

4 returnees whisked off to hospital from airport

Bangladeshi infected with COVID-19 in UAE; British-Bangladeshi man dies in UK

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four people, including a woman and her two-year-old daughter, were sent to a hospital after they arrived at Dhaka airport from abroad yesterday.

The girl was tested positive for coronavirus and had been taking treatment in Singapore, said Shahriar Sajjat, assistant health director at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

Meanwhile, a British-Bangladeshi man, aged 60, died of coronavirus infection yesterday at a hospital in Manchester.

He visited Italy over a week ago, BBC Bangla reports, quoting his son.

The two others sent to the hospital yesterday had high fever, Group Captain AHM Touhid-ul Ahsan told The Daily Star.

Of them, one came from Italy and another from Spain.

On Sunday, the government confirmed three cases of coronavirus. Two of them recently returned from Italy. The other person came in contact with one of them.

"We have no information on when they returned and by which airline. We are trying to find out because the other passengers, crew, and pilots of that flight need to be tested."

According to reports, a Bangladeshi citizen tested positive in the UAE.

Health officials in Dhaka yesterday held several press conferences and asked people not to panic.

IEDCR Director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora said, "We have earlier collected blood samples of four people. They tested negative."

Since the announcement of confirmed coronavirus cases, IEDCR got 509 calls -- of which, 479 were about coronavirus.

"Eighteen people came to IEDCR in person. We collected blood samples of four," Prof Sabrina said.

Regarding the infected persons, she said two of them had fever four to seven days after coming to the country.

World Health Organisation Representative in Bangladesh Dr Bardan Jung Rana said, "Having a case in Bangladesh is not a surprise... but how early the country can detect and contain them is the main concern."

All the ministries, public and private organisations as well as the general public need to act, he said.

"Public education is absolutely important at this moment," he said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also urged people not to panic and to avoid crowded places.

The PM made the call at the weekly cabinet meeting in her office, reports UNB.

"Since it's a contagious virus, her directive is to avoid mass gatherings as much as possible," Ashadul Islam, secretary of Health Services Division, told a press briefing.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque said the government has no plan to close schools and colleges.

The minister asked the educational institutions to increase the use of masks and sanitisers and encourage handwashing. He added that the government will take necessary steps to rein in the price of masks, handwashing soaps and sanitisers.

The minister said the government has kept 400 beds in Dhaka for treatment of coronavirus infected people while every district has 100 beds.

He also requested Bangladeshi expatriates living in different countries not to return now.

Kerala shows the way to tackle COVID-19

The Indian state's robust health system successfully handled the nation's first three positive cases

PTI, Kerala

As India braces itself to tackle fresh incidences of coronavirus, Kerala's successful handling of the nation's first three positive cases, backed by a rigid protocol, including a 28-day quarantine to contain its spread, offers a model to others.

With a strong chain of command, starting from the health department to field workers, the state has shown the way to the rest of the country on dealing with such an outbreak, health officials here said.

"We have almost contained the situation in Kerala, but that does not mean that we are safe. Yes, we treated and cured three patients, but that does not mean that we will lower our guard," health minister K K Shailaja told PTI.

Kerala, she said, has also decided to intensify surveillance, especially at airports, railway stations and bus depots.

The three positive cases -- all medical students from Wuhan, epicentre of the virus, were reported from Alapuzha, Thrissur and Kasaragod districts. They have been discharged from hospitals and none of them are under home quarantine.

Two of them had travelled by the same flight from Wuhan.

The minister said the health department is fully equipped to deal with the coronavirus scare, guided by the protocol set out by Indian Council of Medical Research and National Institute of Virology.

Explaining how the state dealt with the situation, she said health department officials traced those who returned to Kerala from infected areas and isolated them even if they had minor symptoms. The rest were home quarantined.

"Trained health workers were deployed to assist them. We monitored everyone and held daily review meetings," she said.

Kerala is also the only state which strictly mandates 28 days of home quarantine for those returning from COVID-19 countries, while it is 14 days at the national level.

Dr Amar Fettle, the state Nodal Officer of Public Health Emergency of International Concern, said the cooperation of patients, their families and people of Kerala, who acted as per the health department's directions, deserved laurels.

