with rule.

June 25 SSC exam rescheduled to June 24

UNB, Dhaka

The Secondary School Certificate and its equivalent examinations for June 25 have been shifted to June 24.

The decision was made because of the inauguration of the Padma Bridge, said Education Minister Dipu Moni yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to inaugurate the Padma Bridge on June 25.

Students will take the English 2nd paper test on the first day of the exams.

Besides, the activities of all coaching centres across the country will remain suspended from June 15 to July 7 as the SSC examinations are scheduled to begin on June 19, she said.

Like the previous year, the examinations will be held on shortened syllabus.

A total of 20,21,868 students are expected to sit for the examinations.

Jet fuel price goes up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local airlines are about to face a blow both at home and abroad as the price of jet fuel increased again in the domestic market.

The price of jet fuel for international airlines, however, remained unchanged.

Sources in the aviation industry said passengers would have to pay more for the price hike.

This is the 15th time Padma Oil Company Limited increased price of jet fuel in the last 19 months.

The price of jet fuel is now Tk 111 per litre after it was raised by Tk 5 per litre.

Destiny director sent to jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Destiny-2000 director Farha Diba was sent to jail in a money laundering case yesterday.

Earlier, she was sentenced -- in absentia -- to eight years imprisonment in the case.

Judge Shaikh Nazmul Alam of the Special Judge's Court-4 of Dhaka passed the order.

Farha surrendered before the court through her lawyer, seeking bail in the case, said sources.

The same court on May 12 sentenced her with the imprisonment and fined her Tk 40 crore, in default of which she will have to serve two more years in jail.

The judge also sentenced Destiny-2000 managing director Mohammad Rafiqul Amin, to 12 years and fined Tk 200 crore, in default of which he would have to serve three years in prison.

EC's hands are tied

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for Arfanul Haque Rifat, the ruling AL-nominated mayoral candidate.

Amid such a situation, the EC on June 8 issued a letter to Bahauddin asking him to leave his constituency.

Later, he filed a petition with the High Court challenging the directive.

In response, the HC issued a rule asking the EC to explain as to why this directive should not be declared contradictory to the constitution.

Meanwhile, independent mayoral candidate Monirul Haque Sakku, who is the

former joint secretary of Cumilla South District unit BNP, yesterday unveiled his electoral manifesto.

He served as the city mayor for two consecutive terms since 2012.

Citing that he undertook many development activities in the city, Sakku vowed to continue the development work, if he is re-elected.

Replying to a question, he said he would accept the polls result whatever it may be, if the election is held in a fair manner.

[Our Cumilla correspondent contributed to this report.]

Ex-DGHS DG

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All the accused pleaded not guilty and demanded justice after Judge Al Asad Md Asifuzzaman of Special Judge's Court of Dhaka yesterday read out the charges to them, said Anti-Corruption Commission Public Prosecutor Mahmud Hossain Jahangir.

Earlier in the day, the judge dismissed their petitions seeking discharge from the case, added the state lawyer.

The judge fixed July 4 for starting trial of the case.

The accused were charged for their alleged involvement in embezzlement of government funds in the name of coronavirus sample collection and treatment without having any licence to do so.

According to the case statement, the accused pocketed over Tk 1.37 crore through fake Covid tests in the government-run lab Nipson.

The ACC filed the case against Shahed and four

others, excluding the name of Azad on September 22 of 2020.

On September 30 last year, ACC Deputy Director Md Farid Ahmed Patwary, also investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Senior Special Judge's Court of Dhaka.

In the charge sheet, Azad, former director general of DGHS, was named as evidence regarding his involvement in the scam was found during the investigation.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1 the treatment would temporarily relieve her of heart-related issues.

"Khaleda's life will be in danger if she is not sent abroad for advanced treatment," he added.

The government will have to bear all the responsibilities if any unwanted event takes place, he added.