



A rickshaw-puller naps inside his vehicle yesterday afternoon. Number of trips is on a steady decline with people limiting movement outside home due to coronavirus outbreak. This photo was taken in Dhanmondi.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Govt inadequacy put countrymen at risk of coronavirus'

Say doctors, public health experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Physicians and public health experts yesterday said the government's inadequate measures have put many countrymen at risk of getting infected by Covid-19, amid its global outbreak.

At a press conference, they blamed the government for limiting testing facilities to one institution, saying more testing facilities were required to avoid the disease's spread.

Doctors for Health and Environment (DHE) organised the press conference on "Covid-19 is now in Bangladesh too: Want safety of people, doctor and healthcare service providers" at Dhaka Reporters' Unity.

Amid confirmed cases of the viral infection in Bangladesh, providing protection to doctors, nurses and other healthcare service providers was equally important to tackle the situation but the government was yet to take effective measure to this end, they added.

Addressing the press conference, former vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Prof Nazrul Islam raised questions over the government's quarantine measure for homebound expatriates.

The decision to send expatriates to "home quarantine" was unwise, he said.

Prof Nazrul said local administration was instructed to monitor whether the expats were following instructions.

"In practice, who will reach food to the expat? Does that person have personal protection equipment?" he questioned, adding that keeping expats under one roof

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Don't bring prisoners to courts for trial

SC directs authorities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court administration has directed jail authorities not to produce under-trial prisoners before the lower courts during case proceedings till further order, as a precaution to coronavirus outbreak.

Supreme Court Registrar General Md Ali Akbar yesterday issued a notification to this effect under the instruction from Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain.

In the notification, he said producing prisoners under trial from the jails before the courts during hearings of bail petitions and other case proceedings is very risky due to the prevailing situation.

In light of that, under-trial prisoners cannot be carried by prison vans or any other transport and cannot be produced before the courts during case proceedings.

BNP demands postponement of six elections

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP yesterday demanded postponement of elections to Chattogram City Corporation and five other by-polls, in light of the spread of novel coronavirus in the country.

The party also demanded that courts of the country be closed as long as required.

"The decision of holding election is unexpected. People expected that the Election Commission would behave humanely, but their behaviour is inhuman," said Mirza Fakhruddin Alamgir, secretary general of the party, during a press conference at party chairperson's Gulshan office.

By-elections to vacant seats of Dhaka-10, Bagerhat-4 and Gaibandha-3 are scheduled to be held tomorrow, while Chattogram City Corporation elections, as well as by-polls to Bagura-1 and Jashore-6 would be held on March 29.

"We urge the Election Commission to withdraw its decision [of holding polls] for the sake of people. We are requesting to postpone the election; election dates

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406 more Bangladeshis return from Saudi Arabia

Biman operating flights only on 3 int'l routes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special flight of Saudi Arabian Airlines yesterday brought back 406 Bangladeshis, who had been stranded in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf nation suspended air communication with different countries, including Bangladesh, to contain the spread of coronavirus.

On Tuesday, Biman Bangladesh Airlines brought back 409 Bangladeshis, who had also remained stranded in the country.

The special flight of the Saudi Arabian Airlines landed at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 5:50pm, said a member of Avsec (Aviation Security) at the airport.

Most of the 406 Bangladeshis went to Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah hajj, said Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman, chairman of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.

Many of them had been in detention camps in Saudi Arabia, said sources at CAAB.

Jahirul Islam, a doctor at the health desk of the airport, told The Daily Star that of the returnees, two were sent to a hospital as they were detected with high fever.

The others were advised to stay in self-quarantine for 14 days in their respective homes, he added.

Meanwhile, two persons were pushed back from Sylhet Osmani International Airport yesterday.

They are of Bangladeshi origin but citizens of France and Portugal.

They arrived from the UK via Biman flight BG-202 and landed at the airport around 10:30am, reports our Sylhet correspondent.

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Ensure journalist Kajol's safe return

Demand rights bodies, journo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Demands for locating and ensuring the safe return of journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol continued yesterday, nine days after he went missing.

Rights activists and journalists yesterday issued statements and staged demonstrations, demanding that the authorities look into Kajol's disappearance.

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development in a statement expressed deep concern over his disappearance.

Enforced disappearances are a serious violation of human rights and international humanitarian laws, the forum said.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Union of Journalists yesterday formed a human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club, demanding the same.

Leaders of the organisation said it is unacceptable that Kajol remains untraceable for more than a week.

Kajol, editor of daily Pokkhokhal, went missing on March 10. He was last seen leaving his office in Hatirpool on his motorbike around 7pm, police said.