"We have a strong chain of command, starting from the health minister, the health secretary, directors of health services, medical education, mission directors and all.

"We have very specific instructions on case definitions on what action has to be taken and everything was categorised very well. Matrices were prepared which figured every single situation which would arise," Fettle said.

A senior medical official said the severity of the disease would depend on how three factors (the agent factor, the macro or micro environment of

the local area and the immunity of the host), interact in a dynamic fashion.

Interplay of such factors led to a mild manifestation of the infection in the three students, who had only respiratory symptoms.

"We gave them the standard treatment for any respiratory symptoms, including coverage for any other diseases like H1N1 others," the official said.

The health department took supportive measure like antibiotics, when necessary and vitamins, looked after the diet and even took care of stress levels of the students, he said.

Totally, 4,378 people had been under surveillance at isolation wards in hospitals and home quarantine till March 2.

Till March 3, 411 people were under surveillance in Kerala, the break up being 388 in home quarantine and 23 in isolation wards in hospitals.

Anxiety, stigma and frustration were among many fears voiced by those who returned from China and affected nations.

People are even scared to move anywhere near wards housing those under isolation.

While some students, whose parents are in China, had complained to health officials that they were being made fun of in schools, others said their parents were allegedly prevented by nearby shop owners here to open their commercial establishments, fearing spread of the virus.

To address these issues, the Kerala government came up with motivational messages, SMSs and psychological support.

The medical department is providing counselling services to the affected. All people under home isolation and hospital isolation have been sent motivational messages as SMS.

To provide psychosocial support to families of those suspected to be infected, 215 people have been deployed across Kerala and 3,646 tele counselling services provided till date.

Dr P S Kiran, state nodal officer, Mental Health programme, told PTI "we categorised their experiences, stress, depression and stigma. Most of those quarantined are anxiety prone."

A student said the stigma prevailed even after the 28 day quarantine period, with friends not being allowed to mingle, Dr Kiran said.

Fettle said Kerala was like a "Gaulish village" in the Asterix and Obelix comics, where the Gauls always fought among themselves due to differences of opinion but always united and fought whenever there was a common enemy.

Though the situation is under control in Kerala, health staff are still under high alert.

Airports, including domestic terminals are still under surveillance and field surveillance is on to trace anyone who reached the state through any other mode of transport, he said.



Migrant workers waiting in a long queue on the Sonargaon hotel premises in the capital to buy plane tickets to Saudi Arabia. Most of them said they came home on vacation but decided to go back as soon as possible, fearing the kingdom may impose a travel ban anytime due to global coronavirus outbreak. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Screening still lax at Dhaka airport

FROM PAGE 1

As they were crossing through the thermal scanner archway, a DGHS official was checking their body temperature using a hand-held infrared thermometer. Four other officials were seen providing health declaration forms to the passengers.

"We are providing health cards to passengers if they hadn't got those already," Jahirul Islam, assistant health director at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) told The Daily Star there.

While he was speaking, many passengers were seen leaving the desk without submitting the filled-in forms.

It was evident that the few health officials were struggling to do the screening in a disciplined way, as around 50 passengers gathered in front of the desk at a time.

All the health officials were wearing masks, but only one of them was in a disposable apron. Only two of them were wearing hand gloves.

When virologists' attention was drawn to the matter, they said those protective gears were not enough to prevent coronavirus infection, and the health officials run the risks of getting

infected with coronavirus. The virus then may also spread to others, they said.

Asked, Jahirul said, "We wear special PPE [personal protective equipment] in case of any serious situation. We don't have enough supply."

There was only a small bottle of hand sanitiser at the health desk. None of the passengers was using it.

Besides, these correspondents were at the airport for around two-and-a-half hours, but they did not see any sort of disinfection activity.

Airport sources said there has been no disinfection activity whatsoever at the HSIA.

To make the matter worse, passengers from different countries, except China, were seen using the same immigration booths.

So far, the novel coronavirus has hit more than 109 countries with 1,11,354 confirmed cases of infection. Among the infected, 3,892 have died and 62,683 have recovered.

