

## Morocco shuts off Spain's Ceuta and Melilla enclaves

AFP, Madrid

Morocco closed the border with Ceuta and Melilla, Spain's two North African enclaves, early yesterday to prevent the spread of the deadly coronavirus, officials said.

The decision, which was taken by Rabat, shuts down the only land border between Africa and the European Union.

Spain's foreign ministry also said that Morocco had "suspended flights to and from Spain and all passenger transport by boat" in a move coordinated with Madrid.

Authorities in both enclaves issued a message late on Thursday urging all citizens currently located in Morocco to quickly return home.

"From 6:00 am (05:00 GMT), the Beni Enzar border crossing will be closed so all citizens of Melilla who are currently in Morocco should return to the city as soon as possible," the Melillan authorities wrote on Twitter, describing it as a "preventative measure".

Authorities in Ceuta also confirmed the frontier closure.

Antonio Navarro, managing editor of the Madrid-based Atalayar, told AFP he had just managed to avoid being caught in the closures after travelling to Tangiers for work on Wednesday.

## 70-yr-old dies

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candidate Jahangir Alam in the February 1 polls to Dhaka North City Corporation.

Faysal said his uncle went into hiding after the polling day fearing attack. He came home on Thursday to join the marriage ceremony.

Rakiya was buried at a graveyard in Beraid yesterday after an autopsy was conducted on her body at the morgue of Dhaka Medical College.

The victim's family demanded arrest and exemplary punishment of the attackers.

Parvez Islam, officer-in-charge of Badda Police Station, said Rakiya fell sick while trying to save her son during the attack.

"The family complained that she was beaten up. But we didn't see any injury marks on her body," he said, adding that they would record a case if the family lodged a complaint.

The OC said the attackers were loyal to ward councillor Ayub and Alamgir worked for Jahangir during the city polls. He said the polls-time rivalry led to the attack.

Jahangir, also the general secretary of Badda thana AL, told this correspondent that Alamgir worked for him during the election.

"After Ayub was elected councillor, his men attacked and injured several people who worked for me during the polls," he added.

Despite repeated attempts, this newspaper could not contact Ayub, who was a rebel AL councillor candidate, for comments.

## Judges of SC, HC

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discussions about instructing the lower court judges to hear and dispose of cases after their office time. They also talked about the merits and demerits of working extra hours.

The chief justice and other judges of the Appellate Division will finalise the decision soon, and then the decision will be officially disclosed, sources said.

At present, the HC judges discharge judicial functions in the courtrooms between 10:30am and 4:00pm with an hour lunch and prayer break from 1:00pm to 2:00pm.

The Appellate Division judges do their judicial activities between 9:00am and 1:15pm with half an hour break from 11:00am to 11:30am.

The working hours of the lower court judges are between 9:30am and 4:30pm with an hour lunch and prayer break from 1:00pm to 2:00pm.

Besides, the judges work for writing orders, judgements and other relevant tasks beyond their office hours, according to sources.

A SC study report said as of March 31 last year, 35,82,347 cases were pending with the courts across the country.

Around 30.53 lakh cases were pending with the lower courts, 22,000 with the Appellate Division and 5.06 lakh with the HC Division until March 31 last year, according to the report.

On January 1 this year, Law Minister Anisul Huq told reporters that the government would take initiatives to settle pending cases so that at least five to six lakh such cases could be cleared from the existing backlog within this year.

"It's not possible to dispose of all the 31 lakh pending cases within a year, but it's possible to reduce the number by five to six lakh," he said.

The minister added that the government would also take steps so that more cases are disposed of outside the court -- under the alternative dispute regulation system -- and the lower court judges would be provided with necessary training in this regard.

## IEDCR collecting

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The other person who recovered from the disease will be kept at the hospital for some time, Sabrina told a press conference.

IEDCR on Sunday announced detecting three persons, including two from Italy, infected with coronavirus.

The third person has yet to recover, Flora said.

She also urged people not to go to IEDCR in person and asked them to call the official numbers. "We will collect your blood samples.... Your visit puts others at risk."

