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COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION

Tests too few to rule out possibility

Experts say about authorities' claim over extent of coronavirus spread; 3 more infected

MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

The authorities keep sticking to their claim there is no community transmission of coronavirus in the country, but experts say too few tests have been conducted to reach that conclusion.

The government should run more tests in all regions of the country to determine the level of transmission. Otherwise, the situation will be "misvaluated" and the government programmes "misguided", the experts added.

Meanwhile, officials yesterday confirmed that two men and a woman were tested positive, bringing the total confirmed cases to 27. Institute of Epidemiology Disease

Control and Research (IEDCR), the only facility where coronavirus tests are done, has so far tested 365 people.

At a press conference, IEDCR Director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora yesterday said the two men came from abroad and the woman got infected by coming in contact with another patient. They are aged 20, 30, and 40.

Of the 27 confirmed cases, five recovered, two died and 20 are being treated at different hospitals, Flora told the press conference at Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS) in the capital.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

PM TO ADDRESS NATION ON WEDNESDAY -- PAGE 2

A father wraps his child in protective gear, including the eyes, as they get into a train at Kamalapur Railway Station in the capital yesterday. The extraordinary measure was taken as they needed to travel and the government has advised avoiding public transport.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Shops, malls to close from Wednesday

Govt postpones HSC tests
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid growing concern over the spread of the novel coronavirus, shop owners yesterday announced that they will keep all markets and shopping malls across the country shut for a week from Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the government has postponed HSC examinations and suspended entry of all foreign nationals through 11 land ports from India for an indefinite period as part of measures to contain the spread of the virus.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

4 lakh PPEs to be made in Bangladesh

Buet Alumni, Pay It Forward, Honest, Rotary Club Dhaka, Manush Manusher Jonno, M&S combine to help doctors, nurses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Following concerns over shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) for doctors and nurses, a concerted effort by five organisations is set to produce four lakh pieces of equipment.

When news broke on social media claiming that UK-based retailer Marks & Spencer (M&S) was providing technical support for the initiative, curiosity grew as to who was really behind it.

The Daily Star reached out to some of those involved to learn more about the project.

Terming the project a combined effort, M&S Head of Finance Kamal Ahamed said five organisations -- Pay It Forward Bangladesh, Honest, Buet Alumni Association, Rotary Club Dhaka North-west and Manush Manusher Jonno Foundation -- came to M&S with the idea.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Tests to start in divisional HQs

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government has recently imported seven PCR machines to scale up the testing facilities of Covid-19 in the divisional level.

It has already instructed all district-level hospitals to inform the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) about their current number of lab technicians as new manpower would be recruited in this position in every district.

The lab technicians collect samples from suspected patients and analyse them in the laboratory of a hospital or diagnostic centre.

"The PCR tests will be set up at the divisional medical colleges. Technicians of those hospitals will soon be given training," Abul Kalam Azad, Director General of DGHS, told The Daily Star.

He also said the government would

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

'Curbs on movement' in Tolarbagh

Says Mirpur MP; steps taken after deceased patient's neighbour dies; suspected patient dies in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Restrictions were imposed on movement in Tolarbagh of Mirpur after a neighbour of a deceased Covid-19 patient passed away yesterday evening, said local MP Aslamul Haque Aslam.

Earlier in the morning, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) had collected the victim's samples for tests.

"We have not enforced a lockdown, but we have restricted movement for the well-being of other residents," MP Aslam told The Daily Star.

Aslam said he was informed that the victim had gone to

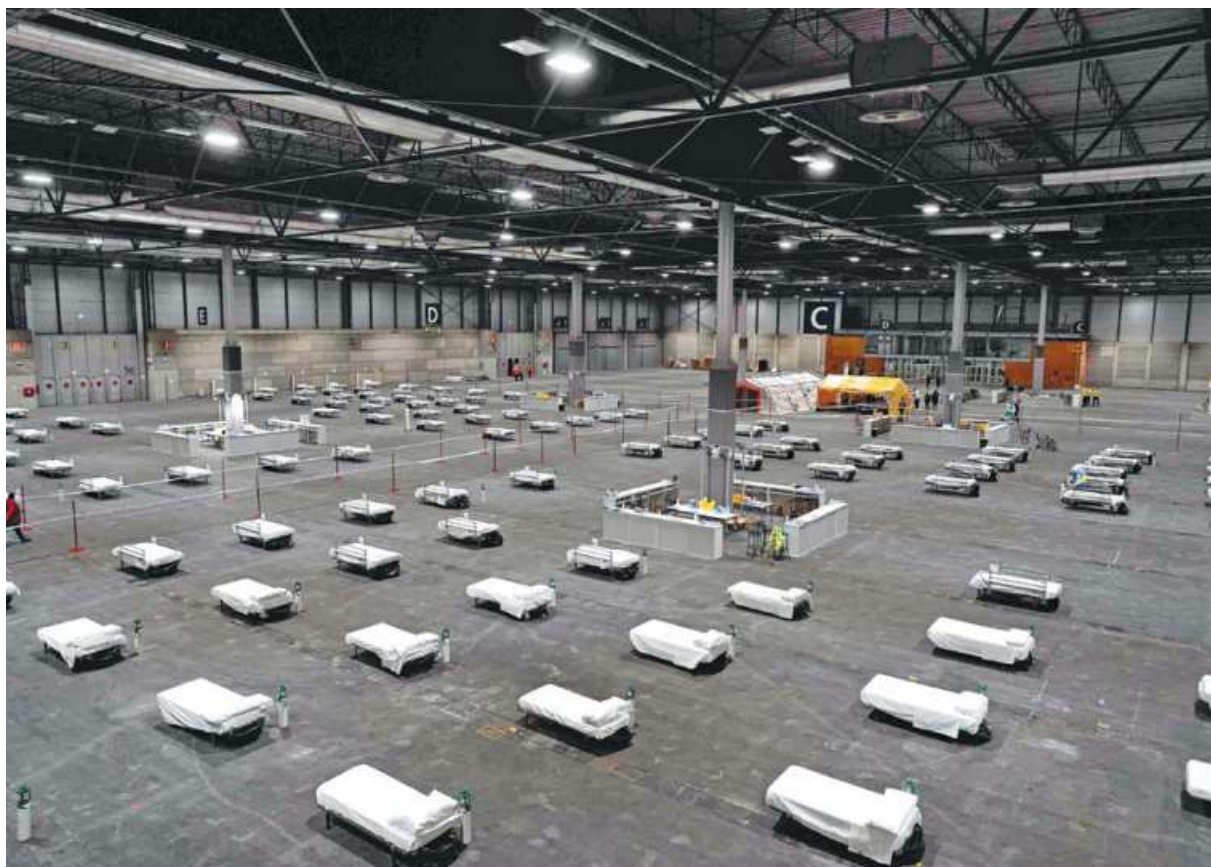
SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

CORONAVIRUS PATIENT'S DOCTOR TESTS POSITIVE -- PAGE 2

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC: Tasks ahead

Unilever Bangladesh Limited and The Daily Star jointly organised a roundtable on March 21, 2020. Health experts, representatives from WHO and IEDCR joined together for a fruitful discussion on ways to tackle the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh, and formulate recommendations on the way forward.

READ MORE ON PAGE 8 & 9



This photo taken Saturday shows a general view of the temporary hospital set up at a pavilion in Ifema convention and exhibition center in Madrid, Spain.

PHOTO: AFP

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Shortage of medical supplies adds to crisis

Lockdown tightened in Europe as death toll jumps to 14,436; Asia braces for second wave of cases; India announces transportation ban

AGENCIES

Italy, Iran and the United States reported soaring new death tolls as the coronavirus pandemic marched relentlessly across the globe yesterday, prompting a scramble in hard-hit regions to set up more hospital beds and replenish the dwindling medical supplies needed to keep health workers safe and saving patients' lives.

The raging pandemic has forced lockdowns in 35 countries, disrupting lives, travel and businesses as governments scramble to shut borders and unleash hundreds of billions in emergency measures to avoid a widespread virus-fuelled economic meltdown. Nearly one

billion people are already confined to their homes.

More than 332,134 infections have been confirmed in 170 countries and territories, with the situation increasingly

grim in Italy where the death toll spiked to more than 5,476 -- over a third of the global total.

As bodies pile up in Italian hospitals, morgues and churches, and as medical workers plead for more help, there is no sign yet that Italy is taming its arc of contagion.

Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte went on TV near midnight, announcing that he was tightening the country's lockdown

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

18-yr-old youngest to die in UK of Covid-19


THE DAILY MAIL

An 18-year-old has died of coronavirus, marking the UK's youngest Covid-19 fatality as 47 new victims brought Britain's death toll to 281, reports UK news platform The DailyMail.


It comes as 665 new cases were recorded -- with Boris Johnson threatening to shut parks if people don't keep their distance.

The total number of coronavirus cases in the UK is now at 5,683 and the Prime Minister warned the British public today that they had 24 hours to take social distancing measures seriously or he will implement an Italian-style total lockdown, after thousands continued to flout anti-coronavirus measures, the paper said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



করোনা ভাইরাস বিস্তার প্রতিরোধে গণপরিবহন ব্যবহারে সতর্কতা বিজ্ঞপ্তি



"প্রত্যেক ঘরে ঘরে দুর্গ গড়ে তোল।
তোমাদের যা কিছু আছে তাই নিয়ে শত্রুর মোকাবেলা করতে হবে।"

যাত্রীদের করণীয়

- জরুরী প্রয়োজন ছাড়া গণপরিবহনে ভ্রমণ না করা।
- পরিবহনে উঠার পূর্বে ও নামার পরে জীবাণুনাশক/সাবান/হ্যান্ড স্যানিটাইজার দিয়ে হাত ধোয়া।
- নিয়মিত বিরতিতে হাত ধোয়ার জন্য হ্যান্ড স্যানিটাইজার/পানির বোতল সাথে রাখা।
- জ্বর, হাঁচি-কাশি ইত্যাদি নিয়ে গণপরিবহন ব্যবহার না করা।
- গণপরিবহনে দাঁড়িয়ে চলাচল না করা।
- হাঁচি/কাশি দেয়ার পূর্বে রুমাল/টিস্যু/হাতের বাহু দিয়ে মুখ ঢাকা।

পরিবহন (বাস, টেম্পু, লেগুনা ইত্যাদি) মালিকদের করণীয়

- নিয়মিতভাবে চালক ও হেল্পারদের স্বাস্থ্য পরীক্ষা করা। রোগের উপসর্গ দেখা মাত্রই বাস চালক/হেল্পারকে সবেতনে হোম কোয়ারেন্টিন এ পাঠানো।
- প্রতিটি ট্রিপের শেষে জীবাণুনাশক দিয়ে বাস, টেম্পু, লেগুনা ইত্যাদির সিট, হাতল, জানালার পাশ ভালোভাবে পরিষ্কার করা।
- দিনশেষে যানবাহনটি ভালোভাবে ধোঁত করা।


চালক ও হেল্পারের করণীয়

- বাস চালুর পূর্বে ও নামার পরে জীবাণুনাশক/সাবান/হ্যান্ড স্যানিটাইজার দিয়ে হাত জীবাণুমুক্ত করা।
- যাত্রী উঠানোর সময় যাত্রীকে স্পর্শ না করা।
- কোন যাত্রী করোনা ভাইরাস আক্রান্ত বলে সন্দেহ হলে তাকে বাসে উঠা থেকে বিরত রাখা।
- ভাড়ার টাকা পৃথকভাবে রাখা। টাকা স্যানিটাইজার দিয়ে জীবাণুমুক্ত রাখা।

সিটি কর্পোরেশনের করণীয়

- বাস ডিপো, টার্মিনাল, প্রধান প্রধান স্টপেজসমূহে সার্বক্ষণিক হাত ধোয়ার ব্যবস্থা রাখা।
- ডিপো/টার্মিনালসমূহে জরুরী ভিত্তিতে করোনা ভাইরাস সংক্রমণ পর্যবেক্ষণ সেল স্থাপন করা।

হাটা চলাচলের সর্বোত্তম মাধ্যম।
 একে উপভোগ করি।
 অল্প দূরত্বে হেঁটে চলাচল করি।



ঢাকা পরিবহন সময় কর্তৃপক্ষ (ডিটিসিএ)

https://dtca.portal.gov.bd

Sadullapur’s UNO panel for lockdown

Gaibandha DC says he is yet to decide; civil surgeon says no lockdown advice was given

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and WASIM BIN HABIB

Confusion spread over the decision to put Sadullapur upazila of Gaibandha under lockdown yesterday, after a upazila committee to contain coronavirus, led by the UNO, made the recommendation to do so in a letter to the district administration.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Nabinewaz of Sadullapur wrote the letter to the deputy commissioner asking for necessary steps to be taken to institute the lockdown.

Abdul Matin, deputy commissioner of the district, and Civil Surgeon ABM Abu Hanif, said the lockdown decision was never taken.

“There was a misunderstanding caused by a letter. We have seen the letter and we will take necessary action against the person who issued the letter,” Abdul Matin said.

The UNO had sent the letter to the DC yesterday noon and forwarded a copy to the superintendent of Police and the civil surgeon.

A copy of the letter was leaked on social media and some private television channels ran a news about the lockdown.

In the letter, the UNO said two US expatriates attended a wedding reception at a house in Habibullahpur village under Bonogram Union of Sadullapur upazila. Some 400-500 people were present at the reception.

“Later, the duo tested positive for coronavirus,” reads the letter.

