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SECOND EDITION



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"If the situation turns worse, the government will take initiatives to stop train services for a certain period."
RAILWAYS MINISTER MD NURUL ISLAM SUJAN ON CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY



"If we let the virus spread like wildfire -- especially in the most vulnerable regions of the world -- it would kill millions of people."
UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTONIO GUTERRES ON WORST CASE SCENARIO IF VIRUS SPREADS UNCHECKED (PAGE 11)



"I can't give a hundred percent concentration in training if there are no games ahead of us."
BANGLADESH'S TOP ARCHER RUMAN SANA ON TRAINING WHEN MOST FUTURE MEETS HAVE BEEN CANCELLED (PAGE 15).

CHECKING SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS

Govt should ramp up contact tracing

Suggest health experts as intensive drive to trace contacts of infected persons and stringent monitoring proved effective in many countries

WASIM BIN HABIB and
MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government must scale up its efforts to trace and quarantine all the people who might have come in contact with the coronavirus patients to contain the spread of the virus, say experts.

It had at least three months to prepare, but it could not act accordingly, they said, adding that a lack of proper screening at the airports and the failure to keep the returnees from abroad in isolation have made things difficult.

Experts now warn that the highly contagious virus might spread to the community level if the government does not immediately take measures such as contact tracing and strict quarantine.

Contact tracing is a front-line public-health strategy that involves identifying and following up with people who may have come into contact with an infected person.

"The goal is to contain the outbreak and break the transmission channels. But we

don't know which method the government is following for contact tracing," said Mahmudur Rahman, a former director of the IEDCR.

According to WHO protocol, every suspected case and its contacts should be monitored for 14 days, he said.

"The main aim of contact tracing is to detect the patient and the vulnerable group in the earliest possible time. It is because early detection will help slow the spread and give the authorities time to take preparations."

The first confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Bangladesh was reported on March 7. With three new cases reported yesterday, the number now stands at 20.

Of the 20, nine travelled from countries badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic, while the others are their family members who came in contact with them. Three of the patients went home after recovery.

The number of those identified through contact tracing is hard to come by.

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A volunteer of Bidyanondo, a voluntary organisation, sprays disinfectant on the coach of a train at Kamalapur Railway Station in the capital yesterday to check the spread of coronavirus. Three more Covid-19 patients were identified in the country yesterday, increasing the number of such cases to 20.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Restrictions tightened in Shibchar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

The administration yesterday deployed around 250 policemen to ensure that no one enters or leaves four neighbourhoods in Madaripur's Shibchar upazila.

Public transport has been suspended in all of Shibchar and locals were requested to avoid public gatherings to prevent coronavirus infection, officials said.

Police will see to it that the people advised to be in home quarantine are properly following the guidelines and the prices of essentials are not hiked, they added.

"It cannot be termed a lockdown. We have isolated some areas in Shibchar. It means we have restricted public movement in those areas to

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IGNORING SELF-QUARANTINE

Returnees' apathy let virus spread

9 returnees, 11 of their family members infected so far; one of 3 new patients in critical state

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The carelessness of the returnees from abroad over following self-quarantine rules is putting their family members and relatives at risk of contracting coronavirus, statistics show.

As many as 20 people got infected with Covid-19 in the country since March 7. Of them, 11 are family members of nine returnees, according to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

The only patient, who died of novel coronavirus last week, was a family member of a person who returned home from Italy.

Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), yesterday said a 30-year-old woman

and two men aged 30 and 70 were found infected with Covid-19. The three are from different families.

With them, the number of coronavirus cases in the country rose to 20.

Briefing reporters at her Mohakhali office in the capital, Nasima said the elderly man was in critical condition at the intensive care unit of a hospital. He got infected after coming in contact with a person who returned from abroad recently.

The woman was suffering from a slight infection and cough. She came in contact with an expatriate who returned from Italy, the DGHS official added.

The 30-year-old man had visited Rome and Berlin.

So far, 44 people have been placed

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COVID-19 UPDATE

10,944
DEATHS

246,440
confirmed cases in 161 countries
5,795
deaths in Europe

4,000 fined in France for flouting lockdown rules
Haiti, the US Virgin Islands, Saint Lucia report first cases
No domestic cases in China for second day

UN chief says millions could die if virus spreads unchecked

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

16,000 acres of forest at risk

Forest Dept may lose the vast swathe of forestland in Mymensingh's Bhaluka due to land ministry's mistake

PINAKI ROY

The Forest Department is in fear of permanently losing around 16,000 acres of Sal forest in Mymensingh's Bhaluka upazila as the land ministry recorded it as khas and private land.

The forestland, as large as 226 Ramna parks, would go under deputy commissioner of the district and other individuals if the land record is not corrected. It would expose the land to misuse such as deforestation, grabbing and many more, said forest department officials.

According to Forest Department sources, around 65 percent of forestland in Mymensingh district -- 25,070 acres out of 38,858 -- has been encroached since the independence.

The fresh threat would only increase the portion of misused land, they feared.

The Forest Department also sent multiple letters to the land ministry raising their concerns and

requested the Land Record and Survey Department to conduct another survey in the conflicting mauzas in Bhaluka.

The land ministry, however, paid no heed to the request and turned down the Forest Department's proposal, officials said.

This happened at a time when the government is trying to increase the country's forest coverage to 18 percent from 15.58 percent by 2030 which is a condition to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).

Abdullah Al Mahsin Chowdhury, the then secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, wrote a letter to Madsudur Rahman Patwari, secretary to the Ministry of Land, on November 26, 2019 in this regard.

According to the letter, around 23,078.26 acres of Sal forest in 30 mauzas of Bhaluka was

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Death toll crosses 10,000 mark

Italy sees record 627 deaths in a day; New York, California impose new restrictions

AGENCIES

More than 10,000 people have now died in coronavirus pandemic that has swept from China throughout the world, forcing the confinement of tens of millions in their homes.



of nearly 20 million. Italy, already the worst-affected country in the world, recorded another 627 fatalities yesterday, taking its reported total past 4,000, followed by 3,248 in China and 1,433 in Iran, according to an AFP tally of official data.

Europe now accounts for half of the 10,944 fatalities linked to Covid-19 around the world. The number of cases globally stood at 246,440 across 161 countries and territories. Germany's biggest state Bavaria yesterday became the first region in the country to order a lockdown for two weeks, imposing "fundamental restrictions" on going out.

The strict measures follow the template set by China, where a lockdown imposed in Hubei province where the new coronavirus first emerged appears to have paid off.

The country is now reporting on a handful of new infections each day, apparently from overseas visitors. The third worst-hit country is Iran with 1,433 fatalities and 19,644

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