



The city was in alert mode yesterday following news of the three confirmed cases of Covid-19 (coronavirus) in the country. Masks adorned the faces of most, and those who didn't have any, scrambled to get one. Left, even school-going children were seen wearing masks, like these two, who were crossing the road in front of Dhanmondi 32 with their mother, who covered her face with a scarf. Top right, exhausted from repeating it to customers, sales staff at a Panthapath pharmacy put up a sign that says masks and sanitisers are out of stock. Bottom right, street vendors all over the city sold masks in numbers. Some vendors, like this one in the area, hiked prices way above standard rates, selling Tk 10 masks for Tk 50-100 and one-time use masks for as high as Tk 100.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Stop price hike of mask, handwash: HC

Directs govt to set up thermal scanners at ports

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing dissatisfaction at the two digital thermal scanners at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport being out of order, the High Court yesterday directed the government to take steps to set up adequate thermal scanners at all ports for coronavirus screening.

During hearing a suomoto (voluntary) rule, the court ordered the authorities concerned of the government to take necessary steps to stop price hike of masks, handwash, hand sanitiser etc, or storing them to make extra profits later.

The government can run mobile courts in order to prevent an artificial crisis or price hike of these items, the bench of Justice FRM Nazmul Ahasan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader said.

The judges said the authorities must remain careful and take necessary steps so that nobody can carry on unusual business practices and make extra money with selling things like masks, handwash and sanitisers, like that of onion.

The bench ordered the government to create awareness among people about coronavirus through advertisements on electronic and print media.

It asked authorities concerned to issue clearance certificates for people coming from coronavirus-affected countries to Bangladesh after screening.

The court said the briefing of Institute of Epidemiology, Diseases Control and Research (IEDCR) about the coronavirus needs to be more specific and told in a way

that does not lead to panic.

The HC judges said they will keep the issue regarding coronavirus and fixed April 5 for passing further order on this issue.

The bench came up with the directives and observations after going through a government report about its preparations to contain a potential coronavirus outbreak.

Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Abdullah-Al-Mahmud Bashar submitted the report and read out it before the bench after collecting the report from Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The judges said the government's initiatives in tackling the virus are commendable, but there is a lacking in preparedness to restrain its spread as two of the three digital thermal scanners at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport are out of order.

During the hearing, Barrister Moudud Ahmed, a senior lawyer and former law minister, who was present in the courtroom, told the HC that the government has realised the scale of coronavirus spread, but dishonest traders are hiking the price of a mask worth Tk 10 to Tk 120.

Barrister Moudud requested the court to pass an order telling the government to provide masks to people, free of cost.

The HC then said it is not possible for the government to give masks to 16 crore people of the country.

The government may consider providing masks to coronavirus affected or suspected people at zero cost, said the HC.

Everyone coming from abroad is being

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## Govt trying to hide info on coronavirus

Alleges Mirza Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is trying to hide information on coronavirus cases found in the country, alleged BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday.



He claimed that the government disclosed the incidents of coronavirus infections only after foreign delegates declined to visit Bangladesh.

"Our government did not do anything to contain the spread of coronavirus and did not find any case till Sunday. Suddenly, they confirmed that three people were infected..." he said while addressing a book launching ceremony at Jatiya Press Club.

At the event organised by Universal Academy, two books by BNP's Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain were published.

Fakhrul said, "Many speculated that the virus had entered the country much earlier, which has come true."

## 'No punishment is enough'

Says father of murdered Wari schoolgirl; lone accused sentenced to death

JNU CORRESPONDENT

"He murdered my child. If there were a punishment higher than death sentence, that too would not be enough for his crimes."

Abdus Salam, father of six-year-old Samia Afrin Saima, who was raped and murdered in Wari, said this after a Dhaka court sentenced lone accused Harun Or Rashid to death in the case.

Salam said he was satisfied with the verdict and now hopes that it will be implemented as quickly as possible. Saima's father said he believes this is a message to everyone that perpetrators of such crimes will not be spared.

Saima, a nursery student, was murdered after she was raped in the building where she lived with her family at Dhaka's Wari on July 5 last year.

A day after the murder, her father filed a case under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act with Wari Police Station.

Yesterday, Judge Kazi Abdul Hannan of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-1 in Dhaka announced the judgement in presence of the lone accused.

The judge said the innocent child had been a victim of the highest form of barbarity by accused Harun. Therefore, the accused could not get any compassion from the court. It is reasonable to give Harun the maximum punishment, the judge said in the observation.

On July 5 last year, the accused took Samia Afrin Saima to the roof of the eight-storey building in Wari, saying that he would show her the view and raped the six-year-old inside an empty flat. When she passed out, he strangled her with a rope.

The murder shook the country, triggering protests by students, teachers and parents.

Harun was arrested from Cumilla on July 7 last year and police pressed charges against him on November 4. The court framed the charges on January 2 this year and recorded the statements of 14 prosecution witnesses out of 17 in the case.

The trial of the murder case started on January 8 and in an exemplary move, the court finished the trial in just two months.

## SAGIRA MURDER Court accepts charges against 4

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday took cognizance of charges against four accused in connection with the murder of Sagira Morshed, who was shot dead in July 1989.



After scrutinising all the documents, Judge KM Imrul Kayes of Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka accepted the charges.

The court also fixed March 12 for holding hearing on charge framing against the accused -- Sagira's brother-in-law Dr Hasan Ali Chowdhury, his wife Sayedatul Mahmuda alias Shaheen, brother-in-law (wife's brother) Anas Mahmud alias Rezwana and alleged hitman Maruf Reza.