Then on March 22, the by-polls of Gaibandha-3 [Sadullapur-Palashbari] was held, and many voters turned out to vote, it said.

“In this circumstances, there is a possibility that the virus might spread fast. Therefore, the committee...has unanimously taken the decision to lockdown the upazila for the safety of public health,” the letter said.

However, the letter did not mention the date of the wedding reception, which was on March 13. Neither did it have details about when and where the two US expatriates tested positive.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Nabinewaz said, “Actually, we have sent the letter as a proposal of locking down the upazila considering the fact that the virus may spread.

“Now it is up to the DC and the higher authorities to take the decision over lockdown.”

The UNO said they had already placed in home quarantine five members of the family which hosted the reception.

They also proposed to the higher authority to test the five for the virus.

Talking to The Daily Star, DC Abdul Matin said, “No decision of locking down Sadullapur was taken. And no patient has been detected [with coronavirus in Sadullapur] here yet.”

Talking to other reporters, the DC said two persons -- a mother and her son -- were detected with Covid-19 in the Sadar and both of them are US

returnees.

But the situation in Sadullapur is normal and there was no lock down enforced here, he said.

The DC insisted that no local was detected with the virus in Sadullapur. “Two US-returnees visited a house. That’s why we have placed members of the household in quarantine.”

Civil Surgeon ABM Abu Hanif echoed the DC.

“Yes, it’s true that two persons were detected. But I will not share the details about them,” he said.

Shahria Khan Biplob, chairman of Sadullapur upazila, said they came to know yesterday that the two US expats who took part in the wedding tested positive for Covid-19.

At the same time, one elderly person of the family which hosted the reception fell ill nearly a week after the reception, he said.

“Following the development, we held the meeting of the committee and wanted to quarantine the house first. Then we thought of a lockdown for the entire village and upazila headquarters, which is close to the village, if anybody showed similar symptoms,” Biplob, also the adviser of the upazila committee, told The Daily Star.

“There might be some mistakes while writing the letter as we did not take a decision to lockdown the entire upazila. Besides, this decision will have to come from higher authorities,” he said.

76,000 PEOPLE IN SHIBCHAR UNDER “CLOSE OBSERVATION”

The local administration in Madaripur’s Shibchar have kept 76,000 people of six areas under “close observation” to fight the spread of the virus, reports our Faridpur correspondent.

“We have deployed 250 police officers around the restricted area to ensure that no one enters or leaves. Our 20 tag officers have been working in 19 unions and one municipality to help the people,” said Shibchar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Asaduzzaman.

Locals are requested to avoid public gatherings to prevent coronavirus infection, he said.

Public transport has been suspended in the entire upazila and all shops, except pharmacies and groceries, are shut down, he added.

“There are 664 foreign returnees, including those from Italy, in Shibchar upazila. Among them, 261 are now in home quarantine and others have already spent 14 days of quarantine. So, we keep a close eye on all who came from abroad and the people they interacted with,” he said.

Md Shofikul Islam, civil surgeon of Madaripur, said, “Recently, 3,000 returnees came to Madaripur and among them 298 are in home quarantine. Three people are in isolation and three others are in official quarantine.”

Tests to start

FROM PAGE 1
appoint new technicians at the district hospitals within a week.

Currently, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) is the country’s lone facility for testing Covid-19.

Experts, however, said that the government should act more aggressively to bring more people within the purview of testing facilities, which would help better understand the situation.

They said more tests should be conducted to find out the real scenario.

Mahmudur Rahman, former director of the IEDCR, also said the surveillance system has to be beefed up to better understand the situation.

“We heard that on several occasions the IECDR refused to collect samples even after the hospital authorities had approached them,” he said, adding that the IECDR must collect samples in such cases.

Mahmudur said currently the government is examining the expatriates and the people who came into the contact of those people.

“But according to WHO protocol, those who are facing respiratory problems should also be tested,” he added.

There have been several allegations that the hospitals are not treating the patients with respiratory problems suspecting coronavirus infection.

Health officials said they were fearing because of the lack of protective gears.

“If I don’t get my protective gear, why should I risk my life? I am a doctor and at the same time a human being. I have every right to get proper safety gears before giving treatment,” said a physician at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, wishing not to be named.

He said 10 doctors were sent to quarantine at a time when only 24 patients have been tested positive.

Government officials also acknowledged the problem saying

the situation would be improved soon.

“The situation calls for a lot of motivation and we are motivating the physicians,” Azad said.

Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) of the DGHS, said “home management” is the most effective way to contain the outbreak. “If every household protects their house from the spread of coronavirus, the situation will improve.”

Muzaherul Huq, former regional adviser of WHO’s South East Asia region, shared a different version saying the government should encourage people to go for a voluntary self-quarantine.

“Indeed, everyone will not follow it but if we can impose a strict monitoring system, it will work.

“A huge number of expatriates have already arrived in Bangladesh and the union parishad members are supposed to be aware of the foreign returnees in the areas of their jurisdiction,” he said.

He suggested that the government should hold the union parishad members accountable and responsible for failing to ensure the quarantine of the returnees.”

Huq believes that the virus has already transmitted to the community level and recommended that makeshift hospitals or quarantine zones should be set up at the stadiums in every district to treat the coronavirus patients.

Meanwhile, three more people in the country were tested positive for coronavirus, raising the cases of total infected to 27, said Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of the IEDCR.

Of the 27 cases, five were released after treatment, two died and 20 others are currently undergoing treatment at different hospitals.

The first coronavirus cases were confirmed in the country on March 8 and the first death on March 18. The second person died from coronavirus on Saturday.



While most of the world is concerned about the growing coronavirus outbreak, the virus is not the biggest worry for 45-year-old day labourer Ayesha Begum, pictured here in Badda yesterday. “What will I eat?” she asked after having been out of work for the last four days.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Tests too few

FROM PAGE 1

Besides, 40 suspected patients are in isolation in different government facilities. In the 24 hours until 10:00pm yesterday, three people who came from abroad were sent to Kuwait-Bangladesh Moitree Hospital in the capital from Dhaka airport. They had high temperature, said Group Captain Touhid-ul-Ahsan, director of the airport.

The country’s first coronavirus case was confirmed on March 8 and the first death on March 18.

The IEDCR is yet to find out how the second person who died got infected, officials admitted.

Iqbal Abdullah, son of the second victim, told The Daily Star: “None of our family member recently visited us. I asked my father whether he came into contact with any potential Covid-19 patients. He said no. We don’t know how he got infected.”

‘NO COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION’
The IEDCR director claimed that there was no community transmission.

“We are collecting information about the second victim. We will

reveal the result when we reach a conclusion. In all the cases, we try to identify the source of infection. Community transmission means that we have not been able to identify the source,” she said, adding that IEDCR officials oversaw the second person’s funeral.

She claimed that IEDCR was testing every case that could be considered suspected coronavirus infections as per the WHO definition.

“We have collected samples from different hospitals and homes. In the last 24 hours, we tested 65 samples and found three positive cases. We also tested 40 atypical pneumonia cases from different hospitals. None of them were positive for Covid-19.

“Community transmission is the next level for us. After we get enough evidence, we will term it community transmission,” she said yesterday afternoon.

According to WHO definition, community transmission refers to countries or areas or territories experiencing larger outbreaks of local transmission defined through an

4 lakh PPEs to be made in Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 1

The five organisations are funding the initiative, under which two to four lakh PPEs will be produced primarily.

“Pay it forward, BUET Alumni and Manusher Jonno Foundation came together with the idea and requested us to provide support in sourcing and the manufacturing process. We gave it some thought and started developing the idea. Later some generous people and organisations came forward to help. We got together with them and took the decision to produce PPEs,” he said.

“We are providing technical support of the product, managing production lines and monitoring sample to

production; we are not involved in the funding, which is being provided by the five organisations and the general public.”

The M&S finance head, however, warned it will take some time to produce the PPEs because they are working hard to ensure standard production.

Following the confirmation of coronavirus cases in Bangladesh, the demand for PPEs rose sharply.

Many public hospitals across the country have set up isolation units for possible coronavirus patients, but a lot of them lack adequate resources and equipment to provide necessary services.

Many doctors, nurses and staff

Shops, malls to close from Wednesday

FROM PAGE 1

The decisions came as the country yesterday recorded three more Covid-19 cases, taking the total number to 27. So far two persons have died from the virus.

Last night, Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Shop Owners’ Association, said they decided to shut markets and shopping malls as the number of customers dropped sharply amid coronavirus scare.

However, the decision will not be applicable to kitchen markets, grocers’ shops and medicine stores. Those will remain open as usual.

“Sales have plummeted. As a result, overhead costs are rising,” Helal told The Daily Star.

Besides, many of the salespersons are unwilling to work due to the virus scare, he mentioned.

Helal said there are around 250 markets in the capital and about 5,500 across the country.

In a statement, the association said, “We made the decision so that shop owners and staffers don’t contract the virus.”

It also urged all retailers and wholesalers not to increase the price of any product.

The association mentioned that all

shopping malls and markets, including the New Market, in the capital will be shut from March 25 to 31.

Zakir Hossain, general secretary of Bangladesh Supermarket Owners’ Association, said the superstores will remain open.

“We have not taken any decision to shut superstores... We will close those only if the government asks us to do so.”

“People buy groceries and essentials there. If those are closed, they will be affected,” he mentioned.

HSC EXAMS POSTPONED
“We have postponed the HSC and its equivalent examinations scheduled for April 1,” Ziaul Haque, chief of the Inter-board Coordination Committee, told The Daily Star.

“New schedule will be published soon,” added Ziaul, also chairman of Dhaka Education Board.

Abul Khair, senior information officer at the education ministry, said the next dates for the exams will be announced in the first week of the next month.

Earlier on March 16, the government had closed all educational institutions and coaching centres across the country till March 31 as part of efforts to contain the

assessment of factors including, but not limited to large numbers of cases not linkable to transmission chains, large numbers of cases from sentinel lab surveillance, multiple unrelated clusters in several areas of the country or territory or area.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Experts, however, said the tests that IEDCR did were not enough to know the level of transmission.

They added that many people who returned from abroad are roaming in different parts of the country and most of them should have been institutionally quarantined.

“Unless the number of tests is increased, we will not be able to grasp the situation. And the response programme will be misguided,” Prof Nazrul Islam, virologist and former vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University told The Daily Star last night.

The IEDCR should not jump to a conclusion based on these tests, he said, adding, “Maybe there were issues that forced officials to let the people coming from abroad to go home.

members are finding it difficult to continue work owing to the growing risk of infection.

This has also resulted in protests at some hospitals. Nearly 200 interns of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital on March 19 halted their services until the hospital provided them with protective gear. They pointed out that patients with fever and cough come on a daily basis and some of them could be affected by COVID-19, which exposes all health workers if they are not safeguarded with the personal protective equipment.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention detailed an outline for what constitutes as a standard PPE.

For gowns, it is important to

PM to address nation on Wednesday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is set to address the nation in the evening of March 25.

Bangladesh Radio and Bangladesh Television will telecast the programme, said sources at the Prime Minister’s Office.

Coronavirus patient’s doctor tests positive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The medical officer who treated a coronavirus patient at the capital’s Delta Medical College Hospital recently also tested positive for the virus.

The young doctor had received the patient at the emergency centre of the hospital, Dr Md Saiduzzaman, a member of the Foundation for Doctors’ Safety & Rights, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Another doctor who assisted him to treat the patient from Tolarbagh is in home-quarantine with five other family members, Dr Das of Kuwait Maitree Hospital said.

Saiduzzaman said the doctor was taken to Kuwait Maitree Hospital, SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

But many of them are defying the advice of quarantining themselves. The authorities must find them and institutionally quarantine them now.”

Prof MA Faiz, former DG of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said, “The government needs to estimate how many people may get infected, how many may need hospital care, ICU and other special interventions, and the number of protective gear for healthcare professionals.”

IEDCR STRUGGLING WITH MANPOWER

According to IEDCR officials, only 44 epidemiologists have been coordinating the tasks -- ranging from responding to calls at hotline numbers to sample collection and from laboratory research to contract tracing.

“We have officials in 17 offices across the country. It is tough to manage everything, especially during this crisis. We need more human resources,” IEDCR consultant Prof Mushtuq told The Daily Star last night.

have sufficient overlap of the fabric so that it wraps around the body to cover the back (ensuring that if the wearer squats or sits down, the gown still protects the back area of the body).

While the transmissibility of Covid-19 is not fully understood, gowns are available that protect against microorganisms. The choice of gown should be made based on the level of risk of contamination, according to CDC’s guidelines on PPE.

For the full guideline on PPEs, which include gloves and respirators, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/respirator-use-faq.html#gowns>

said Bangladesh Railway Director General Md Shamsuzzaman.

He also said no decision on suspending the services had been made yet.

The railway DG mentioned that the number of passengers dropped by 25 to 30 percent due to virus scare.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority suspended till march 31 taking biometric data on vehicle owners for registration of their vehicles, according to a BRTA circular.

NO LATE FEE FOR GAS, ELECTRICITY BILLS

The power, energy and mineral resources ministry has instructed Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) to allow consumers to pay in May the electricity bills for three months from February without any late fees and surcharge.

It also asked the BERC to allow people to pay gas bills in June for four months from February without late fees and surcharge.

In its circulars, the ministry asked people not to crowd banks to pay bills.

18-yr-old youngest to die in UK of Covid-19

FROM PAGE 1

The PM used his daily press conference to warn there was “no doubt” he would act to close open spaces and limit all movement outside homes if people continued to act foolishly, but stopped short of immediate action.