She suggested people avoid leaving home unless it is necessary.

**BANGLADESHIS TO RETURN**  
Twenty-three Bangladeshis, quarantined in the suburbs of the Indian capital for 14 days, will return home today after they were tested negative for the virus.

They will leave New Delhi for Dhaka on a flight of Indigo Airlines with financial support from Bangladesh government, officials

said. Most of them are students and there is a couple with a child.

"We'll get health clearance certificates on Friday and are hopeful of flying to Dhaka on Saturday," one of the students told UNB.

They were evacuated from China's Wuhan, the epicentre of the virus, on February 27 by a special Indian Air Force flight, according to Indian High Commission in Dhaka.

Bangladesh brought back 312 of its nationals from China on February 1 and the remaining Bangladeshis got registered to return home.

A total of 238 expatriates in Manikganj, Kishoreganj and Netrakona have been kept in quarantine at their homes.

Many of them returned from Italy, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

Over 60 more people who returned from abroad have been quarantined yesterday, reports our Manikganj correspondent quoting health department officials.

## Watchdog sues for data on airport facial recognition

AFP, Washington

A civil liberties watchdog sued the US government Thursday seeking the disclosure of records on the use of facial recognition technology being deployed at American airports.

The American Civil Liberties Union said it was seeking to force the Department of Homeland Security to release records on its contracts and policies for the technology which has been expanded in recent months.

ACLU staff attorney Ashley Gorski said the lawsuit aims to require disclosure of what the government is doing with the data it collects with face-scanning machines.

The expanded airport deployment is "putting us on an extraordinarily dangerous path toward the normalization of face surveillance," Gorski said in a statement.

## US launches air raids in Iraq

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The military warned the air strikes risked "escalation and deterioration of the security situation in the country, and exposes everyone to more risks and threats."

President Barham Saleh condemned them as a violation of the country's sovereignty that could "slide Iraq into anarchy and chaos".

The foreign ministry yesterday summoned both the US and British ambassadors over the strikes.

**ILLEGAL OCCUPATION**  
Top US military and civilian officials had long expressed frustration that Iraq's government was not doing enough to prevent rocket attacks targeting US troops and diplomats.

In its statement, the Pentagon said the strikes, which began around 1:00 am (2200 GMT Thursday), hit five Hashed facilities.

It said they were "defensive, proportional and in direct response to the threat posed by Iranian-backed Shia militia groups who continue to attack bases" hosting foreign troops in Iraq.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said: "The response to the cowardly attack on coalition forces in Iraq has been swift, decisive and

proportionate."

A US official told AFP that the warplanes hit logistics nodes and drone storage units.

Among the targets were the Jurf al-Sakhr area south of Baghdad, a militarised zone controlled by Kataeb Hezbollah, according to an Iraqi security source.

The unfinished new airport serving the shrine city of Karbala was also hit, according to its spokesman Ghazwan Issawi.

"Five missiles hit the administrative building at the airport and 18 cars were destroyed," Issawi told AFP, claiming no armed groups have a presence there.

There was no immediate statement from the Hashed but one of its Iran-aligned factions, Harakat al-Nujaba, slammed the air raids as evidence of Washington's "illegal occupation" of Iraq.

And Iran warned US President Donald Trump against taking "dangerous actions" in the region.

Its foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said Washington was reaping the "consequences of its illegal presence in Iraq and the nation's reaction to the assassination and killing of Iraqi commanders and

fighters".

**CLOSE TO THE EDGE**

Some 5,200 American troops are based in Iraq as part of the US-led coalition helping local troops toot out Islamic State group remnants.

But they have come under fire in recent months: nearly two dozen rocket attacks have targeted US troops and diplomats since late October.

One such attack on a base in northern Iraq in December killed a US contractor, prompting Washington to respond with air strikes on Kataeb Hezbollah in western Iraq.

Days later, Washington killed Iran's powerful foreign operations chief Qasem Soleimani -- whom the US said had orchestrated the rocket attacks -- and the Hashed's deputy chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a drone strike outside Baghdad airport.