Another accused Minto alias Mantoo alias Moron was earlier charged and trial was partly held against him. On January 17 in 1991, a Dhaka court framed charges against him.

Meanwhile, three of the accused, except for Maruf Reza, submitted a petition seeking permission to withdraw their confessional statements.

But, the court kept the petition without passing any order on the issue.

All the accused, now in jail, were produced before the court during yesterday's hearing.

On January 16 this year, Police Bureau

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## Partition irreparably damaged politics

Prof Serajul says at Kaniz Fatema Mohsina memorial lecture

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The partition of Bengal in 1947 irreparably damaged the political arena as well as the fields of literature and cultural activities, Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said at a public lecture yesterday.

"Politics was the main victim of the partition's aftermath. It divided the Communist Party, which faced repression in both Bengal," Prof Serajul said while delivering the memorial lecture named after late politician Kaniz Fatema Mohsina.

"The radical political stance that the party took in response alienated it from people," Prof Serajul observed.

Samaj-Rupantar Adhyan Kendra organised the lecture at Bangla Academy to mark the birth centenary of Somen Chanda, a famous writer and Marxist activist. In his honour, Prof Serajul's lecture was titled "Somen Chandar Eksho Bachhor".

The immediate aftermath of the Bengal partition was a massive process of resettlement as millions of Hindus and Muslims migrated from East to West Bengal and vice-versa. "Amidst all of this, political and social power went to nationalists' hands," he said.

The partition also affected the field of cultural activities and literature, he added. With Kolkata and Dhaka separated from each other, exchange of books and other cultural articles were interrupted.

During those times, West Bengal used to produce films of better standard. Following partition, these films became confined to West Bengal, severely damaging the film movement of East Bengal, from which it could not recover for a long time.

Kaniz Fatema Mohsina was the first speaker and health minister of undivided Bengal, who passed away in 2016. She is the mother of Haidar Akbar Khan Rono, a presidium member of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), and cultural activist Haider Anwar Khan Jhuno.

Former DU Bangla professor Ahmed Kabir presided over the programme.

## 'Moving Road' a substitute for public transport?

Filmmaker Abu Sayeed exhibits his concept

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Filmmaker Abu Sayeed, who introduced the moving road concept, yesterday requested the prime minister or her representatives to visit his exhibition on the idea at central public library premises in the capital's Shabbagh, which runs until March 12.

The exhibition on the concept of this "Moving Road" started on March 3, Sayeed said while speaking at a press conference there.

He claimed that his concept of creating an overhead moving walkway would ease Dhaka's traffic congestion to a large extent.

He said the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has not taken any initiative to establish a pilot project at Gulshan Park at the cost of Tk 7.5 crore, in spite of government approval.

"However, the Governance Innovation Unit under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on August 17, 2019 approved the pilot project for DNCC to set up a 500m moving ramp, aiming to inspect its usefulness and functionality," he added.

According to the concept, the moving road will be constructed above existing footpaths, or on one or two lanes of the road. It will have two parts: a fixed platform, and a moving section similar to walkways in airports.

The road, six feet in width, will be elevated 10 feet above the ground, with stations at every 200-metre interval. It will stop every two minutes for ten seconds for passengers to get on and off. There will be seats on the road, as well as standing space.



A model of Abu Sayeed's moving roads concept in being exhibited at Central Public Library premises.

PHOTO: STAR

Abu Sayeed claimed that a one-kilometer stretch of moving road -- that will run on electricity -- could transport 10,500 passengers within a minute or two.

He further made the ambitious claim that this "unique mode of transportation" will cost one-fifth of the metro rail, with a cost of around Tk 200 crore per kilometre.

The same length of metro rail costs over Tk 1,000 crore, he said.

Besides, it will give city dwellers respite from traffic and air pollution by reducing dependency on public and private vehicles. People can also walk on the platform as footpaths are occupied, he said.

## MOSQUITO CONTROL ACTIVITIES DNCC inspection drives continue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

During a sudden drive to inspect workers who conduct mosquito control activities, Jamal Mustafa, DNCC's acting mayor, and Atiqul Islam, the corporation's mayor elect, visited Mohammadpur area under ward-31 yesterday.

During this time, they talked with locals and listened to their problems regarding mosquitoes and waste management.

As the drive went on, DNCC Magistrate Masud Hossain slapped a total fine of Tk 97,000 against six establishments, including a restaurant and a diagnostic centre.

Talking to The Daily Star, Jamal said, "We are making sudden visits to different wards to see how well the work is going at ground level. We are also taking samples of insecticides to examine whether they're still working."

To oversee mosquito control activities at ground level, DNCC formed 11 monitoring teams recently. Although Atiqul is yet to take office as mayor, he tagged along with the monitoring team to observe everything.

To begin the day, Jamal and Atiqul visited a government colony around 8:45am and found it unclean and a potential breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Later, they visited different alleys of Nurjahan Road along with Ward-31 Councillor Md Shafiqul Islam.

Meanwhile, they also removed objects which were obstructing footpaths and inspected whether nearby stores were dumping garbage beside roads.

Atiqul said, "Areas surrounding each house should be cleaned by its residents, as it's not only the responsibility of city corporations." He requested citizens to be more active regarding keeping their respective areas clean.

DNCC Chief Health Officer Brig Gen Mominur Rahman Mamun and Secretary Rabindra Sree Barua were also present during the drive.