It came as the UK death toll rose by

48 in just 24 hours to 281 people, with more than 5,600 confirmed cases. Those who died in England were aged between 18 and 102, The DailyMail cited authorities as saying.

Hours earlier, there had been appalling scenes as Britons across the UK flocked to beaches and parks up

and down the country to take a stroll with their loved ones for Mother’s Day, despite social distancing advice from the government surrounding the coronavirus pandemic.

The surge in cases of the virus comes on the day Johnson urged families to stay apart and instead

celebrate Mother’s Day via Skype and other remote communications.

In a tough message to the public from Downing Street this afternoon, Mr Johnson said that even though he understood the physical and mental health benefits of open spaces, he would take drastic steps to protect health.



PHOTO OF THE DAY

SK ENAMUL HUQ



This bus travelling to Narayanganj from Savar was seen carrying a small fraction of its capacity yesterday. Passengers kept their distance from each other, most of them wearing masks amid the coronavirus pandemic. The photo was taken at Shabujbagh in Dhaka.

Overcrowded prisons not equipped to deal with Covid-19 cases

Inmate with symptoms in Natore rushed to isolation

ZYMA ISLAM

Authorities at most prisons across the country -- that are housing double their capacity of inmates -- are struggling to follow the Department of Prisons' directives to screen for coronavirus.

"We are currently housing over 89,000 prisoners across the country. The actual capacity is 41,244," Assistant Inspector General of Prisons Md Monzur Hossain told this newspaper last week.

"We have informed the [prison] authorities to screen all incoming prisoners for symptoms. All new prisoners will be taken to a quarantine ward. They will be kept there for 14 days to see if they show symptoms," said the AIG.

"Following this, they will be taken to another buffer ward, before being released into the general population [inside the prison]. This is an extra precautionary measure in case a healthy prisoner who is ready to leave the quarantine ward is infected by a new prisoner who is sick," he explained.

Following this two-step quarantine, only healthy prisoners will be allowed to mix with the general population, as per the directives.

NATORE JAIL AUTHORITY SENDS INMATE TO ISOLATION

Amid the situation, authorities of Natore District Jail yesterday sent a prisoner to the isolation ward of a designated hospital after he was found to be showing coronavirus-like symptoms. Abdul Barek, superintendent of Natore jail, said, "The prisoner showed symptoms of fever, throat pain, cough and headache on Saturday. We admitted him to the isolation bed of the jail hospital. I reported the matter to the district judge and deputy commissioner (DC), civil surgeon, and superintendent of police -- on Sunday [yesterday] morning, considering risks to the rest of the prisoners and staff." A Natore court granted him bail in the afternoon, following which the district coronavirus prevention committee admitted him to the isolation ward of Natore Sadar Hospital.

The inmate was sent to the jail on March 1, in a case filed over a fight, in Natore Sadar upazila, reports our Natore correspondent.

CRAMPED FOR SPACE

The Department of Prisons' directive is a tall order for Chattogram Central Jail, which houses around 7,500 prisoners in a jailhouse made for 1,853.

"Around 150 new prisoners come in every day. Where should I keep them if I have to quarantine them for 14 days?" said

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

CTTC arrests 3 ATM fraudsters

Says they scammed Tk 50 lakh from 100 accounts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of police have arrested three members of a fraud gang over the weekend, for misappropriating about Tk 50 lakh from over 100 bank accounts in Dhaka, Faridpur and Cox's Bazar.

Mamnun Talukdar, alleged leader of the gang, was arrested from a hotel in Cox's Bazar, while Raju Farazi was picked up from Dhaka's Jatrabari area on Friday. Another member Mithu Mridha was arrested at Bhanga in Faridpur on Saturday, said Najmul Islam, additional deputy commissioner (cyber crime) of CTTC unit.

They used to trick ATM card users to know their CVV (card verification value) numbers and OTP (one-time password) of mobile phones, said the official.

According to CTTC, the gang used to collect ATM card numbers, account names, and phone numbers from branch managers by calling them from cloned numbers of the card divisions of respective banks.

"Identifying themselves as customer

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Italy returnees rue missed opportunity

Upcoming tourist season would have helped them earn extra

JAMIL MAHMUD

The Covid-19 outbreak hit Italy hard at a time when many Bangladeshi wage-earners and traders living in the country were hoping to increase their income during a busy tourist season.

A number of Bangladeshi expatriates who recently returned home said such opportunity would have helped them ease high living costs there, and support families back home better.

Jahangir Bepari, who runs a small business in the capital city of Rome, said a tourist season was about to begin in late March, and it would continue throughout April in upper Rome, where historic monuments like the Colosseum are located.

Bangladeshis who have businesses in such popular tourist spots could have saved about Tk 5 lakh in the season after meeting expenses, he said.

Following the outbreak, there is little scope for business in Italy. Besides losing foreign tourists, there is a chance that traders will lose local consumers drastically in coming months, he said.

Jahangir said another tourist season starts in summer, from early June when tourists throng sea beaches which is also an opportunity for many Bangladeshis to earn extra.

According to him, a Bangladeshi worker can earn between 1,200 and 2,000 euros (around Tk 1.09 lakh and Tk 1.82 lakh) while a small trader's income is about 3,000 euros (approximately Tk 2.73 lakh) a month.

To avoid the outbreak's impact on its economy, the Italian government has announced a stimulus package of 25 billion euros, which include measures to help cover workers' layoffs, according to media reports.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



A good samaritan refills water in a drum, which was set up by another citizen near Jatiya Press Club. These have been left for passers-by to wash hands, which can act as a major cautionary measure against coronavirus. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Provide safety gears to doctors, nurses: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday ordered the authorities concerned of the government to procure safety gears including personal protective equipment (PPE) and supply those to doctors, nurses and staff members at all hospitals and clinics across the country to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

In response to a writ petition, the court directed the health secretary to immediately form a five-member advisory committee to prepare a list of necessary health safety gears including PPEs, surgical masks, gloves, gowns, shoe covers, sanitiser and disinfected medicine in 48 hours to tackle the outbreak.

After getting the list, the authorities will collect the equipment in next seven days and then, the Directorate General

of Health Services, Directorate of Drug Administration and Central Medicine Store Department will distribute those among doctors, nurses and staff across the country, the court said.

The HC also ordered the finance ministry to provide necessary funds and assistance for purchasing the equipment to tackle the pandemic.

Besides, the court issued a rule asking the authorities to explain in three weeks why they should not be directed to collect or procure or purchase necessary health safety equipment on an urgent basis to ensure safety of patients and healthcare personnel.

The HC bench of Justice Md Ashrafur Kamal and Justice Sardar Md Rashed Jahangir came up with the order and rule

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

SC suspends regular lower court activities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday suspended the lower court proceedings, excluding hearing and disposing of urgent matters including bail applications, to avoid public gatherings at the court premises in order to prevent the risk of coronavirus outbreak.

Supreme Court Registrar General Md Akbar Ali issued a circular to this effect in line with the instruction from Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain.

Earlier in the day, the chief justice held a meeting with the judges of the Appellate Division and Law Minister Anisul Huq at his office to discuss running the judicial functions across the country in the present situation.

They decided to monitor the overall situation in coordination with the activities of other organs of the state, SC Spokesman Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star.

After the meeting, the law minister told reporters that the decision for limiting the lower court functions was taken in line with the World Health Organization's

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

COVID-19 Bangladesh adds \$1.5m to Saarc emergency fund

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has committed to contribute \$1.5 million to the Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Covid-19 Emergency Fund, becoming the sixth country to join the regional initiative to fight the spread of the virus under a common strategy.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday told The Daily Star over the phone that they have already communicated with the Saarc Secretariat in this regard.

In the last two days, Afghanistan and Nepal pledged \$1 million each, Maldives pledged \$200,000 and Bhutan \$100,000.

On March 15, during a videoconference

among Saarc leaders, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who initiated the conference in the wake of the coronavirus crisis, proposed the creation of the fund and made an initial offer of \$10 million.

The total contribution, from six Saarc countries, now stands at \$13.8 million.

Pakistan and Sri Lanka are yet to make any announcement on contributing to the voluntary fund, that can be used by any of the eight Saarc countries for emergency needs.

Indian Prime Minister Modi said India was ready to share expertise and logistics for the greater cause of the region. It has already activated one million dollars of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

63 noted citizens slam govt's lack of preparedness

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent personalities yesterday opined that the failure of the government in keeping recently-returned expatriates from Covid-19 affected countries in quarantine proves that the lack of coordination and preparation could push the country towards grave danger.

There is not nearly enough preparedness, coordination, testing kits and management, protection for doctors, masks, sanitisers and ventilators, said a written statement signed by 63 renowned personalities, adding that the number of infections that the government is providing lacks credibility, in the absence of testing mechanisms.

The signatories also raised 10 demands in an open letter to the prime minister yesterday.

"We're deeply concerned seeing the existing weakness in public health management, hospitals and treatment centres and lack of preparation," said the statement, adding that they are aggrieved, frustrated and worried over irresponsible comments and "untrue" statements of success over the issue.

However, responsible action of voluntary persons and organisations was their only ray of hope till now, the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Sludge from roadside drains has been extracted and dumped on a footpath on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. Not only is the waste occupying almost half the footpath width, it is also making the air heavy with stench. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

CORONAVIRUS

Set up testing centres in all districts: 14-party

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League-led 14-party alliance yesterday urged the government to set up at least one coronavirus detection centre in every district, and several in Dhaka city in order to tackle the spread of the deadly virus.

It also called upon the authorities concerned to strictly maintain the mandatory home quarantine for people who have returned from abroad recently, and arrest those who defy it.

The alliance made the call in a press release, signed by several senior leaders -- including its coordinator and AL presidium member Mohammed Nasim, Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu.

The alliance urged the government to equip all doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers with proper safety gear, and suggested to engage the trained medical team of Bangladesh Army if necessary.

It also pledged to work with the government, and appreciated the efforts of health service providers in combating the deadly virus.

Regarding quarantine, the press release said, "No exception shall be made in this case."

"If anyone denies to stay in quarantine, they will have to be arrested," it added.

CTTC arrests 3

FROM PAGE 3

care agents, they used to call account holders and tell them that they made the call to activate new (ATM) cards. The fraudsters collected CVV codes and expiry dates of cards in this way and transferred account holders' money to their Skrill, bKash or Nagad accounts," said Najmul Islam.

The CTTC team recovered seven mobile phones and a bulk of fake SIM cards during the drives. It seized a car and froze multiple bank and bKash accounts of the fraudsters, the official added.

"The authorities of the banks that fell prey to the fraudsters lodged complaints with the CTTC, who informed the matter to Bangladesh Bank and finally managed to identify the gang after tracking phone numbers in Dhaka, Faridpur and Cox's Bazar," Najmul continued.

A case was filed with Dhanmondi Police Station in this connection. The arrestees confessed to their crimes during primary interrogation, officials said.

Rajshahi residents

FROM PAGE 5

Commissioner Hamidul Haque asked various religious institutions to keep their premises clean regularly. He also recommended not to use any carpet on the floor.

Hamidul in a recent Facebook post asked residents to avoid gatherings and not to attend any event or go to restaurants or hotels in groups.

Golam Ruhul Kuddus, additional deputy commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, said, "We cannot stop people from purchasing essentials. But as a precautionary measure, we asked police officials to monitor the gatherings and arrange queues, maintaining safe distance."

The number of persons who have entered Rajshahi city through land ports from India is 1,868, while 900 people entered through airports since March 1, according to RMP.

Meanwhile, a nurse of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) has been in home quarantine since Saturday after she came in close contact with a relative of an Italy returnee while travelling on a bus.

To screen coronavirus suspects as well as avoid spread of the disease, RMCH has set up a makeshift camp with three doctors in front of its outdoor department.

But patients were seen gathering in front of the camp without following protocol of keeping a six-foot distance.

Kawsar Al Imran, who brought her mother to the hospital yesterday, told The Daily Star, "There's no way we can maintain distance, as people gather in large numbers."

He said hundreds like him waited for three hours under the sun but no doctor was available.

Contacted, Saiful Ferdous, deputy director of RMCH, said, "We're trying our best. We have supplied PPE to them [three doctors] to handle patients. I don't know why they were not on the spot. I will look into the matter."

Meanwhile, to make people aware on how to help prevent the spread of coronavirus, government officials in Rajshahi also launched a campaign on Friday.

As part of the initiative, they went to different areas of the city and handed over leaflets to residents. Wearing masks and hand gloves, the officials also spoke to shop owners and vendors over the issue.

Asked, Rajshahi Divisional Commissioner Humayun Kabir said though no one was being quarantined, they have to be prepared and alert.

It was not from

FROM PAGE 5

Bomb disposal unit along with local police recovered the silver coloured object from the hole.

Firoj Hossen Molla, officer-in-charge of Sitakunda Police Station, told The Daily Star that they will study the object to determine what it is exactly.

Ferdous Wahid, director of Ferdous Steel Corporation, told The Daily Star that they brought a barge crane to be dismantled at their shipyard.

He said they announced on loudspeaker that they will dismantle a crane boom, which weighs around 300 tonnes. "We evacuated some people as well," he said.

"There was a bang when the crane boom landed from a height of at least 250 feet," he added.

He said he can't say where the smaller pieces which fell nearby came from.

"There was at least 30 minutes between the large piece of metal landing at Mitrakra and the time of our dismantling of the crane boom," he claimed, adding that there is no connection between these two incidents either.

Italy returnees rue

FROM PAGE 3

Returning Bangladeshi expatriates said compensation as per the announcement will help them little, considering the amount of loss they have to count.

