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**"Once the system is fully functional and under control of SMP, it will be a huge game changer for the law enforcement in the city."**

ADDITIONAL DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF SMP ZEDAN AL MUSA AFTER 110 IP CAMERAS WERE INSTALLED. (PAGE 16)



**"I want to be clear. I have no symptoms. I'm feeling good. Technology allows me to work from home."**

CANADA PRIME MINISTER JUSTIN TRUDEAU ON HIS QUARANTINE ROUTINE. (PAGE 8)



**"Following the vacation, people may go outside the city. So we have decided to keep government offices open for half-day on the election day to increase voter turnout."**

CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER KM NURUL HUDA ON CCC POLLS. (PAGE 5)



## CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

# 2 more cases confirmed

*Bangladesh cancels all flights to and from Europe, except UK, from March 16 to 31; 150 expats likely to return today from Italy*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two more persons were diagnosed with COVID-19 in Bangladesh yesterday, hours after the authorities announced that the first three cases had tested negative.

Of the new patients -- both males -- one returned from Italy and the other from Germany around two weeks ago, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam told The Daily Star last night.

In another development, Bangladesh last night decided not to issue on-arrival visas for all countries. It also decided to suspend travel to and from Europe, except for England, until March 31 to contain the spread of coronavirus in the country.

Europe is now the new epicentre of the corona pandemic, according to World Health Organization.

The government decisions will take effect this midnight, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and Health Minister Zahid Maleque jointly announced at a press briefing at State Guesthouse Padma in the capital.

Shahriar Alam and Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen, among others, were present at the briefing.

Earlier, several countries, including Kuwait and Qatar, suspended air communications with Bangladesh and other countries to fight the virus, which has spread to 135 countries and territories, leaving 5,764 people dead.

Contacted, Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said, "They tested

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Italy returnees stage protest inside the Ashkona Hajj Camp yesterday after they had been quarantined upon their return yesterday. After a day-long drama, they were sent on self quarantine.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## CONTAINING COVID-19 Saarc leaders to hold video conference today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

In a significant move, Saarc leaders will hold a video conference today to chalk out a strong common strategy to fight COVID-19 in the region.

Indian Prime Minister Naredra Modi will lead the conference at 1700 hours IST, tweeted Indian Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Raveesh Kumar yesterday.

"Coming together for common good!" he said as the region braces for a serious health crisis caused by novel coronavirus which has infected more than 150,000 people and killed more than 5,700 globally.

The video conference comes on the back of a tweet by PM Modi on Friday calling on Saarc countries to work together to contain this deadly pandemic.

"We could discuss, via video conferencing, ways to keep our citizens healthy... together, we can set an

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## They roam around in quarantine!

ZAHANGIR SHAH, Manikganj

Although the government is repeatedly requesting people returning home from abroad to be in home quarantine for 14 days to prevent spread of novel coronavirus, many of them are seen walking freely in their localities.

Three days ago, a youth returned home from Saudi Arabia to a village in Manikganj Sadar Upazila. He was instructed by the local administration to stay at home under quarantine.

Visiting the village on Friday, this correspondent found him roving about near his home.

"I don't have any symptoms of coronavirus infection. That's why I go out of home," he told The Daily Star.

Another youth of the same village returned home

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## Shambolic

*142 Italy returnees allowed to go home for self isolation after day-long mismanagement, protests; 59 more taken to a Gazipur camp*

RASHIDUL HASAN

After daylong drama about quarantining people returning from Italy, the authorities last night allowed 142 of them to go home and asked them to be in self isolation.

Health experts said this would put entire communities at risk as they feared there would hardly be any monitoring over their self isolation.

However, 59 other Italy-returnees who arrived at Dhaka airport in the evening were sent to a makeshift quarantine centre in Gazipur's Pubail.

Most of the 142 Bangladeshis had began arguing with officials as soon as they were taken to Ashkona Hajj Camp from the airport around 9:00am. They kept demanding that they be allowed to go home immediately.

At least five of the returnees told The Daily Star they left Italy after many people in their neighbourhoods in Rome and Catania were tested positive for the virus and fell sick.

On the way home, two of them told The Daily Star that the authorities didn't

take any blood samples from them to test for coronavirus. Experts said it would have been wise if the Italy-returnees had been let go after proper tests.