Most of the cases were reported in China. Outside China, Italy has faced the worst outbreak with 7,375 confirmed cases and 366 deaths.

Bangladesh has so far three confirmed

cases -- two males and a female. Two of them returned from Italy recently.

Covid-19 -- the seventh strain of the virus that was first detected in China's Wuhan city in December -- can hide inside human body for up to 14 days without showing any symptom, according to WHO.

Unlike in Bangladesh, some of the major international airports have taken preventive safety measures against the spread of Covid-19.

For example, the Prague airport in the Czech Republic has designated separate gates for all passengers arriving from Italy, one of the heavily infected country.

Airline crew flying to and from South Korean airports are being offered hazardous-material suits, in addition to disinfecting planes more frequently, after the first case of coronavirus infection was reported in South Korea. EXPERTS' TAKE

Termining the screening measures at the Dhaka airport lax, experts said any loophole could be costly.

They stressed the need for keeping passengers from countries with high number of infections separated from

others at the airport.

"The screening process should be vigorous. A slight oversight could turn costly," Prof Muzaherul Huq, former regional director of WHO's South East Asia region, told The Daily Star.

Prof Saif Ullah Munshi, chairman of the department of Virology at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said, "Passengers from countries with high number of passengers must be screened separately. Besides, all planes and luggage of the passengers should also be disinfected. Otherwise, the existing screening would not work."

"Honourable prime minister has directed a halt to providing Bangladeshi visa to people from coronavirus-hit countries. We had been pressing for it from the beginning," he said.

Despite repeated attempts, DGHS Director General Prof Abul Kalam Azad could not be reached over phone for comments.

In the meantime, the aviation keeps suffering a massive blow in the aftermath of coronavirus outbreak as the number of outgoing and incoming air passengers from Dhaka has tumbled, officials said.

Leave some for everyone

FROM PAGE 1

"The people who used to buy one refill packet of handwash at a time, are now buying four to five. It may cause a price hike of these products," he said.

Mostafizur Rahman Sikder, a pharmacist in the city's Tejturi Bazar, said panic-buying would cause an artificial shortage of these products.

"We ran out of masks and hand sanitisers yesterday evening. We have a few packets of handwash and antiseptic liquid. These are very necessary. How are we going to meet people's demands, particularly of those who are unwell?" he wondered.

Many -- buyers and sellers alike -- blame a group of people who are buying more of the products than necessary, leading to a hike in prices.

Mohammad Mehedy, a shopper in Farmgate, said he had to buy a mask at Tk 150, which cost about Tk 20 to 30 before.

"I needed it badly for my child. That's why I bought it. I urge people not to buy such necessary products in large numbers," he said.

Another shopper, Riyadul Islam, said, "We are responsible for the shortage. We wouldn't have faced this situation if some people didn't buy more than necessary."

Ghulam Rahman, president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh, however said the crisis was not only down to the buyers, but also dishonest traders, adding some were taking advantage of the current situation to hike prices and make extra profits.

He urged the government to take tough measures against this.

Against the backdrop, a group of black-marketers have become active in the city's wholesale medicine markets in Islampur, Babubazar and Mitford area.

Wholesalers said a group of

dishonest traders, with help of some brokers, are running the black market to make extra profit.

"Some traders tell their customers that they ran out of masks and hand sanitisers, but they sell those at two to three times higher prices in the black market in the evening," said Nurul Alam, a medicine shop owner in Islampur Road.

This newspaper also found some pharmacies putting up signs saying they have no masks to sell.

A mask trader of Amin Market in Babubazar area said that wholesale rate of a face mask was Tk 1.40, but it was now being sold for Tk 5 per piece -- rising to Tk 40 at the retail level.

Considering the situation, Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) yesterday afternoon held a meeting with medicine manufacturers and marketers to maintain the supply of the necessary

cleaning materials and control the prices.

During the meeting, they decided to take legal action against those who would sell hand sanitisers at higher prices and directed retailers not to sell more than one piece at a time.

They also directed the manufacturers not to provide their distributors more than 500 pieces of the sanitisers at a time in one invoice, and decided to publish the fixed retail prices of the materials in national dailies.