They said as a consequence of the lockdown, a large number of Bangladeshis lost jobs in Rome and other major cities.

A few hundred of them returned to Bangladesh while the rest remained stranded there in precarious conditions.

Abdul Hamid, the owner of a pizzeria in Rome, said he is supposed to get 500 euros (about Tk 45,000) a month as compensation for the layoff period.

Hamid had to shut down his shop and allow leave to his two employees, before flying back to Bangladesh on March 15, amid financial hardships.

Even during the lockdown, someone staying at home has to spend what amounts to 320 to 420 euros a month. At a normal time, the expenditure is more, he said.

"It's hard to live in Italy without a decent income," said Hamid (36), who migrated from Mymensingh a decade ago.

Both he and Jahangir said they will not return there until the situation improves.

The compensation is like having something rather than nothing, said another expatriate, who was employed at a motor workshop as a mechanic.

The expatriate, who preferred not to be named, said the tourist season was a big opportunity for him and many other Bangladeshis to earn extra money.

The expatriate, who hails from Cumilla, said his Italian employer cancelled his work contract following its closure due to the lockdown and asked him to be in contact.

Moin Uddin, another returnee, said many Bangladeshi workers he knows stayed back there due to financial hardships.

There are people who do not have enough money to buy plane tickets. They have no choice but to stay back, said Moin, who is from Noakhali's Sonaimuri upazila.

The expat from Cumilla said there are some 8,000 to 10,000 Bangladeshis living in his neighbourhood, known as Bangla town. They are all in financial crises under the present situation, he said.

Ubaidul Haque, who lives near the leaning tower of Pisa, said he had been without a job for more than two weeks after the nightclub he worked at was shut down.

"Everyone is out of job," said Ubaidul, who hails from Narsingdi.

Those who have stayed back will have to rely on their savings, he added.

"Undocumented workers will have to face bigger problems. No one cares about them," he said.

Badrul Alam, who lives in beachside town Fiumicino, said he returned home because he had to break into his savings. Besides, his family members back in Dhaka were also worried about him.

Upon their return, the expatriates were taken to Dhaka's Hajj Camp on March 15 for a mandatory health checkup. A day later, they were sent to home quarantine.

Italy is home to some two lakh Bangladeshis, including about 50,000 undocumented workers.

The country diagnosed over 47,000 known infections of coronavirus, and more than 4,000 fatalities from the disease, surpassing the number in China.

Overcrowded prisons

FROM PAGE 3

Kamal Hossain, senior superintendent of Chattogram jail.

"We are checking them for symptoms during intake, and if they show any symptoms we will quarantine them. This is what the district civil surgeon recommended to us, considering our situation," said Kamal.

The newly-built Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj will not be able to quarantine new prisoners either -- as it is overcrowded already.

"I have over 10,000 prisoners. The jail's capacity is 4,097. We are keeping new intakes under observation but not quarantining," said Iqbal Kabir Chowdhury, senior superintendent of the Dhaka jail.

Similarly, Tangail District Jail's Superintendent Mohammed Abdullah Al Mamun informed this correspondent that he would not be able to quarantine freshly-arrived inmates for 14 days.

The jail he runs currently houses some 1,100 prisoners, while it is made for only 467 prisoners.

"If a new prisoner is showing symptoms, we will quarantine the patient. But otherwise, they are released into the general population," Mamun informed The Daily Star.

Barishal Central Jail too will not be able to quarantine prisoners for 14 days, said jail authorities.

"We can house 50 to 60 prisoners in the quarantine ward, but we get around 30 new prisoners every day. Housing them for 14 days might be a problem," said Proshanto Kumar Banik, the jail superintendent.

"If we observe any symptom in the prisoners, we will send them to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital

immediately," he added.

The contingency plan in case of an infected prisoner varies from jail to jail. Some have plans of isolation wards in the jail's hospital while others will send them to general hospitals.

Rangpur Central Jail authorities informed The Daily Star it will also only quarantine suspected cases, already housing twice its capacity at around 1,500 prisoners.

The superintendent of Cox's Bazar District Jail also has no space to quarantine the new intakes, as per the prisons department's orders.

"It is not possible to quarantine. We have only kept the 45 prisoners from Myanmar separately," said jail Superintendent Md Mokammel Hossain.

The Cox's Bazar jail houses some 4,500 inmates but was actually built for 530 prisoners only -- meaning they house nearly nine times the amount of prisoners they can actually hold.

While all prisons are crowded, the Cox's Bazar District Jail packs more people per square feet than others.

For example, the Cox's Bazar District Jail, Mymensingh Central Jail, and Narayanganj District Jail are all built on approximately eight acres of land. But while the population of the first is 4,500, the other two accommodate 2,100 and 1,800 prisoners respectively.

Narayanganj District Jail has an official capacity of 300, but houses six times its capacity, jail authorities told The Daily Star.

Mymensingh Central Jail has space for 1,000 prisoners but houses a little more than twice its capacity.

However, both managed to clear out spaces to quarantine the new intakes for 14

Five returnees

FROM PAGE 5

In the last three months, some 8,344 migrants returned to Patuakhali; police and health officials are looking for them, he said.

A mobile court led by Ghior UNO Irine Akter yesterday fined three grocers at Baniajuri Bazar Tk 55,000 for hiking prices of essentials, reports our Manikganj correspondent.

The UNO also fined Mazharul Islam Razu, a Saudi Arabia returnee, Tk 10,000 for violating home quarantine.

A mobile court fined a woman who returned from Jordan Tk 10,000 as she was roaming around at Pechulia village of Joypurhat Sadar, our Dinajpur correspondent adds.

Health department officials say 72 returnees from different countries have been put in home quarantine in the district.

In eight districts -- including Joypurhat -- under Rangpur division, 539 returnees from abroad have been put in quarantine,

said Dr Mostafizur Rahman, director of DGHS in Rangpur.

Provide safety gears

FROM PAGE 3

following a writ petition filed by Advocate Aklasuddin Bhuiyan, Advocate Ripon Barai and Advocate Mahbulul Islam on behalf of Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh yesterday, seeking necessary orders.

The judges heard the petition, passed the order and issued the rule at their chamber room as they were not assigned to sit in the courtroom yesterday, petitioners' counsel Advocate Manzill Murshid told The Daily Star.

During hearing, Murshed told the court that as per reports published in different newspapers there is shortage of health safety equipment in different hospitals and clinics, and due to that reason, many doctors and nurses are afraid to perform their duties.

Even in some cases, they were avoiding normal patients who have got viral fever, flu, cough etc, he said. Due to the shortage of effective health safety equipment, doctors and nurses are reluctant to serve patients, which ultimately deprive citizens from medical treatment as well as the affected from the right to life as guaranteed under article 32 of the constitution of Bangladesh.

Deputy Attorney Generals Debashis Bhattacharyya and Protikar Chakma represented the state at the hearing.

SC suspends regular

FROM PAGE 3

recommendation to prohibit gathering of people to tackle the spread of coronavirus.

Yesterday, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam also met the chief justice at his office to discuss the situation.

Contacted, Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star that the chief justice will discuss with his colleagues about suspending the proceedings of the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the SC after March 29 when the divisions will reopen after its ongoing vacation.

On March 19, the SC administration has directed jail authorities not to produce under-trial prisoners before the lower courts during case proceedings till further order, as a precaution.

The prisons do not have an adequate number of hygiene and sanitation facilities for the large number of inmates they're holding, and advised hygiene practices are difficult to follow as a result.

The prisons are also relying on self-reporting and shared thermometers to screen prisoners for fever.

"We are not technologically sound," said Mamun, Tangail jail's superintendent. "Because we have no equipment to check, we are asking prisoners if they have a fever, or if they had a fever in the past week."

"We don't have thermal scanners or infrared thermometers yet, but we have asked the ministry to provide us with those," said the AIG of Prisons Monzur.

Khulna jail Superintendent Omar Faruk, however, informed that they obtained infrared thermometers.

SC ORDER TO NOT PRODUCE UNDER-TRIAL PRISONERS

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

Supreme Court Registrar General Md Ali Akbar issued the notification 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 are 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, it said.

Qulkhwani of Wazed Ali Khan today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Qulkhwani of freedom fighter Wazed Ali Khan will be held after Zohr prayers



today at his village home in Tangail's Dhanbari upazila. Relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to attend the event and pray for the departed soul.

Wazed, also the vice-president of Dhanbari upazila unit of Awami League, died of cardiac arrest at Bhatkura village on Friday. He was 72.

He left behind his wife, three sons, a daughter and a host of friends and well-wishers to mourn his death.

Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 3

the fund to dispatch medical supplies to Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Foreign Minister Momen said during the conference, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina suggested that the Saarc Secretariat should coordinate the regional collaboration on fighting coronavirus for the safety and security of the people in the region.

She also proposed for the establishment of an institution in Bangladesh to prevent and fight public health threats in the region in future. Saarc Secretariat can devise a mechanism on how to use the fund, Momen said.

63 noted citizens slam

FROM PAGE 3

statement said, lamenting that "the government is not showing any interest to coordinate these initiatives."

"We want the government to adopt a master plan in coordination with experts, environmentalists, physicians, civil society members and ministries immediately to address the crisis," reads the letter.

To make the master plan work, they suggested to form a multi-functional working committee with civil society members' of different levels to look over the activities of the government.

It further urged the government to publish a white paper of its plans to contain the epidemic, allot funds for it on a priority basis and inform the public of it; ensure supply and management of coronavirus testing kits and other required materials free of cost; and implement strict monitoring at all entry points of the country, map location of potentially vulnerable groups and take region-based measures, and close down all tourist spots.

Its other suggestions include using hotels, resorts and other suitable establishments away from densely-populated areas for quarantine, and setting up temporary hospitals at stadiums, gymnasiums with the help of the army, and coordinate with private hospitals.

It also suggested supplying PPEs to doctors and nurses immediately; take measures to regularly disinfect hotspots of virus spreading including mass transports, jails and slums; ensure paid leaves of garment workers, enforce fair price of daily commodities, provide training to volunteers and equipment to raise awareness and carry out preventive measures.

The signatories to the letter include: Prof Anu Muhammad, Prof Dr Geeti Ara Nasrin; Sultana Kamal, Shaheen Anam, Khushi Kabir, Shahidul Alam, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Rehnuma Ahmed, Ali Riaz, Badiul Alam Majumdar, Samina Luthfa, Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, Fahmidul Haq along with a number of university teachers and rights activists.



BIRDEM GENERAL HOSPITAL

(An Enterprise of Diabetic Association of Bangladesh)

122 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.

☎: 58616641-50, 9661551-60 Fax: 880-2-9677772

INVITATION FOR TENDER

Invitation Ref. & Date : BIRDEM/Purchase/10-Group (Medicine & MSR Items)/2020/02


Dated : 22 March 2020

01.	Name of Works	Supply of Medicine & MSR items for BIRDEM General Hospital for the year 2020-2021				
02.	Details of Work	Group-01: Medicine.		Group-06: Stationery & other Items.		
		Group-02: Surgical Items.		Group-07: Crockery's & Miscellaneous Items.		
		Group-03: Linen.		Group-08: Hardware & Sanitary Items.		
		Group-04: Gauge-Bandage, Dressing & related items.		Group-09: Electro Mechanical items.		
		Group-05: Chemical & Reagents.		Group-10: Cleaning Materials.		
03.	Procurement Method	Open Tender Method (OTM)				
04.	Source of fund	BIRDEM General Hospital				
05.	Name, designation & address of official inviting tender	Director General, BIRDEM General Hospital, Shahbag, Dhaka-1000.				
06.	Name & address of the office selling tender documents	Procurement Section, Room: 230, 1 st floor of OPD Building, BIRDEM General Hospital, Shahbag, Dhaka-1000.				
07.	Date of selling of tender documents	Tender documents will be available from 24 March 2020 to 21 April 2020 on all working days (09.00 am to 01.00 pm).				
08.	Tender closing date	23 April 2020 (From 08.00 AM to 12.00 PM)				
09.	Tender opening date	23 April 2020 at 12.30 Noon (In presence of the tenderers or their authorized agent, if anybody available)				
10.	Price of tender document (For each Group)	Group: 1, 2 & 5 = 5,000/ (Five Thousand) Taka Only. (Each Group)				
		Group: 3, 4, 8 & 9 = 2,000/ (Two Thousand) Taka Only. (Each Group)				
		Group: 6, 7 & 10 = 1,000/ (One Thousand) Taka Only. (Each Group)				
11.	Tender Security	Name of Group	Tender Security Amount (BDT)	Name of Group	Tender Security Amount (BDT)	Comments
		Group-01	1,00,000.00	Group-06	10,000.00	Said amount for each group have to be deposited in the form of Demand Draft or Pay-order from any local commercial bank in favor of BIRDEM General Hospital.
		Group-02	50,000.00	Group-07	10,000.00	
		Group-03	30,000.00	Group-08	20,000.00	
		Group-04	30,000.00	Group-09	20,000.00	
Group-05	50,000.00	Group-10	10,000.00			
12.	Eligibility of tenderers					
	a.	The tenderers should be manufacturer or their authorized supplier/distributor/dealer or seller of the items.				
	b.	Each group & item of the lot shall be evaluated separately.				
	c.	The tenderers should have valid & updated trade license, TIN, VAT & Income Tax Certificate.				
13.	Detail specifications, terms & conditions, warranty & After sales services are enumerated in the tender schedule.					
14.	BIRDEM authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.					
Note: In case of holiday or any unavoidable circumstances last date of dropping & opening will be the next working day.						

