



More and more citizens are wearing dust masks, some to fend off pollution, and many in fear of coronavirus. Vendors are busy selling this in-demand item, while stocks last. The photos were taken recently at Shahbagh. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Probe alleged negligence

JP lawmaker on coronavirus screening at airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party MP Mujibul Haque yesterday in parliament demanded that the government investigates into the allegations of negligence in screening of inbound passengers at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to prevent spread of novel coronavirus.

The opposition lawmaker also demanded that the health minister makes a statement in the House under section 300 of the rules of procedure of parliament to assure people of the matter.

Mujibul came up with the demand during an unscheduled discussion in parliament with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the chair.

Citing news based on a Facebook video of a China returnee passenger, Mujibul said passengers had to wait for five hours after arriving at Dhaka airport. There was no doctor to attend to them. Besides, their health check-up was not done, he added.

"After five hours of waiting, they were given documents saying that they have gone through screening at the airport. There were allegations of negligence regarding screening of incoming passengers at the airport. Some passengers went out of the airport without screening at night," said the opposition lawmaker.

He also said this negligence was in no way acceptable. He demanded the health minister's attention in this regard and urgent inquiry into the matter.

The novel coronavirus -- the seventh strain of the virus -- was first detected in China's Wuhan city in December. At least

560 people have died with more than 22,500 confirmed cases around the world as of yesterday. Most of the cases have been reported in China.

On an average, 12,000 passengers land at Dhaka airport daily. All of them have to go through thermal screening and those coming from China are later screened by doctors separately.

In the last 15 days till February 5, around 6,789 passengers from China have been screened at the airport, said doctors.

"The way passengers are being screened at the airport, nobody can guarantee that the virus would not be transmitted. It's a serious health concern and we should be careful about every minor details," Prof Saif Ullah Munshi, a virologist, told The Daily Star on February 4.

"It's basic [protocol] that any passenger suspected of carrying the virus must remain separated from others," said Prof Saif, chairman of BSMU's virology department.

Asked, Dr Shajriar Sajjat, assistant health director at the airport, said, "There is no separate immigration booth for passengers from China. As a result, the purpose of the screening is not being fully met now. We asked our higher authorities to take steps in this regard."

Meanwhile, health officials at the airport said lack of adequate manpower and other facilities were making it difficult for them to screen inbound passengers.

There are only seven doctors, 10 nurses and 20 staff members assigned by the

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'Withdraw DLitt of 3 Pakistanis'

DU teachers, students demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Teachers and students of Dhaka University's (DU) linguistics department yesterday organised a sit-in, demanding withdrawal of honorary Doctor of Letters (DLitt) degrees of former Pakistani autocrat ruler Ayub Khan, president Iskandar Mirza and prime minister Khawaja Nazimuddin.

DU had conferred the honorary degrees to them before the Liberation War.

They waged the sit-in programme in front of Raju memorial sculpture at 11am to press home their demands.

Referring to the three as oppressors and enemies of the country, Tuhin Mandal, a participant of the protest, said DU authorities should have withdrawn the degrees a long time ago for their heinous roles during the Liberation War and oppressive rule when they were in power in undivided Pakistan.

FEAR OF CORONAVIRUS

Face mask stocks run out as demand soars

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

Just two weeks ago, Ahmed Pharmacy, a small medicine store at Farmgate, had less than five customers looking for face masks.

But in the past week, the number of people buying masks has almost quadrupled, as panic around coronavirus spread. The pharmacy is almost out of disposable surgical and N95 masks.

With the increasing demand, price has also increased by two to three times.

Experts and health authorities said those who are affected by flu need to wear mask to stop transmission of the disease, but the masks would have little utility for those who are physically well.

People, however, are prone to misconception, they said.

The actual retail price for one surgical mask is Tk 5, while N95 masks should cost Tk 30.

Like Ahmed Pharmacy, the scenario is similar at all medicine stores and street-side stalls in Farmgate.

Sources in other parts of the city including Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Jatrabari, Mohammadpur College Gate, Mohakhali, and Gabtoli also reported a shortage of face masks.

"We have only half a box (25 pieces) of

surgical masks left; N95 masks are already out of stock. The companies are also not supplying anymore," Foisal Ahmed, owner of Ahmed Pharmacy told The Daily Star.

As demand increased, this pharmacy is selling the rest of the surgical masks at Tk 10.

"If you visit other pharmacies on Green Road, you would find they are selling it for Tk 15, or are already out of stock," Foisal added.

This correspondent later visited several medicine shops and street vendors at Green Road and Indira Road near Tejgaon College. No shop or street vendor has stock of pollution-blocking N95 masks while surgical masks were a rare find.

