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"We are at war, a public health war certainly."
FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON DESCRIBING THE BATTLE AGAINST COVID-19

"It's bad. It's bad. Each and every one of us has a critical role to play in stopping the spread and transmission of the virus."
US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP ON CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY

"He [Bangabandhu] is remembered for his courage and indelible contribution to Bangladesh's progress."
INDIAN PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI ON FATHER OF THE NATION'S BIRTH CENTENARY

'Sonar Bangla' not far away

Says Hasina on the birth centenary of Bangabandhu; Mujib's ideals source of eternal inspiration: Modi

AGENCIES

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday vowed to build Bangladesh as "Sonar Bangla" soon to realise the dream of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who wanted to ensure a better life for all Bangladeshis.

"We must build 'Sonar Bangla' as dreamt by you [Bangabandhu]. The day is not far away. It's our commitment to you," she said while addressing the nation during the formal inauguration of the Mujib Borsho celebrations marking the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation, reports UNB.

Noting that Bangladesh now enjoys a dignified position on the world stage, the PM said the country would have to march forward further to establish it as a hunger-and-poverty-free and developed one as dreamt by the Father of the Nation.

She called upon the young generation to love the country and its people as well as build themselves as worthy citizens for moving with dignity in the world arena.

"My appeal to today's children, teenagers and youth generation is that you'll love the country and the people of the country. This freedom we earned in exchange for many sacrifices. So, you'll have to build

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The Swadhinata Stambha at Suhrawardy Udyan was bathed in the glow of fireworks as the nation celebrates the 100th birth anniversary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman yesterday. *Inset*, the area in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Dhanmondi Road-32 inundated with flowers as hundreds turned up to offer their respect. Story on page 2.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/PRABIR DAS



Coronavirus Outbreak

'No spread yet at community level'

IEDCR claims after testing only 20 with atypical pneumonia; experts say sample size too small; 2 more test positive

MOJIBUL AHMED SUJAN

After testing around 20 patients suffering from atypical pneumonia, an infection of the respiratory system, the authorities yesterday claimed there has so far been no community transmission cases of coronavirus in the country.

It means all the coronavirus patients are either the ones who travelled from countries badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic or their family members who came in contact with them, they said.

"We have tested more than 20 cases of atypical pneumonia. Based on this, we are sure there is no community transmission," Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said replying to a query at a press briefing yesterday.

Experts, however, said the number of patients with atypical pneumonia would be much higher and that the sample was not adequate to reach such a conclusion.

They said patients with atypical pneumonia show similar symptoms of coronavirus and any increase in atypical pneumonia cases should be brought under strict surveillance.

The WHO protocol adopted by the WHO-China Joint commission on Covid-19 also suggests that countries with confirmed imported cases have to immediately expand surveillance by testing all patients with atypical pneumonia.

At yesterday's briefing, the IEDCR director also said two new persons were diagnosed with Covid-19, taking the total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the country to 10.

One of the two patients returned from Italy recently while the other

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Biman rescues 409 Bangladeshis stranded in KSA

Cancels flights to KL

RASHIDUL HASAN

Biman yesterday brought back 409 Bangladeshis, who had been stranded in Saudi Arabia, on a special flight after the Gulf nation suspended air communication with different countries, including Bangladesh, to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Most of the returnees were stuck in Saudi Arabia after going there to perform umrah.

The special flight landed at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 4:15pm, said an official of Aviation Security (AVSEC) of the airport.

Several hundred Bangladeshis, including 37 staff members of foreign airlines, are currently in Saudi Arabia without any means of return as the Saudi government stopped flights from Bangladesh and other countries early this week, sources in Biman said.

Biman operated the special flight on the Dhaka-Jeddah route yesterday

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Global death toll surpasses China's

WHO calls for 'boldest actions' from all European countries; Italy's death toll 2,100

AGENCIES

The number of deaths from the novel coronavirus in other countries has surpassed those inside China for the first time.

China, where the first cluster of coronavirus patients was discovered late last year, has reported 3,226 deaths. Globally, the number of deaths stands at 3,837 outside of China.

Infection cases reported by countries outside China reached 99,215, overtaking the 80,881 in China. Italy accounts for the most deaths and new cases among countries outside China, with 2,158 and 27,980, respectively.

Iran and Spain, the worst-hit countries after Italy, have reported 853 and 309 deaths, respectively, and more than 23,000 cases combined, according to a tally compiled by AFP from official sources.