Professor Zafar Ahmed Latif

Director General

BIRDEM General Hospital




বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংক

(সেন্ট্রাল ব্যাংক অব বাংলাদেশ)

প্রধান কার্যালয়

মতিবিল, ঢাকা-১০০০

বাংলাদেশ



বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং-৩৬/২০২০

তারিখঃ ০৮ চৈত্র ১৪২৬

২২ মার্চ ২০২০

জনতা ব্যাংক লিমিটেড এ 'এসিস্ট্যান্ট এক্সিকিউটিভ অফিসার (এইও)' পদে নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে চলমান মৌখিক পরীক্ষা স্থগিতকরণ সংক্রান্ত বিজ্ঞপ্তি

ব্যাংকার্স সিলেকশন কমিটি কর্তৃক প্রচারিত বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং-২২/২০২০, তারিখঃ ০৩/০৩/২০২০ এর সূত্রে সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, করোনা ভাইরাসজনিত পরিস্থিতির কারণে জনস্বাস্থ্যের বিষয়টি বিবেচনায় নিয়ে আগামী ২৪/০৩/২০২০ তারিখ হতে ০৫/০৪/২০২০ তারিখ মেয়াদে অনুষ্ঠিতব্য শিরোনামোক্ত মৌখিক পরীক্ষাটি পরবর্তী নির্দেশনা না দেওয়া পর্যন্ত স্থগিত করা হলো। তবে আগামী ২৩/০৩/২০২০ তারিখে অনুষ্ঠিতব্য মৌখিক পরীক্ষা যথারীতি অনুষ্ঠিত হবে।

ব্যাবহিক ও আর্থিক সেবা পেতে হয়রানির শিকার হলে কিংবা কোনো অভিযোগ থাকলে ১৬২৩৬ নম্বরে ফোন করুন।

আরিক হোসেন খান

মহাব্যবস্থাপক, বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংক

ও

সদস্য-সচিব, বিএসসি

ডিসিপিঃ ৪৮/২০২০-১১৮৪

তারিখঃ ২২/০৩/২০২০

জিডি-৫৭০



A man helps a family member with physical disability board a train at Chattogram Railway Station, as the door is too narrow for wheelchair access. On top of that, getting on and off a train at the station is a challenging task for passengers, since the train compartments rest unevenly higher than the surface of the platform. This photo was taken on Friday afternoon.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Youth’s body recovered from Ctg pond

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday recovered the body of a 25-year-old youth from a pond in port city’s Bayezid area.

The identity of the deceased could not be known immediately.

SI Nur Nabi of Bayezid Bostami Police Station said, “Local spotted the body floating in the pond of a mosque near BSTC Glass House area and informed police around 11am.”

“Police rushed to the spot and recovered the body,” said the SI, adding, “The youth was wearing three-quarter pants and a black and white half shirt. There were no injury marks on the body.”

“The deceased had no mobile phone or wallet with him,” added the SI. He said they have notified PBI to collect his finger print for bio-metric verification.

It was not from space, after all

Metal object in Sitakunda fell out of shipyard crane

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Ctg

The iron-like object which fell on a village at Bhatiyari union of Sitakunda on Saturday afternoon, is part of a crane that was being used to drag fragments of a larger barge crane weighing 5,000 tonnes.

Dismantling large cranes requires proper know-how but the yard authority did not know how to handle it, causing wire and hook of the other crane to detach and projectile to nearby areas. At least three pieces fell on three different areas, said sources inside the ship breaking yard.

Mohammad Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Metal Workers Federation, claimed that the incident originated from Ferdous Steel Corporation.

Ali, quoting his network of workers at ship breaking yards, said one of the three parts severed the power line at a nearby area in Jahajghata. The power line was restored yesterday evening.

Another part fell on a coconut tree and the heaviest part fell two kilometres away at Mitrapara of Bhatiyari union, creating a

15-feet deep hole, he said.

Mohammad Ali Shahin, coordinator of Young Power for Social Action, an NGO that works to ensure safety at shipyards, told The Daily Star that the yard does not have the technical knowledge to operate power cranes.

This requires technical know-how, otherwise it can cause serious damage, he said.

Golam Kibria, village police of Bhatiyari union told The Daily Star that the shipyard is two kilometres away from where the object fell. Sometimes tiny pieces of metal from shipyard ends up in nearby areas.

Milton Roy, Sitakunda upazila nirbarhi officer, told The Daily Star that they were considering that it came from the shipyard of Ferdous Steel Corporation.

The yard authority was dismantling a ship close to the time the object fell, he said.

Earlier the iron-like object weighing around 30kg led to a lot of speculation among locals.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Violating Home Quarantine Order

Five returnees fined

STAR REPORT

Five returnees from abroad were fined Tk 32,000 in total for violating home quarantine order in three districts during the last two days. Meanwhile, three traders were fined Tk 55,000 for hiking prices of essential commodities taking advantage of coronavirus fear.

Separate mobile courts fined three returnees from abroad in the district for defying home quarantine on Saturday, our Patuakhali correspondent reports.

In Sadar upazila, Executive Magistrate and Upazila Nirhabhi Officer Latifa Jannati fined Sajol Karmakar (35) from the town’s Natun Bazar area Tk 5,000.

He returned from India on March 11 and was seen roaming outdoors.

In Mirzaganj upazila, UNO and Executive Magistrate Sarwar Hossain fined Monir Hossain (32) Tk 2,000. He returned to Poshim Subidkhali village from Malaysia recently.

Dashmina UNO and Executive Magistrate Tania Ferdouse fined another man Tk 5,000, who returned from Oman recently. His identity could not be known immediately.

Meanwhile, samples of two people with coronavirus symptoms were sent to Dhaka, said Deputy Commissioner of Patuakhali Matuil Islam Chowdhury yesterday.

Of them, a 60-year-old woman went to the town from India recently and another man went to Moukaran in Patuakhali Sadar upazila two days ago from Kalkini upazila near Shibchar in Madaripur, he said.

“We already declared the houses they are staying in as ‘home quarantines’. The order will be effective until we receive their reports,” he told a press briefing at his office around 11am.

In the district, around 2,165 people were put in home quarantines and 402 of them were released, said DC Matuil Islam.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

SPREADING RUMOURS

Doctor put on 3-day remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chattogram court yesterday granted a three-day remand for quizzing Dr Iftekhar Adnan, who was arrested by police on Saturday night for spreading rumors about novel coronavirus on social media through an audio clip.

The court of Chattogram Metropolitan Magistrate Abu Salem Md Noman passed the remand order for Dr Adnan -- who works as a doctor at a private hospital at GEC intersection of the port city -- after police pleaded a 10-day remand for him before the court, said Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Md Kamruzzaman of Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

Police claimed that Adnan is a health affairs secretary of Jubo Dal’s Chattogram city unit -- a youth wing of BNP.

The audio -- which appeared to be a phone conversation allegedly recorded by Adnan -- says the death toll from coronavirus increased in Chattogram, and that the government is withholding information relating to it, urging the man on the other side to be cautious.

Police had said on Saturday that Adnan admitted to recording the audio, during primary investigation.

Rajshahi residents defy social distancing advisory

Divisional health director urges lockdown to tackle coronavirus

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

With expatriates -- most susceptible to coronavirus -- continuing to return to the country, the authorities concerned in Rajshahi are struggling to make residents aware of social distancing for precautionary measures against the deadly virus as they keep on gathering at various places in large numbers.

Besides, religious congregations are also taking place in the division on a regular basis.

Meanwhile, doctors of healthcare centres are also in need of personal protective equipment (PPE) for treating coronavirus suspects.

“Though there are still no reports of anyone being infected with coronavirus, we need to remain alert,” said Dr Gopendra Nath Acharya, director of Rajshahi Divisional Health Office under Health Services Division.

The doctor informed that around 1,500 people with history of visiting corona-affected countries entered eight districts of the division in 24 hours till 6am yesterday, and all of them were asked to be home quarantined.

Urging the authorities concerned to impose a lockdown in the division, the director said the situation is grave as they do not have any testing facility. “Social distancing is important as it will lower the chances of getting infected,” he said.



People gather at a makeshift camp in front of RMCH outdoor yesterday. The hospital started the service for coronavirus screening, but no one was seen taking any visible cautionary step.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Unfortunately, people were still seen gathering at markets, parks and other places, despite government instruction of avoiding any kind of gathering as preventive measures to curb the spread of coronavirus.

Failing to stop religious gatherings, Rajshahi Deputy

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Constituent assembly

FROM PAGE 16

seats. There will be one Speaker and one Deputy Speaker to be chosen by the members of the Constituent Assembly from amongst themselves.

According to the Order, a member of the Assembly may resign his seat by a notice addressed to the Speaker. And if a member remains absent from the Assembly without leave for 60 consecutive sitting days, his seat shall become vacant.

CURB ON FLOOR CROSSING BY PARLIAMENT MEMBERS

Crossing of floor by a member of the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh has been prohibited by an order promulgated by the president today. A member of the Constituent Assembly who has been elected on the ticket of a political organisation will cease to be a member upon his resignation or expulsion from

that party, adds the Order entitled Bangladesh Constituent Assembly Members (Cessation of Membership) Order, 1972.

PM’S ‘MEET THE PEOPLE’ SCHEDULE

Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will henceforth meet the citizens on Friday and Sunday at Ganobhaban to hear grievances of the people, according to the PM’s secretariat.

PARLIAMENT MEMBERS WILL DRAW 500TK A MONTH

A member of the Bangladesh Constituent Assembly shall draw Tk 500 per month as salary, according to the president’s Order entitled “The Members of the Constituent Assembly (Salaries and Allowances) Order 1972”. Besides that, members of the Constituent Assembly will enjoy first-class travel facilities from their residence to the place of the session

of the Assembly. Each member shall be given Tk 40 as daily allowance and Tk 10 as conveyance for each day during any period of stay on duty. A member, his spouse and his dependent children shall be entitled to the same medical facilities enjoyed by Class-I gazette officers. Every member of the Constituent Assembly shall get a telephone at his residence at government expense.

SOVIET UNION WILL SUPPLY 50 LOCOMOTIVES

The Soviet Union will give 50 diesel-driven locomotives to Bangladesh. This is disclosed by the Soviet Ambassador to Bangladesh Valentin Popov following his discussion with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at his official residence today.

SOURCES: March 24, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Daily Ittefaq, Azad, Morning News, The Bangladesh Observer and Purbodesh.

Govt mulls turning 87km

FROM PAGE 16

zones and many markets and other structures along 16.5 km of the four-lane highway are slowing down traffic on the road, said Shishir Kanti Routh, additional chief engineer of RHD, quoting a road safety audit conducted by his department in 2017-2018.

The average daily traffic on the highway in 2019 was 27,663, he said. Shishir, also a member of RHD’s PPP cell, predicted that the traffic on the highway will increase once economic zones are established in Mymensingh, Netrokona, Sherpur and Jamalpur districts. There are three or four land ports in the districts.

For the first time, the RHD also plans to install an Intelligent Transport System (ITS) on the expressway to immediately learn about the news of any accident or other incidents. It will allow the department to take quick action to prevent disruption to traffic, he added.

Although the probable cost and duration of the new project has not been assessed yet, an RHD official said it may take Tk 3,000-4,000 crores. As the project would not require too much land, the duration of the project would be relatively short, he said.

Meanwhile, the government is also implementing a project for rapid bus service, whereby buses will use dedicated lanes, on the other portion of the four-lane Dhaka-Mymensingh highway from Shahjalal International Airport to Gazipur.

SOUTH KOREA ACCEPTED THE PROJECT

Public Private Partnership Authority (PPPA) and Korea Overseas Infrastructure and Urban Development (KIND), a Korean organisation for providing support to global PPP businesses, signed a memorandum of understanding in April last year.

RHD submitted two projects and Korea so far accepted the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway project, RHD Chief Engineer Ashraf Alam told The Daily Star on March 7.

The project proposal was then sent to the PPPA via the Road Transport and Bridges Ministry, he added.

PPPA Chief Executive Officer Muhammad Alkama Siddiqui told this newspaper on March 7 that they have already endorsed and recommended the project for submission to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) for in-principle approval.

He said once approved, they would hire an adviser and carry out a detailed feasibility study, physical and financial assessment within the shortest possible time.

The ministry would soon send the proposal to CCEA for approval, a ministry official said.

He added that South Korea has already selected three companies -- SK E&C, Korean Expressway Corporation and Cotte E&C -- for implementing the project. SK E&C will be the lead company.

An expressway is a highway especially planned for high-speed traffic, usually with no or very few

intersections, limited points of access or exit, and a divider between lanes for traffic moving in opposite directions.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on March 12 opened the country’s first-ever expressway from Dhaka to Faridpur’s Bhanga upazila. However, users will get the full benefit of the expressway once the construction work of Padma bridge is complete.

The government had also planned to construct an expressway parallel to the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway, but changed its decision last year.

Now priority is being given to a high-speed train project between Dhaka and the port city, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said recently.

Maoist rebels

FROM PAGE 16

battling the extreme left-wing guerillas since April, 2017 when 25 police commandos were killed in an attack in the same district.

Sixteen commandos were also killed in a bomb attack in the western state of Maharashtra before India’s election last year that was blamed on the Maoists.

The militants, who say they are fighting for rural people and the poor, have been fighting government forces across Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and other states since the 1960s.

Thousands have been killed in the fighting.

Man killed

FROM PAGE 16

and drugs, the OC said.