Iran launched ballistic missiles at US troops in Iraq while the Iraqi parliament voted to expel all foreign soldiers from its soil, a decision that has yet to be implemented.

The spiralling tensions brought the two countries close to war, and the latest episode this week had worried Iraqi officials that their country would once again be a battleground for regional tensions.

## Struggle now

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preparation parade last year.

At the meeting, Bangabandhu calls upon the people to participate in the struggle for national reconstruction to bring smiles to the faces of the country's suffering people. He announces the new slogan: The struggle now is for rebuilding the country and the struggle now is for establishing a society free from exploitation.

**NO AID WITH STRINGS ATTACHED**  
Bangabandhu today reiterates that he will never accept aid from anybody if it is offered with strings attached. He makes it clear that the nation has sacrificed a lot for independence and "when it has been achieved, we are ready to suffer for three months or more but we will not accept anything at the cost of prestige or independence".  
**SMUGGLERS WARNED**

Bangabandhu today sternly warns smugglers engaged in draining the valuable wealth of the country. Addressing the AL volunteer corps, he says that some unscrupulous elements are engaged in such activities, taking advantage of the present condition of the country. These elements will be completely weeded out of society because the huge sacrifice and blood paid for liberation must not be allowed to go to waste.

**DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH MALAYSIA SOON**  
Malaysia and Bangladesh have agreed to establish diplomatic ties as soon as possible. A joint statement issued in Dhaka today upon conclusion of the visit of a three-member Malaysian ministerial delegation says that it is also agreed that the two countries will cooperate in all possible fields of bilateral interests.

**UN COMMISSION TO DISCUSS ATROCITIES IN BANGLADESH**

A resolution to set up an ad hoc working group of experts to report violation of human rights in Bangladesh during the Pakistani occupation is discussed by the human rights sub-committee of the UN. Secretary General of ICJ Niall Macdermot, who is in Dhaka on a two-day visit, says that ICJ through its representative John Salzberg has urged the human rights sub-committee to investigate human rights violations in Bangladesh from March 1, 1971. He also points out that it was as early as April 3, 1971 that the ICJ protested against the secret trial of Bangabandhu.

**SOURCES:** March 15, 1972 issues of Ittefaq, The Bangladesh Observer, Azad, Morning News, Dainik Bangla and Purbodesh.

## Left empty for 6 years

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found cracks on the walls, displaced floor tiles, broken doors and windows with rusty iron grilles, and rickety chairs and tables.

There was garbage dumped around the hospital building and the premises have turned into a place for cattle to graze. Some locals said that in absence of a caretaker, the hospital has become a centre for drug users, smugglers, and gamblers.

The hospital, comprising a two-storey main building and four one-storey structures for accommodation and other logistic purposes, was built on four acres at a cost of Tk 4 crore in 2013.

It was built to support more than 50,000 people of three unions in the wetlands with poor road connectivity, according to Jagdal Union Parishad Chairman Shibly Ahmed.

"Surrounded by water bodies, this upazila is deprived of access to education, communication and healthcare," he said.

The 32-bed Derai Upazila Health Complex, the nearest healthcare facility, is difficult to access due to poor connectivity. Thus, the poor from remote villages in Jagdal, Kulanja, and Karimpur unions are unable to take patients to there, he added.

Mizanur Rahman, a retired assistant secretary who also served as district commissioner of Cumilla, said he initiated the move to build the hospital in Jagdal so that the poor could get easy access to healthcare.

The government approved the project in 2006 and it was funded by the World Bank. He, along with other locals, donated the land for the facility, he added.

Mizanur said his own parents, who lived in Jagdal, died due to lack of treatment.

"But six years after its inauguration, locals are yet to receive any medical treatment from the hospital, which is now in shambles," he lamented.

Suhash Sutradhar, an NGO worker and resident of Jagdal village, said, "Derai Hospital is seven kilometres away from our village and even during the dry season, the only transport available are motorcycles and battery-run auto-rickshaws, which are risky for patients. In the rainy season, we have to use boats, which are time-consuming and also risky."