WHO regional office for Europe yesterday said there is a need for bold measures in all European countries, calling the continent the "epicentre" of the new coronavirus pandemic.

"Every country, with no exceptions, needs to take their boldest actions to stop or slow down the virus threat," Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, told a press conference.

Italy on Monday reported 349 new deaths from the novel coronavirus. The number of official fatalities has more than doubled since Thursday, when Italy's toll topped 1,000 for the first time.

It has reported more than 700 deaths in two days. Among specific regions, the overwhelming majority of the fatalities remained largely

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Virus can cause havoc in Rohingya camps

Experts warn citing poor medical facilities, unhygienic conditions, population density

SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Around a million Rohingya in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, along with aid workers, are likely to be among the worst sufferers if coronavirus spreads in the region, feared experts.

Lack of medical facilities, extremely unhygienic living conditions, and population density of the camps can cause havoc in case of a virus outbreak, they said.

Catalin Beraru, spokesperson for the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Bangladesh, said refugees across the globe, including in Bangladesh, live in overcrowded camps or settlements that pose a greater risk of infection from communicable diseases like Covid-19.

Tariq Adnan, communication officer of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Bangladesh, said the Rohingyas already live in unsanitary conditions and their access to healthcare is severely compromised. Therefore, it is more difficult to implement preventive measures there.

Noting that there was no reported case of Covid-19 infection in the camps, the international organisations - the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), WHO, and MSF - emphasised on equipping local hospitals with adequate resources and expanding test facilities to tackle the potential outbreak.

Mostafa Mohammad Sazzad Hossain, assistant communication officer of UNHCR, said any coronavirus suspect at the Rohingya camps would be kept in temporary isolated areas until referred to pre-identified isolation units.

At present, only the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) in Dhaka has the capacity to identify Covid-19 infection. No other healthcare facility in the country is equipped to diagnose Covid-19.

PREPARATION SO FAR
Mahbub Alam Talukder, refugee, relief and repatriation commissioner in Cox's Bazar,

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CORONAVIRUS



Total deaths	7,063
Deaths in China	3,226
Deaths in Italy	2,158
Deaths in other countries, territories	1,679
Italy recorded new deaths in 24 hours	349
Total infected in 145 countries and territories	1,80,090

COVID-19 IN SOUTH, SE ASIA

WHO calls for aggressive measures

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Health Organisation (WHO) yesterday called on countries under its South-East Asia zone, including Bangladesh, to urgently scale-up aggressive measures to combat Covid-19, as confirmed cases crossed 480, and the disease claimed eight lives in the region.

"The situation is evolving rapidly. We need to immediately scale up all efforts to prevent the virus from infecting more people," said Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, regional director of WHO South-East Asia Region.

Eight of the 11 countries under WHO South-East Asia Region have confirmed cases of Covid-19. Thailand has 177 confirmed cases, Indonesia 134, India 125, Sri Lanka 19, Maldives 13, Bangladesh 10, Nepal and Bhutan one each. These numbers are increasing quickly, she said in a press release.

"More clusters of virus transmission are being confirmed. While this is an indication of an alert and effective surveillance, it also puts the spotlight on the need for more aggressive and whole of society efforts to prevent further spread of Covid-19. We clearly need to do more, and urgently," the regional director said.

Looking at the numbers, some countries are clearly heading towards community transmission of Covid-19, Poonam said, adding this should best be prevented.

Of critical importance are continued efforts to detect, test, treat, isolate and trace contacts, she also said.



The parking area of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport is often full of cars and crowds of people waiting for passengers. In recent times, however, as shown in this photo taken yesterday afternoon, the normally bustling area has virtually been devoid of activity as the country and its ports have restricted travel to combat coronavirus outbreak.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Doubt cast over CCC elections, by-polls

CEC says decision within a few days after observing coronavirus situation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission will decide within a day or two if five by-elections and Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) polls are to be postponed over the coronavirus outbreak, Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda said yesterday.

The by-polls to Dhaka-10, Gaibandha-3, and Bagerhat-4 are scheduled for March 21, while the CCC elections and Bogura-1 and Jashore-6 by-polls are slated for March 29.

"We will consider postponement of elections if the [coronavirus] situation goes out of control. But for now, we want the polls to be held on time," the CEC told reporters coming out of the Election Commission

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