Sensing their presence, Sohel’s associates opened fire, prompting law enforcers to fire back in “self-defence”, the police official said.

At one stage, Sohel fell in the line of fire, while his cohorts managed to flee the scene.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared him dead, the OC added.

Police claimed to have recovered a revolver from the spot.

Sohel’s elder brother Jamal Hawlader alleged that they went to Khilgaon Police Station on Saturday night hearing that police picked up Sohel who was returning from Cox’s Bazar.

Police then told them to go to the court yesterday saying he would be produced before it.

“But they killed my brother,” he claimed.

He also alleged that a local drug trader offered his brother to join the drug trade, but Sohel denied working with him. The drug trader may have misguided police to kill him, he alleged.

Jamal admitted that his brother was accused in a case but said he was on bail. He claimed Sohel used to sell fruits on the footpath in Khilgaon’s Sipahibag but recently shifted to Shanir Akhra as police evicted vendors from the footpath.

OC Mashiur refuted the allegation and said Sohel was a drug trader and went to Cox’s Bazar bring in drugs to Dhaka. He handed the drugs to someone before his arrest along with another youth named Sagor. Sohel was arrested several times and resumed his criminal activities after getting bail, he said.

Diamond

FROM PAGE 16

The new sample of kimberlite, a type of igneous rock, showed unmistakable properties similar to other portions of the NAC, the researchers said.

The fragment adds about 10 percent to the known expanse of the NAC and also helps reconstruct mysterious shapes of Earth’s ancient continental crust.

“The mineral composition of other portions of the North Atlantic Craton is so unique there was no mistaking it,” said University of British Columbia geologist Maya Kopylova.

“It was easy to tie the pieces together. Adjacent ancient cratons in northern Canada -- in northern Quebec, northern Ontario and Nunavut -- have completely different mineralogies.”

What happens

FROM PAGE 16

of resurgence”, said Flahault, head of Geneva University’s Institute of Global Health.

That proportion depends on the ease with which the virus is transmitted from an infected to a healthy person.

The more contagious the disease, the higher the number of immunised people has to be to stop it in its tracks.

For Covid-19 “there would need to be between 50 and 66 percent of people infected and then rendered immune to wipe out the pandemic”, he said.

The level of contagion itself is open to variation, according to the kind of preventative measures taken, such as quarantine, confinement, and also potentially weather conditions.

If an infected person infects on average less than one other person “then the epidemic comes to an end”, he said.

RESURGENCES

But that will not necessarily be an end of the epidemic, which might just be taking a break, as he argues it is “currently doing in China and South Korea”.

Because health measures during an epidemic are only temporary “and when you relax them the epidemic starts again until it reaches an ad-hoc herd immunity, sometimes over several months or years,” he said.

The head of the infectious diseases service at the Pitie Salpetriere hospital in Paris, Professor Francois Bricaire, also warned of possible “resurgences”.

“The reappearance of Covid-19 is a possibility, with eventually a seasonal resurgence” he told AFP.

Sharon Lewin, an Australian infectious diseases expert, also wonders about the possibility of a return: “Will it come back? We don’t know.”

However, she said SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), also a coronavirus, disappeared completely following strict social distancing measures, after killing 774 people in 2002 and 2003.

The development of a vaccine and its global distribution, which the pharmaceutical industry has promised to deliver within 12-18 months, would radically change the outlook.

Emirates to suspend

FROM PAGE 16

Saeed Al-Maktoum said in a statement. “We continue to watch the situation closely, and as soon as things allow, we will reinstate our services.”

Emirates passenger flights normally serve 159 destinations.

The United Arab Emirates on Friday announced its first two deaths from the COVID-19 disease, having reported 153 infections so far, of which 38 people have recovered.

Maktoum said that, until January this year, the Emirates Group was “doing well” against current financial year targets, but “COVID-19 has brought all that to a sudden and painful halt over the past six weeks”.

“The world has literally gone into quarantine due to the COVID-19 outbreak,” he said.

The airline also said it will slash basic salaries -- by between 25 and 50 percent -- of a majority of employees for three months, but will not cut jobs.

“Rather than ask employees to leave the business, we chose to implement a temporary basic salary cut as we want to protect our workforce,” said Maktoum. “We want to avoid cutting jobs.”

The disease first emerged in China in late December and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization earlier this month.

Gulf countries have imposed various restrictions to combat the spread of the virus, particularly in the air transport sector.

The UAE has stopped granting visas on arrival and forbidden foreigners who are legal residents but are outside the country from returning.

17 years old raped

FROM PAGE 16

daughter in a critical condition on Friday night.

She is now undergoing treatment at Habiganj Sadar Hospital.

Rajib Chowdhury, a doctor of the hospital, said they primarily found evidence of rape.

Contacted, Azizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Nabiganj Police Station, said the victim’s father filed the case on Saturday afternoon. Police arrested Jewel at night, he said.

Talking to this newspaper, the victim’s mother said her daughter went out with Jewel on Friday. Promising her to marry, Jewel raped her, she said.

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY MARCH 23, 2020, CHAITRA 9, 1426 BS

We need a collective strategy to fight COVID-19

Coordination among private and public initiatives is crucial

As more and more people are testing positive with COVID-19 every day, with the actual number of people infected still unknown to us, fear has gripped the nation. People are worried for all the right reasons—the government still does not have any comprehensive plan to tackle the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the country, our hospitals do not have the capacity or approval to test and treat patients infected with the disease, we do not have the required amount of test kits, our doctors and medical staff have not been provided with enough personal protective equipment (PPE) to treat the suspected COVID-19 patients, and self-isolation or home-quarantine measures have not been found to be successful. However, amid the growing public concern over the government’s sloppy preparations to contain the spread of the COVID-19 in the country, initiatives taken by some voluntary and private organisations have offered us a ray of hope.

One of the most encouraging news for us this time has been the testing kit developed by scientists of Gonoshasthaya Kendra. Globally, it has been proved that testing as many suspected cases as possible is the number one thing to do to contain the spread of the virus, apart from quarantine measures and lockdowns. Thus, in order to make testing accessible to all, the government needs to provide Gonoshasthaya all the support it needs to produce the testing kits on a massive scale.

Besides, we have come across some individual and organisational efforts to help the mass people deal with the corona crisis. Amid huge PPE crisis in our hospitals, some private organisations, including Buet alumni association and some garment industries have started producing them, to be distributed among doctors, nurses and medical staff free of cost. It is good to know that the PPEs produced by them have already got the health ministry’s approval.

Initiatives taken by Bidyananda Foundation, a voluntary organisation, are underway to fight the spread of the virus. They have been distributing masks and hand sanitisers among people for free and have already set up hand washing facilities in different points of the city. Then there are some student organisations, including Chhatra Union, whose members themselves have been making hand sanitisers and distributing them among the rickshaw-pullers and other vulnerable groups of society. Moreover, many private organisations and hospitals, who are now fully prepared to test patients for COVID-19, are just waiting for the government’s approval.

As we have always witnessed, during any national crisis, it is the general people and the private organisations who always show us the way out. And it is no different this time. But all these private initiatives need to be coordinated to have a greater impact and that responsibility falls on the government. We hope the government would be proactive in coordinating among all the private and public initiatives and make a collective plan to fight the pandemic.

Bhakurta’s natural water source being drained out

An artificially created water shortage

WHILE it is the bounden duty of Dhaka Wasa to provide drinking water to its residents, that cannot be by depriving other areas of drinking and irrigation water. But that is exactly what the Dhaka Wasa has been doing with the water of a natural aquifer in Bhakurta to supply water to the Mirpur residents for the last five years.

The reservoir in Bhakurta, discovered by Wasa about five years ago, was Providential since it was being refilled naturally through an underground channel linked with the Himalayas. What was estimated to last for about 30-40 years has already gone dry because Wasa had been pumping out crores of litres of water from the source with deep tube wells causing severe water crisis not only for the several lakh residents of two unions of Savar, but also of one union in Keraniganj, where the residents have to scrounge for potable water from here and there because even the hand pumps have run dry. The situation has also deprived a vast swathe of land of water for cultivation, that they had benefitted from since 1985, since last one year. The marginal farmers are the worst affected.

Wasa agrees that the situation has been caused primarily by extracting water in excess of its natural replenishment volume. And this is because perhaps no study was done initially to determine the rate of recharge so that the outflow did not outrun the recharge.

While there seems to be no lack of appreciation of the problem, it seems that Wasa and the Local Government Engineering Department are trying to pass the buck on to one another in so far as developing separate network for water distribution for Bhakurta area instead of the current temporary measure. Neither Wasa nor LGED can shirk their responsibility. And there is nothing as “won’t do or can’t do” for government agencies. They should put their heads and resources together to solve Bhakurta’s water problem, and do it quickly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Prevent panic buying

The number of people infected with the coronavirus is increasing everyday. People are panicking and purchasing commodities without considering the impact on the market.

During such times, the authorities should take advanced measures to keep the situation under control.

Malik Muntasir Reza Shyamoli, Dhaka

COVID-19 and Bangladesh’s macroeconomic challenges

MIZANUR RAHMAN

THE world economy is now on lockdown because of the global coronavirus pandemic. Governments and their central banks around the world are wasting no time in dealing with the health and economic implications of this crisis.

It is surprising that the Bangladesh government has seemingly accepted the effects of the outbreak on our economy. The real economy is facing unforeseen crises—slump in both aggregate supply and demand. An obvious consequence is contraction in value added and output across industries.

On the supply side, every economic activity will surely contract more or less. This is because supply chain of every product including access to raw materials and intermediate inputs has been substantially disrupted. Labour mobility too has been seriously impeded as physical isolation is one key measure of minimising the health risks. On the demand side, exporters who are left with diminished production capacities will also see markets for their final goods shrink. Local industries that cater to domestic residents are also experiencing rapid decline in the demand for their goods and services. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) which employ millions of workers and constitute the backbone of the economy appear to be more vulnerable. As SMEs face massive slump in demand, their existential challenge is to remain financially viable.

This unforeseen but truly exogenous COVID-19 shock is now interacting with many prevailing economic woes of Bangladesh. Those include stagnant tax revenue, widening fiscal deficits, prohibitive liquidity and solvency crisis in the country’s financial system, a long-depressed stock market, an overvalued exchange rate, and persistent and unsustainable current account deficits in the last few years. How do we deal with these complex economic challenges?

Firstly, businesses faced with falling demand and broken supply chain will find no option but to lay off workers. That will be destabilising and chaotic. The government must try to prevent this using several mechanisms. Given that government borrowing from banks have surged in order to support widening fiscal deficits in recent times, liquidity crisis has become prohibitive in our financial system. We therefore expect no big room for increased budgetary support. The best

course of action for Bangladesh will be an unprecedented monetary expansion targeting lending rate to be in the range of 5-8 percent. To this end, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) can immediately start buying government bonds and treasury bills held by the banks and financial institutions. Other policy options include reduction in cash reserve requirements (CRR) and statutory liquidity ratios (SLRs). BB can also direct cash-rich state-owned banks to increase their advance-deposit ratio (ADR) to an enhanced target level. BB should target repo rate to go down from current 6 percent to 4 percent. Excess liquidity is already evident in the financial system and lending to private sector would pick up once interest rates subside further.

The central bank can make a number of interventions targeting industries

and corporations to avoid imminent bankruptcy. Thirdly, the stock market has long been depressed for a variety of reasons. The outbreak of COVID-19 is now causing another round of panic sale and stock prices have collapsed. A policy guideline of BB is already there whereby a commercial bank can access a five-year Tk 2 billion fund from the central bank to invest in stocks and securities. I will advise the central bank to further lower this borrowing cost to less than 5 percent and let the scheme go into effect without delay.

Providing liquidity to households and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is a critical challenge. To this end, BB can work via microfinance institutions (MFIs). The nationwide network of state-owned and private commercial banks can also be utilised for channelling low-cost

mounting. The government will have to increase its budgetary allocation for improving food security for vulnerable people. Millions of households and elderly people live on the financial edge and will require income support through social safety nets to avert falling back into extreme poverty. Government may collaborate with bKash or similar mobile payment systems to provide income support to poor and ultra-poor households. It will have to restate its annual budget discarding avoidable spending plans including developmental projects that are yet to take off.

National Board of Revenue (NBR) may defer collection of taxes for one or two quarters. Household and firms will further demand the lowering of tax rates and a new set of tax incentives. NBR can provide tax relief to firms based on the number of employees working at least 20 hours a week. Indiscriminate use of account freezing of firms may force them to go bankrupt. Tax relief of a certain amount may be granted to firms employing up to 50 workers and on condition that workers continue to be employed during this downturn. Ministry of Finance (MOF) must revisit its tax policy to save our businesses.

The COVID-19 outbreak will further worsen current account imbalance in Bangladesh. As tax revenue will contract this year, we expect government spending to increase faster and fiscal deficits to rapidly widen. On the other hand, net private sector saving will also deteriorate for a variety of reasons. That essentially means we expect doubling of our current account deficit in 2020-21.

That will prove dangerous because it may lead to a crisis in the foreign exchange market. If BB keeps selling its foreign exchange reserves to support an overvalued exchange rate of taka per USD, it will significantly erode monetary policy effectiveness. Liquidity crisis will return to the financial system. We can avoid such a scenario by orchestrating a gradual devaluation of taka against the US dollar. Finally, we must reorganise key state institutions that are governing the financial sector and capital markets. An expansionary monetary policy, as envisaged in this note, will require careful planning, intense monitoring and prudent supervision at every stage.