"I sent my nephew to Mitford to buy N95 masks; they asked for Tk 1,200 for a dozen. He returned without buying," said Md Dulal, a street vendor in front of Ananda Cinema Hall in Farmgate.

Shagor Hassan, a local of Adabor, said, "I bought a mask from my area's pharmacy about two weeks ago to fend off Dhaka's polluted air. A few days ago, a friend asked me to get a mask for her, so I went back to the store."

"To my surprise, they had suddenly run out of masks. I checked a few shops nearby

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'Bring rapists to book'

Call raised at human chain in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a human chain yesterday demanded exemplary punishment for those who have raped women and children of indigenous communities, including the 14-year-old Tripura girl raped at Chakaria upazila in Cox's Bazar six days ago.

They also demanded compensation to family of the teenager, and formation of a special cell to take action against all sorts of violence against indigenous women and children.

Leaders of different indigenous communities, university teachers, rights activists and students formed the human chain in front of National Museum.

The Tripura victim, a ninth-grader, was raped on January 31 after she went out of her hostel in Lama's Hebron Mission area to drink water from a tubewell nearby.

Police arrested a man, said to be an Awami League activist, on charge of raping the girl.

Falguni Tripura, coordinator of

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Demanding exemplary punishment for rapists, members of indigenous communities, activists, teachers and students formed a human chain in front of National Museum yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Badrul Ahsan passes away



CIT DESK

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan, a popular columnist for The Daily Star and former publisher and editor of now defunct First News, passed away early yesterday.

He breathed his last in the capital's Uttara around 1am.

He was 60.

His first namaz-e-janaza was held yesterday at Gulshan Azad Masjid after Zohr prayers. He was buried at his family graveyard in Narsingdi after a second janaza.

Badrul was a senior official of Standard Chartered Bank and was stationed in Dubai for a long time.

He started writing his column, Crosstalk, in The Daily Star in 2000.

According to The

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By-polls to Taposh's seat on March 21

Gaibandha-3, Bagerhat-4 same day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

By-elections to three constituencies, including Dhaka-10, will be held on March 21.

Dhaka-10 fell vacant on December 27, after mayor-elect Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh resigned as lawmaker to contest the Dhaka city polls.

The other two constituencies are: Gaibandha-3 and Bagerhat-4.

Gaibandha-3 and Bagerhat-4 went vacant on December 29 and January 10, following deaths of Awami League lawmakers Yunus Ali Sarker and Md Mozammel Hossain respectively.

Election Commission Secretary Md Alamgir announced the by-polls schedule after a meeting at the commission yesterday.

Of the three, electronic voting machines (EVM) will be used in the by-polls to Dhaka-10 while the rest will be held with traditional ballot boxes.

The last date for submitting nomination papers is February 19 and last date for withdrawal of candidacy is February 29.

The EC will scrutinise nomination papers on February 23.

According to the constitution, it is mandatory to hold by-polls to elect a new public representative within 90 days after a constituency falls vacant.

HUMAN RESOURCE EXPORT TO MALAYSIA

Minister stresses chalking out 'zero-cost' mechanism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad yesterday said he will welcome Malaysia's proposal on sending migrant workers to the Southeast Asian country under a "zero-cost" migration policy.

"Zero-cost migration can be put in place. However, they have to clarify what they mean by 'zero-cost'," he told journalists at his ministry office.

He stressed chalking a mechanism for "zero-cost" migration.

"No one will be happier than I if a mechanism of zero-cost migration is being set," he said, adding that his mandate at the ministry is to reduce workers' expenditure and increase employment opportunities for them.

A Malaysian delegate will visit Bangladesh at the end of this month, as a Joint Working Group meeting between the two countries over reopening Malaysia's labour market for Bangladeshi workers is scheduled to take place on February 24 in Dhaka, said the minister.

Malaysian Human Resources Minister M Kulasegaran on January 15 said they would soon finalise a zero-cost labour recruitment deal with Bangladesh.

"I'm sending the Malaysia-Bangladesh Joint Working Group to Dhaka, Bangladesh, soon to iron out the remaining issues on the zero-cost recruitment agreement," Kulasegaran told Malaysian media.

Minister Imran Ahmad said now everyone including the United Nations and ILO are putting focus on cost of migration and Bangladesh has also been working to reduce migration cost for the workers.

The minister said dates over the JWG meeting were deferred couple of times in September and November last year, mainly because of disagreement from the Malaysian counterparts.

Responding to a query, he said he will visit the United Arab Emirates this week where talks over reopening the country's labour market for Bangladeshi workers can take place.

Meanwhile, following the recently-

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