Josna Begum, another villager, said her 12-year-old nephew died a few months ago on the way to the Derai Upazila Health Complex.

"He was suffering from diarrhoea. Had the Jagdal hospital been functional, we could have saved him," she said.

A patient at the health complex, 55-year-old Ozufa Begum, from Karimpur village, said it took her more than two hours and a hellish journey to get there.

"I reached the hospital around 11:00am. I've been waiting for around two hours now and I'm not sure how long it will take to get to a doctor and when I will be able to return home," said Ozufa, in the first week of February.

The Jagdal hospital, much nearer

her home, could have saved her a lot of time, money, and a torturous journey back and forth.

Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman, health and family planning officer of Derai upazila, told this correspondent that medical services could not begin in the Jagdal hospital due to a lack of manpower.

"We wrote to the higher authorities more than 15 times asking for manpower, but we are yet to get a positive response," he said.

A total of 26 posts, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and medical technologists, are needed to run the hospital.

Contacted, Jaya Sengupta, lawmaker of Derai-Sulla constituency, claimed the manpower allotment for the hospital was delayed due to bureaucratic complexities.

"The hospital has to be repaired before making it operational," she added.

Sunamganj Civil Surgeon Mohammad Shams Uddin said he joined the office in February and was unaware why appointments of the hospital workforce was pending.

"I visited the hospital on February 15 and I'm trying to open at least the outdoor unit of the hospital soon," he said.

He also said the local health department in general was facing a severe manpower crisis at the moment.

"No new appointments in the second, third, and fourth class sections in the health department has been made in the last nine years," he claimed.

## Some guidelines

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their daily assemblies inside classrooms until further notice. The students will have to sing the national anthem, among other activities, inside the classrooms, the directive reads.

Does it not sound ridiculous?

Most schools in the country hold their daily assemblies in relatively open spaces, preferably in the playground, on their campuses. But as per the new directive, students will now have to gather inside the classrooms, meaning they will have to be closer to each other, which could expose them to a virus that is transmitted through contact and proximity.

Issuance of such instruction also raises questions about its rationality. It is as if holding assembly on the school ground runs the risk of exposing the students to the virus. As if there will be no risk if assemblies are held inside classrooms.

Except a handful of schools, many educational institutions are struggling to accommodate the increasing number of students due to the shortage of classrooms. We often come across news reports showing how students are being overcrowded inside a classroom, with one describing how 80 students were crammed in one classroom. And this new decision would make things difficult for many schools.

However, there is one praiseworthy aspect of the DSHE directive. It asked to suspend all cultural, sports and other events that lead to public gathering, and reschedule the programmes.

Now, let's look at DSHE's previous directive issued on March 10.

The directorate had asked all students of educational institutions at secondary level to thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water.

But this directive appears to be imprudent.

There are more than 26,000 secondary-level schools, colleges and madrasas in the country where some 1.50 crore students are studying. We all know the conditions, more or less, of the schools and colleges of our country.

While it is true that the government is constructing and repairing buildings and classrooms, many schools in the country, especially in rural areas, still do not have proper toilet facilities. If there are toilets, many are not sufficiently clean. Most of the institutions do not have separate hand-washing facilities. And finding soap or handwash liquid there would

be a truly rare feat.

Now that the government has come up with the directive, questions should be asked about how many schools would actually be able to provide soap or handwash to students, and for how many days. Do they have sufficient funds, or would they charge students to bear the additional cost of ensuring hygiene?

There are at least a dozen institutions in Dhaka where the number of students are more than 20,000. For such a huge number, providing hand-washing facilities would be an uphill task.

Where many countries around the world have shut down schools, our government still insists that no such situation has arisen yet that schools and colleges need to be closed.

The call for closing down educational institutions also rings louder in our country. And a number of guardians have already stopped sending their children to school. It is obvious that children will mingle at schools.

One father told this correspondent yesterday that, "The government is saying that the situation in our country is not as grave as other countries. But will it be judicious to wait for the situation to turn dire and then take steps."