Engage law enforcers to ensure quarantine

HC directs govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the civil aviation and tourism ministry to hand over all overseas returnees to law enforcing agencies -- to keep them in quarantine for up to 14 days on their arrival, to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

In response to a writ petition, the court ordered the home ministry to deploy law enforcing personnel to escort overseas returnees to hospitals or quarantine facilities, for keeping them under quarantine upon their arrival, as arranged by the health ministry.

The health ministry was directed to impart necessary medical tests and treatment to overseas returnees soon after their arrival at hospitals or quarantine facilities for up to 14 days, or longer periods if anyone is found infected with coronavirus.

The HC ordered the cabinet secretary to ask deputy commissioners concerned to monitor treatment and welfare of overseas returnees in quarantine at district levels.

The health secretary was directed to provide particulars of overseas returnees it kept in quarantine, of the treatment provided to infected persons, and release of non-infected returnees before the court on April 16 through affidavit.

The court also issued a rule asking the authorities concerned of the government to explain in two weeks why they should not be directed to ensure compliance of 14 days' compulsory say in quarantine of overseas returnees upon arrival through land, sea and air ports at all the nearest

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Ashraf Siddiqui passes away

UNB, Dhaka

Dr Ashraf Siddiqui -- noted poet, folklorist and former director general of Bangla Academy -- passed away due to old-age complications at a hospital in the capital early yesterday.

He was 94. Chinmoy Bhattacharya, duty manager of Apollo Hospitals, said Dr Ashraf breathed his last around 3:15am at the hospital. He had been undergoing treatment there since February 20 because of respiratory problems.

Dr Siddiqui obtained his PhD in folklore studies from Indiana University in the US. His major works include Taleb Master

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icddr,b announces \$400,000 grant for women scientists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) will award grants worth USD 400,000 for women researchers and scientists, in commemoration of birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The grants are named 'The Mujib 100 Research Grants for Women in Science in Bangladesh' stated a press release circulated by icddr,b yesterday.

The money will support eight to 10 projects by Bangladeshi women scientists, researchers, academicians and students aged below 50, the press release added.

"This research grant is the first initiative of its kind to build a new generation of women researchers and scientists in Bangladesh. This is a sure way to advancing new treatments, diagnosis, disease management, public health strategies and many others," it said. Half of the money will be for applicants outside of icddr,b, while the other half will be going to women researchers at the institution.

icddr,b's Scientific Advisory Group comprising of scientists and public health experts from across the globe will evaluate the projects and select awardees, while final selection will be based on the approval of icddr,b's Institutional Review Board (IRB), said the press release.

Applications open March 21, and more information can be found in the organisation's website, www.icddr.org

DU STUDENT RAPE Case transferred to special court

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The case filed over the rape of a Dhaka University student in the capital's Kurmitola area on January 5 was transferred yesterday to the 7th Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression of Dhaka for its trial.

Md Kaisarul Islam, acting chief metropolitan magistrate of Dhaka, passed the order after detectives pressed charges against lone accused Majnu.

Abu Bakar Siddique, investigation officer of the case, on March 16 submitted the charge sheet to the CMM Court of Dhaka.

The IO also brought charges of assaulting and snatching of her mobile phone, wristwatch, and money.