Around 3:00pm today, the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection (DNCRP) temporarily shut down two medicine shops in Gulshan for hiking prices of masks and hand sanitisers.

"These shops were selling masks at Tk 200 to 230 each, whereas the actual price is about Tk 50," said Monjur Mohammad Shahriar, deputy director of DNCRP.

Batsmen blaze thru'

FROM PAGE 1

Zimbabwe fell in early trouble, losing the experienced Brendan Taylor in the second over as the batsman tried to flick a Shaiful Islam delivery only to find the man at midwicket. Mostafizur Rahman trapped Craig Ervine leg-before and Wesley Madehevere was run out soon after as Zimbabwe stuttered.

Opener Tinash Kamunhukamwe had played a few good strokes during his 20-ball 28 and starred in a 42-run stand with skipper Sean Williams for the fourth wicket but any hopes of the partnership going onto challenge the target was decimated when both fell to leggie Aminul in consecutive deliveries. Afif Hossain, Aminul and Mustafizur all got into the act with one wicket each after Aminul's double strike as Zimbabwe slumped to 107 for eight.

A late onslaught came, first from Donald Tiripano and then Carl Mumba, with the former threatening to cut loose like he did in the second ODI at Sylhet by reaching 20 off 12 with three sixes before being bamboozled by Mohammad Saifuddin and dragging a delivery onto his stumps. Mumba smote Fizz for a four and six in the 19th over before becoming the left-arm seamer's third victim as Zimbabwe were bowled out for 152.

Earlier, Soumya launched himself into a magnificent pull shot over deep mid-wicket in the final delivery of the innings to take Bangladesh

to 200 for 3 against Zimbabwe, to signal a return of the stability in the batting order following a few series spent in confusion. Soumya blazed a team-high 62 off 32, laced by four fours and five sixes after coming in at number three following Tamim Iqbal's departure.

The openers had given the Tigers the perfect launchpad to a big total with a 92-run stand -- the highest opening partnership for the Tigers in T20Is -- with both Tamim and Liton Das going after the bowling early. Liton continued his decimation of the Zimbabwe bowlers following his 176 in the third ODI at Sylhet, blazing a 39-ball 59 with five fours and three sixes yesterday. He started on his merry way, hitting a six and four in the very first over and then flayed the bowling all over the park. Just when the innings was gathering more momentum, both Tamim and Liton departed in quick succession and it appeared that Bangladesh would struggle to continue in the same vein of aggression.

Soumya, however bided his time at the crease, hitting the odd boundary or two after coming on in the 11th over. Following Mushfiqur Rahim's departure for 17 off 8, Soumya came into his own in the death overs, which realized 75 runs from five overs. He blazed three sixes in the final over and three fours and four fours in the last four overs of the innings to ensure that the Tigers reach a big total.

S'pore to allow ship barred by Malaysia, Thailand to dock

AFP, Singapore

Singapore will allow a cruise ship carrying about 2,000 people to dock after it was barred by Malaysia and Thailand over coronavirus fears, officials said yesterday.

The Costa Fortuna was turned away from the Thai holiday island of Phuket and the Malaysian state of Penang in recent days, despite having no suspected virus cases among its passengers and crew.

But the ship -- carrying dozens of people from Italy, which has been hard hit by the virus -- will be allowed to dock at its home port of Singapore today as scheduled.

A doctor onboard will check passengers and crew before they disembark, and everyone will undergo temperature screenings before entering Singapore, the city-state's port authority and tourism board said.

The vessel, which set sail from Singapore on Tuesday last week, said no passengers were feverish or had other symptoms, they added.

Thailand refused to let the ship dock due to restrictions on people with recent travel history to Italy, while Malaysia has barred all cruise ships from the country's ports because of coronavirus fears.

Italy has been hard hit by the virus with 366 fatalities -- the most deaths from the disease of any country outside China, where the outbreak began in December.

Singapore last week banned visitors with recent travel history to northern Italy.

Officials said all passengers on the Costa Fortuna had completed necessary checks related to the virus before the start of the cruise.

The case has similarities with that of the Westerdam, a cruise ship that was at sea for two weeks and was rejected by five countries over fears its passengers could have the virus.

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