Even the parents have argued that the government's directive to avoid public gathering is in contradiction with its instruction to keep schools open. It is, in fact, impossible for guardians in the capital to send children to school without them mingling with other students and the general public.

Many schools do not have their own transport services for students. The government does not have any specific transport service for schoolgoers either. So, the students need to wade through a maddening morning rush while going to their respective schools, like they always have to.

Besides, many students avail public transport, namely buses and human haulers, to reach their institutions, which puts them at high risk of exposure.

Coronavirus is spreading fast and we don't want to sound panicked. But, like hundreds of guardians, we urge the government not to downplay the potential impact of the easily transmitted virus and take all-out preparations before the situation turns dire.

## Virus hits politicians

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US lawmakers and the White House neared agreement on a coronavirus economic aid package, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi saying she hoped to announce a deal soon.

Experts warn that due to a lack of testing and unreported cases, many more people may be affected by the outbreak that emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

Health authorities around the world face the prospect of services being overwhelmed.

"We're anticipating 20% of the population in the first wave to be affected," Kerry Chant, the chief medical officer for the New South Wales (NSW) state government.

Home to more than 7 million people, NSW is Australia's most populous state, and Chant said models suggested 5% of the state's population - some 350,000 people - would need hospital treatment as a result of coronavirus.

Australia has recorded nearly 160 infections and three deaths from the flu-like disease. Among the infected is one of its highest-profile government ministers, Peter Dutton, who is in charge of home affairs. He said he was feeling fine.

Movie star Tom Hanks announced

in Australia on Thursday that he and his wife, actress Rita Wilson, had both tested positive.

Trudeau said he would be in isolation for two weeks after his wife, Sophie Gregoire Trudeau, tested positive for coronavirus. She said she was "experiencing uncomfortable symptoms" adding that she would "be back on my feet soon".

Canada has reported 145 cases of the virus, a three-fold gain from a week ago. There has been one death.

Romania's Prime Minister Ludovic Orban said yesterday he would self-quarantine after attending the same meeting as a senator from his party who tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

A host of major sporting events were affected, with the Players Championship golf halted and the Australian Formula One Grand Prix scrapped. Nepal closed Mount Everest to climbers.

Calls grew in Britain for the Premier League season to be stopped with the news that Chelsea forward Callum Hudson-Odoi has tested positive. All of Chelsea's first-team players and coaching staff would self-isolate, the club said.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta has also tested positive.

## AL, BNP share top posts

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opponent Shah Monjurul Huq bagged 2,864 votes.

A total of 5,940 lawyers cast ballots out of total 7,781 at the SCBA auditorium in Dhaka.

Five Bangabandhu Awami Ainjibi Parishad candidates who won the election are Md Moniruzzaman (vice-president); Mohammad Bakir Uddin Bhuiyan (assistant secretary); Mohammad Imtiaz Farooq (assistant secretary); Md Humayun Kabir (executive member); and Md Mashiur

Rahman (executive member).

Seven Jatityatabadi Ainjibi Oikya Panel candidates who were elected are Md Abdul Jabbar Bhuiyan (vice-president); Raghib Rauf Chowdhury (treasurer); Mar-E-Um Khondakar (executive member); Amirul Islam Khokan (executive member); Md Mohaddesh-Ul-Islam Tutul (executive member); Md Mohsin Kabir (executive member); and Mohammed Shaif Uddin Raton (executive member).

## 2 cops closed

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Altaf was buried at his family graveyard after Juma prayers yesterday.

Altaf's family members said he was picked up from Jaangara village in Muktagachha on February 28.

A Mymensingh court sent him to jail on March 1. He was released on bail on March 7.

Altaf's son Arif Hossain said police picked his father from home as he

could not pay them the amount they were asking for.

Rabiul Awal, a neighbour of Altaf, said he had never heard of Altaf's involvement in any sort of criminal activities.

OC Jahangir, however, denied the allegation and said Altaf was arrested on the charge of snatching Tk 1,65,000 and a mobile phone from two people on February 26.