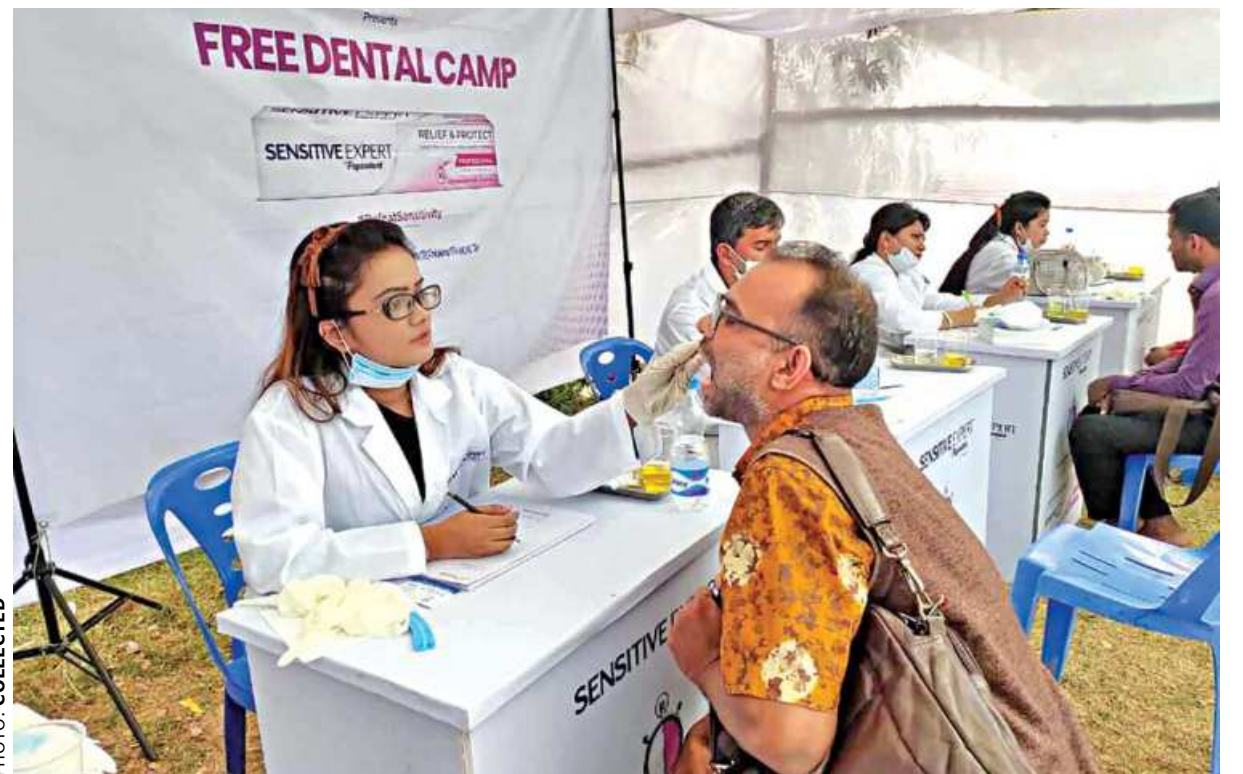


PHOTO: COLLECTED

Oral care brand Pepsodent has held various campaigns, including monthlong free dental camps across the country, in partnership with Bangladesh Dental Society, marking World Oral Health Day, observed worldwide today. Over a million people have benefitted from the dental camps, Pepsodent said in a press release yesterday.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

This footpath near Bijoy Sarani was dug up for sewage development work within a year of being constructed. This hole has been left for twenty days, with just a bamboo stick for warning passers-by. The photo was taken recently.

COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

IOM, Koica ink deal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

International Organization for Migration yesterday signed an agreement with Korea International Cooperation Agency (Koica) to launch a five-year project on capacity building and awareness-raising to combat human trafficking in Bangladesh.

IOM, Bangladesh will partner with the Ministry of Home Affairs to implement the project, said an IOM press release.

The agreement was signed at IOM office in Dhaka by its chief of mission in Bangladesh Giorgi Gigauri and Koica Country Director Doh Young Ah.

The project, "Koica-IOM Comprehensive Programme to Combat Human Trafficking in Bangladesh", will aim to build the capacity of the national criminal justice system to prosecute traffickers.

It will provide sustainable reintegration support to trafficking victims and sensitise up to one million people to the risks of trafficking and the importance of safe migration in trafficking-prone areas including Dhaka, Jashore, Satkhira and Cox's Bazar.

Over five years, IOM and partners will assist up to 800 victims with shelter and reintegration assistance to reduce their vulnerability and empower survivors to attain self-sufficiency.

Human trafficking is a global phenomenon and a growing concern for Bangladesh, said Gigauri.

Vulnerable Bangladeshi children, women and men become victims of human traffickers for different reasons, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, transactional marriage, child labour exploitation and organ trade, he said.

Doh said the project is an ongoing commitment of Koica to work with Bangladesh government to help achieve Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal-5 (gender equality) and Goal-16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

Approximately 4,700 human trafficking cases are awaiting prosecution in Bangladesh, according to the release.

Vacate dorms by Friday evening

DU directs resident students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University (DU) authorities yesterday asked its resident students to leave their dormitories by today [Friday] evening, amid fears of coronavirus outbreak in the country.

The university syndicate took the decision at an emergency meeting, and asked students to leave halls and hostels by 6pm, said a DU press release.

The university has also extended its closure till March 31, which was previously March 28.

During this time, dormitory authorities have been asked to take up dengue prevention and cleanliness programmes.

The syndicate has also requested DU teachers, students, officials, other staff and their family members to stay in their respective houses, in order to ensure their safety and for the greater interest of the nation, said the press release.

Meanwhile, resident students of Jahangirnagar University yesterday left their respective dormitories, in line with a university directive. Prof Sohel Ahmed, provost of Shaheed Rafiq Jabbar hall, confirmed the matter to The Daily Star.

On March 16, the government took the decision to close down all educational institutions from March 17 to 31, as a precautionary measure for coronavirus spread.