The returnees left for their home only hours after Health Minister Zahid Maleque said people coming to Bangladesh from affected countries will face a compulsory 14-day period in quarantine. He also warned that anyone violating the directive would be jailed or fined.

Yesterday's daylong tension between the returnees and the officials at Ashkona highlighted the mismanagement and lack of basic protective measures taken by the authorities, especially since Italy is the worst affected country in Europe, the new epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic.

At Ashkona in the capital's Uttara, friends and family members started coming in contact with the returnees since morning.

Hardly anyone was wearing a mask, let alone other protective gear. Even the law enforcers wearing no masks jostled the crowd which was chanting slogans

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## Corona quacks run amok

*'Miracle cures' in social media drawing large following*

ZYMA ISLAM

In this atmosphere of fear-mongering, the one thing churning faster than the pandemic, is the rumour mill.

And while the coronavirus is spreading through touch and saliva, the rumours are using one thing that the population has access to, but has questionable literacy in -- social media. This includes Facebook, IMO, WhatsApp and, of course, YouTube.

"GOOD NEWS!!! Wuhan's coronavirus can cure itself by a bowl of freshly boiled garlic water. The old Chinese doctor proved its effectiveness... RECIPE: Take eight chopped garlic cloves, add seven cups of water and bring to a boil. Eat and drink the boiled water from the garlic... Please share with all your contacts and help save lives..." reads a message shared with this correspondent by multiple people over the past few days, with the noble intention of saving my life.

The message is laughable to say

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## Countries bolster virus defences

*Cases, deaths spike in Italy, Spain, Iran; European countries ramp up border controls; US extends travel ban to UK, Ireland*

AGENCIES

Governments around the world ramped up the battle against the new coronavirus yesterday by shutting borders and promising cash injections, as Italy, Spain and Iran emerged as global hotspots registering thousands of new infections and at least 335 deaths in just 24 hours.

A week that saw schools and businesses shut down indefinitely, millions of travellers barred from crossing borders, celebrities and politicians become infected and the whole of Italy locked down ended with a flurry of government announcements.

US President Donald Trump declared a national emergency and announced a \$50 billion package, with similar measures being taken by governments from Austria to Canada yesterday.

The president's 30-day ban on travellers from Europe also came into effect yesterday, a day after the final planeloads of European passengers flew into Los Angeles.

Vice President Mike Pence yesterday extended the travel ban to the United Kingdom and Ireland starting at 0400 GMT Tuesday.

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## Passenger train to and from India suspended

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Railway (BR) has suspended regular passenger-carrying trips to India following the neighbouring country's travel restrictions on foreigners to combat the spread of the coronavirus.

No train would leave the country for India from today and the decision would remain effective until further notice, Mia Jahan, additional joint director general of BR, told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, operation of freight trains and import-export with India through land ports will continue, officials said.

India suspended visas under several categories until April 15 on Wednesday, which came into effect from Friday. Indian nationals in Bangladesh and Bangladeshis in India would be allowed to go to their countries, an official at the Indian High

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The spring brings bright-red and orange leaves on the trees that looked almost lifeless only a week ago. The photo was taken at Ramna Park in the capital.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Journo taken from home at dead of night, jailed

*Wife alleges he was also beaten up for writing against graft*

STAR REPORT

A mobile court under a taskforce of Kurigram district administration sentenced a journalist to one-year imprisonment early yesterday after he was arrested from his home on charges of possessing narcotics.

Later around 1:30am yesterday, the mobile court sent the journalist -- Ariful Islam, Kurigram correspondent of Bangla Tribune -- to jail, said officials at the district administration.

Ariful's wife Mansarina Mitu, however, said her husband was innocent and that he became "a victim of vindictiveness by the district's deputy commissioner for writing against irregularities and corruption".

DC Sultana Pervin denied the allegation and said Ariful was punished as the taskforce found illegal drugs in his possession.

As the news spread, journalists, including Ariful's colleagues, strongly protested the incident and demanded his immediate release.

The colleagues said online newspaper Bangla Tribune ran a news report, written by Ariful, in May last year saying that the DC re-excavated and renovated a pond in Kurigram, using money from government funds and donations from individuals.

Later, the DC named the pond "Sultana Sorobor" after

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Ariful Islam