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that are worst hit by the coronavirus pandemic. One key policy directive can be to extend working capital loans at the lowest possible interest rate (or even zero) to industries on the condition that they keep their workers on payroll regardless of their work for at least three months. The assumption is that effective drugs (or vaccination programme) will roll out and normalcy will return by this time. BB can also negotiate with multilateral organisations for floating a Special Fund of Tk 100,000 crore to this end.

Banks and financial institutions can access this low-cost fund and start lending to businesses provided that they meet a few conditions including retaining workers on payroll. Secondly, BB can issue a directive asking lenders to extend a 12-month moratorium on their loans and advances that will fall due in a year. This will provide cushion to firms

loans to households and MSMEs. Brac Bank for example has credible experience of managing large portfolios of loans to MSMEs. Their experience and infrastructure can be of high value.

The government seems to be in deep trouble. Tax revenue is contracting. But the need for giving budgetary support to many sectors is now manifold. Government will have to redouble its spending on public health and medical infrastructure. A public-private partnership can be started incorporating private hospitals and medical colleges. The partnership can involve measures including paying for testing, supplying more test kits and emergency gear to frontline health workers, staffing and providing uninterrupted supplies to health centres.

Food security is an emerging concern around the world as job losses are

Why should you care about the air you breathe?



IF you live in Dhaka, a city that is perennially drowned in a sea of polluted air, you may think that a scarlet sunrise or sunset blazing across the horizon is a sight to behold. However,

there is an ugly story behind this pretty picture. It is air pollution. Indeed, pollutants of any kind in the air will make sunrise and sunset colourful.

Pollutants in the air arise from two major sources: natural and anthropogenic. Globally, the largest sources are natural events: dust storms, forest fires, volcanoes, earthquakes, biological decay and the like. In sheer quantity, natural pollutants often outweigh the anthropogenic pollutants that generally create the most significant long-term threat to the biosphere. Why? Natural pollutants come from widely dispersed sources or infrequent events. As such, they do not substantially raise the ambient pollutant concentration, and thus have little effect on the environment.

Some of the major anthropogenic pollutants in an urban setting are effluents from vehicles, emissions from industries and power plants using fossil fuels. They emit large quantities of harmful pollutants—carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, sulphur oxides, nitrogen oxides, particulates, hydrocarbons and photochemical oxidants—in restricted areas, making a significant contribution to local air pollution levels. Other sources of pollution are municipal and agricultural waste sites, brick fields, foundries, metal smelters and waste incineration facilities. Refineries, which emit several pollutants, also make a huge impact on the quality of air. All these pollutants are precursors to the formation of smog, a term coined to describe a mixture of smoke and fog. It is the worst form of air pollution.

Smog is produced through a complex set of photochemical reactions involving the above-mentioned pollutants. They react in the presence of sunlight to produce a witch’s brew of virulent chemicals. Among some of the worst are formaldehyde, peroxyacetyl nitrate (PAN) and acrolein. Furthermore, ozone is formed at the ground-level through chemical reactions involving unburned hydrocarbons in gasoline, volatile organic compounds, various oxides of nitrogen and sunlight. Problematic ozone levels occur often on hot summer afternoons when there is little wind and temperatures soar above 30 degrees Celsius. The net result is a brownish orange shroud called photochemical smog, occurring

more frequently in large cities with high rise buildings where there is less air circulation and more accumulation of pollutants in the lower atmosphere.

To make a bad situation worse, smog remains under siege for days if it is accompanied by temperature inversion, a phenomenon where air temperature increases with altitude instead of decreasing, resulting in a warm-air lid over cooler air anywhere from ground level up to few thousands of feet into the atmosphere. In an area experiencing inversion, the warm-air lid prevents ground-level air from rising. Consequently, pollutants in the cool, stable and quiescent ground air become trapped below the warm layer of air, creating dirty air with dangerous concentrations of noxious pollutants.

The pollutants in the air do not respect international borders and are carried by wind to faraway places. Hence,



A child walks along a dusty road in Dhaka.

PHOTO: AFP

anthropogenic air pollution is a global environmental problem instead of regional or local, continuous rather than episodic.

A measure of outdoor air pollution is the Air Quality Index, or AQI, a yardstick that runs from 0 to 500. It rates air conditions across a city/country based on concentrations of five major pollutants: ground-level ozone, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide. The higher the AQI value, the greater the level of air pollution and the greater the health concern. An AQI of 50 represents good air quality with little potential to affect public health. When AQI is above 100, air quality is considered to be unhealthy, at first for certain sensitive groups of people—sick, elderly and children, and then for everyone as AQI gets higher. If the AQI is greater than 200, the air is considered hazardous for the entire population.

Dhaka has the dubious distinction of being one of the 10 most polluted cities in the world, with AQI invariably close to 200. Arguably, these cities are often labelled as “hell with the lid off.” According to The Health Effects Institutes’ State of Global Air Survey, the entire population of Bangladesh has been consistently exposed to unhealthy levels of pollutants in the air since 1990.

Over the past few decades, researchers have unearthed a wide array of health effects which are caused by exposure to air pollution, particularly smog and ozone. Among them are respiratory diseases—asthma, emphysema, coughing, shortness of breath, changes in lung function and lung cancer. Children are at a greater risk of damage to lungs because their respiratory systems are still in the developmental stage. Cardiovascular diseases, immune system impairment, adverse pregnancy outcomes such as

oxide combine with moisture in the air to create sulfuric and nitric acidic precipitation, thereby acidifying lakes with detrimental effects on aquatic biome. It can also cause structural damage to buildings and monuments, especially those made of limestone or marble, as well as destroy plants and crops.

Indoor pollution can be worse than outdoors pollution in some cases. Air pollution inside buildings is accelerated by the toxicity of materials like asbestos, radon, pesticides and tobacco smoke, mildew, mould, mites, dust and pet dander, together with poor ventilation and humidity. Appliances that produce combustion fumes, especially cooking stoves and water heaters, emit carbon monoxide.

Most indoor pollutants, except carbon monoxide, asbestos and radon, are responsible for irritating but non-lethal allergic reactions. Prolonged exposure to air with high levels of carbon monoxide could be lethal, while radon and asbestos can cause lung cancer.

While there is currently no proven link between air pollution and Coronavirus (COVID-19) mortality, one peer-reviewed study into the 2003 SARS outbreak showed that patients in regions with moderate air pollution levels were 80-85 percent more likely to die than those in regions with low air pollution. COVID-19 is similar to SARS and can cause respiratory failure in severe cases.

Satellite images from NASA show a surprising effect of COVID-19 outbreak in China: reduction in air pollution. A “significant decrease” in pollution over Wuhan and the rest of China is attributed in part to an “economic slowdown” resulting from the virus outbreak.

An unexpected consequence of air pollution could be cooling the climate by offsetting some of the global warming that has occurred so far. That is because certain aerosols—sulphate, for instance—can reflect part of the sunlight back into space before it reaches the Earth’s surface. Call it unwittingly geoengineering the climate. Nevertheless, even if pollutants reduce global warming, it is not desirable to have them in our lungs.

Finally, because of the vastness of the atmosphere, we felt that it could absorb any conceivable amount of abuse by us. We have, therefore, used the air, and in turn our lungs, as a receptacle for hundreds of noxious pollutants. But with clean air technologies, targeted regulations, effective laws and strict emission standards, it is still possible to go far enough back in time to a period when the air was relatively pure.

Quamrul Haider is a Professor of Physics at Fordham University, New York.

One more nail in the coffin of free press



THE SOUND & THE FURY
SUSHMITA S PREETHA

A barrage of fireworks light up the smoggy skies of Dhaka and I feel as if I'm in the opening scenes of a dystopian film. There's anxiety and despair all around about what's to come—those who have been following the developments in other parts of the world know there's no way to avoid the impending crisis in our healthcare system as it scrambles, without any preparation, to tackle what may soon become a tsunami of patients showcasing symptoms of the coronavirus. The streets are uncharacteristically empty, and the rickshaw puller, for whom self-quarantine would mean the loss of his daily wages on which his family of five depend, asks me if I know how much these pyrotechnics cost.

Our conversation is silenced by the loud explosions. Yes, I remind myself, celebrations must go on—priorities are priorities, after all—and I know better than to mention the unmentionable, even in a private conversation with a rickshaw puller, even on social media and particularly in opinion pieces published in *The Daily Star*. The nagging thought that I'm trapped in a dystopia returns as, with each firework that sounds like a gunshot, my mind finds itself ruminating over the fate of photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol, who has been missing since March 10, 2020. The coronavirus crisis and the resultant chaos and mismanagement have understandably taken over the news, and while we worry about what will happen to our loved ones if the virus spreads beyond control, Shafiqul's son has been living an unimaginable nightmare of his own, not knowing where his father is and whether he is still alive.

Kajol is the editor of a fortnightly magazine called *Pakhahal*, with past experience in working as a photojournalist with *Dainik Samakal* and *Banik Barta*. He "disappeared" a day after a case was filed against him and 31 others, including the editor-

in-chief of daily *Manabzamin*, under the Digital Security Act by lawmaker Shifuzzaman Shikhor, a former aide to the prime minister. They were accused of "deteriorating the law and order" by publishing a report with "false information" and circulating it on social media.

The report in question, published in *Manabzamin*, simply stated that Jubo Mohila League leader Shamima Nur Papia, during police interrogation, had shared the names of 30 MPs, bureaucrats and businessmen who used to frequent her prostitution and extortion racket. The report itself did not name any of these lawmakers and others, but it was later

back alone after a while and leaves the area on his bike at exactly 6:51 pm.

Mysteriously, following his disappearance, his Facebook posts from this year have also disappeared. In fact, the last post that can still be accessed on his page dates back to November 27, 2019. According to a report by *Prothom Alo*, many of the missing posts involved the arrest of Jubo Mohila League leader Shamima Nur Papia. The report further added that Shafiqul was known to be on good terms with many activists and leaders of Jubo Mohila League (*Prothom Alo*, March 17).

Shafiqul's son, Monorom Polok, claims that he collected his father's call

pleaded with the police to file an abduction case, but both the Chawkbazar and New Market police stations refused to take the case, each insisting it fell under the other's jurisdiction. The case was finally lodged with the Chawkbazar police station on March 18 following a *suo moto* move from the High Court asking the police why it had not filed a case yet.

Why was there such a delay in filing a case? It would be easy enough to dismiss it as bureaucratic ineptitude of our law enforcement agencies, but was there something more sinister in the reluctance of law enforcers to file and pursue the case? When there is a CCTV footage that clearly identifies men who were following Shafiqul and tampering with his motorbike, why hasn't the police been able to apprehend them yet—in the 12 days he has been missing (as of this article going to print)? Why is Shafiqul's son having to collect call lists when it's the police who should be following leads and questioning all those who may have crucial information on Shafiqul since they were the last to speak to him?

It's ironic that our law enforcers can go to any lengths when they have to track down a dissident using their sophisticated surveillance mechanisms but cannot bring themselves to track a missing person, even when there is a CCTV footage identifying the suspects!

Where did Shafiqul go? What could have happened to him? No one claims to know anything, but if what happened to *Bangla Tribune* correspondent Ariful Islam is an indication of how journalists who ruffle the feathers of the political elite are treated, we have reasons to be deeply worried. On March 14, Ariful was dragged from his home in the middle of the night, beaten, stripped and threatened with "crossfire" by Senior Assistant Commissioner (RDC) Nazim Uddin and two magistrates as part of a mobile court raid (which was later declared "illegal" by Kurigram municipality mayor Abdul Jalil, following widespread criticism). It is now clear that Ariful was targeted for his investigative reports about the activities of Kurigram Deputy Commissioner (DC) Sultana Pervin. As he was being humiliated and tortured, Nazim told him, "So, you are a journalist! We will teach you

what journalism is, you dared to write against our DC"—and "You will be put in a crossfire. Your time is up. Recite the *kalima*."

Ariful's description of that night is chilling, to say the least, and offers a window into those unknown, untold stories of men disappearing into the night only to appear—if they appear at all—as dead bodies in so-called shootouts or after "falling ill" while in custody, with some rare exceptions. Ariful is no doubt lucky that his story was picked up by the media right away and that he had the backing of a powerful media outlet, which protected him from further harassment and mistreatment.

But what about those who aren't so fortunate, those like... Shafiqul?

That freedom of expression is no longer an inalienable right in Bangladesh is not breaking news. According to Article 19, a UK-based human rights organisation, in February 2020 alone, there were at least 50 incidents of violations of freedom of expression—four involved serious bodily injuries, nine assaults, one abduction, five destruction of equipment, two defamation cases and one involved gender-based violence. Despite widespread criticism of the Digital Security Act which essentially authorises state agencies to pick up whoever they want without so much as a warrant or approval of any authorities, under various vague and misleading sections of the law, more than 1,000 cases have been filed under the Act since October 2018—sometimes for as little as disapproval of government decisions on social media. The systematic way in which freedom of expression has been, and continues to be, throttled has created an environment of fear, uncertainty and self-censorship which has caused irreparable damage to the democratic fabric of this country. The disappearance of Shafiqul Islam is one more nail in the coffin of the free press.

And so you and I keep silent in a cowardly bid to protect ourselves from the virus that has seeped deep into our psyche and political systems. As for a dystopian future, haven't we been living in one for a long time anyway?

Sushmita S Preetha is a journalist and researcher.



Photojournalists stage a demonstration demanding the safe return of Shafiqul Islam Kajol, in front of the National Museum in Dhaka, on March 18, 2020.


shared by some, including Shafiqul, on social media with a list of names.

Shafiqul was last seen at his office in Hatirpul at 6:51 pm on March 10. A CCTV footage from outside his office, verified and shared by the Amnesty International, on March 22, shows several unidentified men keeping a track on his motorbike for at least three hours before he was last seen. Between 5:59 pm and 6:05 pm, three men are seen approaching his motorbike separately and meddling with it. At 6:19 pm, Shafiqul walks out of his office with another person but does not take his bike with him. He comes

list from Grameenphone, according to which, Shafiqul spoke to two Jubo Mohila League leaders shortly before he disappeared. One of these two women told *Prothom Alo* that she had spoken to Shafiqul at 6:30 pm about where he was and when he would return, and about setting up a time to meet to discuss his latest Facebook posts. The second woman on his call list denied speaking to Shafiqul but admitted that she had sent him a text and that she, too, had wanted to meet to talk about his social media posts.

For almost a week, Shafiqul's family

Could universal basic income be the answer to ending poverty?


ARAF MOMEN AKA

UNIVERSAL basic income (UBI) is a concept that has come a long way from its primitive form back in the 16th century, when a Spanish Renaissance scholar named Johannes Ludovicus Vives suggested that the Mayor of Bruges give a minimum income to all citizens of the city. The concept has become widely accepted in countries like Finland, India, Namibia, the state of Alaska, etc.

The idea is to pay each and every individual a minimum income, regardless of whether they are employed or not. This income should be high enough to cover the bare necessities such as food and clothing and be untaxable. Whatever extra disposable income citizens earn through employment is theirs to keep.

According to the *Financial Times*, India has experimented with the UBI system in an unorthodox way, giving money to people mainly in rural areas like the southern state of Telangana, the eastern state of Odisha, etc. Conclusions haven't been drawn up yet, as the experiment is still ongoing. But it is believed that it has caused a dissipation in agrarian distress, which had risen because of corruption and unjust exclusion of poor people from anti-poverty programmes in India.

Namibia had a pilot project between

the years 2008 and 2009 called the Big Income Grant (BIG). Grants in the form of UBI in the Otjivero-Omitara area had resulted in significantly lowered child malnutrition, a more productive workforce, greater affordability of education, a 20 percent drop in economic and poverty-related crimes.

Finland's experimentation with UBI yielded a more positive health-oriented result than a financial one. The two-year experiment with UBI ended in February 2019, with results such as reduced levels of stress, better health and ability to concentrate, according to a World Economic Forum article. However, there wasn't much change in regards to employment tendency among the group that received the UBI, mostly because implementing the UBI does not automatically grant people the skills required to be employed.

Now how would such a concept fare in an economy like ours?

Bangladesh is a country that is still wrought with extreme poverty. According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey- 2016, 12.9 percent of our population lived in extreme poverty, and 24.3 percent were living in the upper-poverty line back in 2016. Although there is a possibility that the extreme poverty rate is now lower, it still plagues our economy substantially. Extreme poverty and poverty of any kind indicate that a part of the population is encumbered with the inability to access basic necessities for survival, regardless of their employment status.

In allocating a basic income for all people, the government will have to



draw up a Consumer Price Index (CPI) to figure out which consumer goods are essential, and which of those should be taken into consideration. An untaxable monthly UBI of Tk 12,000 should be realistic in the sense that an income like this should be enough to fulfil the bare necessities like food, water, clothing and shared accommodations, given that our essentials are cheaper than in most other countries.

Since this system does not have any clear specifications on the demographic that should be able to earn a UBI, one suggestion would be to provide it to the population that is eligible for work, and the population that has retired. Children are not to be included in the roster.

There is a strong argument against UBI, which is that handing out free

money to people might make them end up being lazier and more reluctant to work. While it is true that there will be a certain percentage of people leaving work and reducing their work hours, it is also true that those people would be more likely to take up self-development activities, like going for further studies, honing specific skills and caring for their families.

Back in the 1970s, an experiment of the UBI system on a group of people in Canada showed a 1 percent drop in the employment rate and around 10 percent drop in working hours. While they were out of work, those people used that extra time to care for their families or for self-development.

As people leave the workforce for such purposes, what the UBI does is

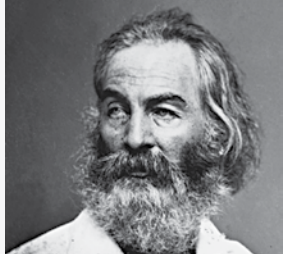
create a more skilled labour force in the future that is capable of occupying jobs that require more knowledge-based skills rather than simple technical skills, or provide technical skills that are far more efficient than before.

That being said, the UBI system will be incredibly expensive to implement. According to the CIA's World Fact Book, it is estimated that 73.52 percent of Bangladesh's population will be above the age of 14 by July, 2020. Let's say, given that most children from poor families go to work when they are 15, the number of people eligible to receive the UBI will be 11.9 crore. And this entire system will cost Tk 1,42,922.9 crore to implement.

In addition to cost, implementing it will require massive restructuring. There is also a huge debate on where the money meant for the UBI system will come from, because it is impossible for taxes to be the only source of money for the system. With that said, it still stands that experimentation before implementation is an obvious prerequisite of putting the UBI system in place.

The UBI system is highly malleable and the market will get to operate as it used to, balancing out oddities with its invisible hand. What sets this system apart is that it manages to close the gap between income levels, eradicate poverty in a single swoop and help people live a happier and less stressful life.

Araf Momen Aka is an undergraduate student of Jahangirnagar University.



WALT WHITMAN
(1819-1892)
American poet, journalist, and essayist.

Keep your face always toward the sunshine - and shadows will fall behind you.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 In the lead
6 Croc's cousin
11 Dance of Brazil
12 Fragrance
13 Silky-coated dog
15 Fitting
16 "— Abner"
17 Start of a count
18 Some skirts
20 Parts of hearts
23 Pursue
27 Accomplishment
28 Ready for business
29 Home run, in slang
31 Jacket material
32 Showed over
34 Ocean between Eur. and Amer.
37 Clinic nickname

DOWN

1 China setting
2 Angel's instrument
3 Give off
4 Crunch targets
5 Showy flower
6 Dublin tongue
7 Museum subject
8 Visitor to Oz
9 Foreboding sign
10 Quite uncommon

38 "Modern Family" network
41 Stiff, hot drink
44 Juliet's love
45 Cook's mushroom
46 March 17 honoree, for short
47 Left, on a liner

14 Major no-no
18 Bishop's topper
19 Depicted
20 Back, on a boat
21 Pot brew
22 Scoundrel
24 King Kong, for one
25 Take in
26 Finish
30 Very popular
31 Puget Sound city
33 Bird of myth
34 Broadcasts
35 Easy gait
36 Like old lettuce
38 Bushy hairdo
39 Tavern order
40 Boston cager, for short
42 Sailing site
43 Dandy

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	B	A	L	K	C	A	S	T	F
P	R	I	C	E	A	L	O	F	F
A	R	C	H	E	S	D	I	E	
T	I	E	S	E	T	H	I	C	S
S	O	S	S	Q	U	A	D	S	
C	H	A	R	O	N	C	U	T	
T	A	I	P	E	I	C	O	N	E
A	R	K	A	C	A	D	I	A	
P	L	E	A	T	O	M	I	T	S
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S	P	A	R		D	O	G	S	

BEEBLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BEETLE'S BECOMING A MEDIA STAR

HE HAS 3,000 FOLLOWERS ON INSTAGRAM!

WHAT DOES HE POST?

VIDEOS OF HIMSELF SLEEPING

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

OFFICE OR MOBILE NUMBER?

OFFICE, INCLUDING EXTENSION

HELLO? HELLO? HANNAH, IS THAT YOU AGAIN?

WORLD'S BEST BUTT-DIALER

HAS ANYBODY SEEN MY PHONE?

CoronavirusPandemic:TasksAhead



Unilever Bangladesh Limited and The Daily Star jointly organised a roundtable titled “Coronavirus Pandemic: Tasks Ahead” on March 21, 2020. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

MAHFUZ ANAM
Editor and Publisher
The Daily Star

The times are different. The whole world is different. We have never faced a situation like this before. In a sense, we are all confused. As a responsible newspaper, we want to communicate authentic information to the public. The public needs to know what the tasks ahead are.

DR BARDAN JUNG RANA
World Health Organization (WHO)
Representative to Bangladesh

We are already in a place where we should not be. We were in a preparatory stage throughout the months of January and February, before the first COVID-19 case emerged. Like many other countries, Bangladesh did not go forward with strong measures. However, Bangladesh, as well as all other countries in the region, are following the international health regulations. Bangladesh already has a National Action Plan for Health Security, which includes events such as outbreaks of such viruses.

We already have a few confirmed cases, but instead of dwelling on these concerns, we must attempt to mitigate them. It is important to accept that we have many cases, and be open and clear about the fact that the number of cases is going to rise.

Misinformation and rumours are scarier than the virus itself. These things hamper the country's efforts towards mitigating and containing the spread of the virus. The media should be responsible in controlling the spread of misinformation and rumours. Right now, panic is the worst enemy. If the public starts to panic, the government would have to begin mitigating the panic, and not the virus.

We need to look into the actions of other countries which have been successful in containing the virus. Bangladesh is the 108th country to declare a case. Over 180 countries have been affected so far, which is why WHO has declared it a pandemic. The positive aspect to this is that there are a number of countries whose experiences we can learn from. COVID-19 is a new virus and so everything is a learning curve. This virus has no mention in medical textbooks, nor do we have prior experience with it, which is why it is called “novel.” WHO is giving all of its efforts in order to gather more scientific information on the virus.

Physical distancing has proven to be a successful measure to slow down the transmission of the virus. Awareness on this

is already rising, as you can see from the reduced traffic in Dhaka. Social or physical distancing is an individual responsibility. This is no longer solely the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. All wings of the government should be involved in this. If each person is individually conscious, there is no way the virus can travel from one place to another, since it transmits from person to person. People can leave the virus on surfaces or objects they touch, which is why we are asked to wash hands regularly.

There will be more cases in the coming days, and more contact tracing will be required. The burden on the health system will only increase, since there will be more incoming reports, and more people wanting to be hospitalised even without needing to be. Moreover, Bangladesh is on the gateway of a dengue outbreak. Recently, there were two reports of a measles outbreak.

The epidemic can be controlled by strengthening and intensifying our tracing, isolation, testing, and treatment. Social distancing will help reduce the burden on the healthcare system, and the system will then conduct contact tracing, find the patients, then isolate, test and treat them.

This is not the first time that Bangladesh has experienced an outbreak, and so it has a system in place, and a government which has already mitigated other such health crises. It is also one of the best countries for immunisation. But, the Ministry of Health needs support. The government has to repurpose its funding, resources, and human resources because there was a shortage of human resources in the health sector even before the outbreak began.

DR A B M ABDULLAH
UGC Professor, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) and Personal Physician of Prime Minister

The number of coronavirus cases in the country has risen to 24. There have been talks about the country going into lockdown and a state of emergency. Before going into lockdown, however, it must be taken into consideration that there are many workers in the country who survive on daily wages. Other countries provide such workers with food and other necessities, and so we need to think about how we can support them if a lockdown occurs.

Out of the 24 coronavirus patients, three have already been sent home while the rest are still in the hospital. Therefore, we need to think about whether more hospitals need to be prepared to house more patients. The situation has not yet turned such that space cannot be given to patients in hospitals. Three or four more hospitals are also ready. The preparations by the government are not bad, but the scenario is changing every day. If the number of cases rises significantly, the government will take steps accordingly.

Coronavirus is contagious, and so the patients infected by the virus should not be admitted to general hospitals, since the

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Undertake initiatives to track all the home-quarantined people and bring them under community-quarantine immediately.
- Ensure PPE for doctors as they are vulnerable to infection.
- Avoid gatherings and public transportations as much as possible. Senior citizens or those at risk of co-morbidity should not step out of their homes without an emergency.
- Look into how we can properly communicate to people about gathering for prayers as it is a sensitive issue.
- Decentralise testing mechanism for coronavirus. If the tests are positive, then isolate those people and ensure quarantine.
- The marginalised population should be taken to the quarantine facilities since they cannot quarantine themselves at their homes. Proper support should be ensured for them so that they can stay there for at least two weeks.
- Every hospital should strongly implement the guidelines provided by the World Health Organization (WHO). Predict the

speed and time within which coronavirus can spread in Bangladesh and take measures accordingly.

- Focus on strengthening and maintaining isolation properly so that people cannot lie about it.
- Emphasise on focused communication. For example, who must wear masks and who are not required to do so, how to wear and dispose of masks, etc.
- Awareness of non-pharmaceutical measures should be enhanced. Emphasise on awareness at personal, social and governmental levels.
- Recognition of the problem is the first step of the solution. Establish a centralised command centre to co-ordinate efforts in Bangladesh as multiple decisions are being focused on by multiple people.
- Decentralise diagnostic kits. Do not visit a doctor with simple cough, sneezing and runny nose.
- The government should involve all other stakeholders, including the public, to raise mass awareness.

virus could spread all over the hospital. This will lead to people panicking, and patients will either stop going to the hospital, or outdoor patients will try to leave. Therefore, coronavirus patients should be kept in isolated hospitals. For example, there is Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital which has 200 beds currently, Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH), or Railway General Hospital. The issue is that Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH) and Railway General Hospital do not have ICUs and dialysis machines. These facilities must be ensured when preparing other hospitals.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) must be provided to all doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel. If their personal protection is not ensured, they will be too afraid to continue treatment.

People with regular cases of cold and coughing are pouring into hospitals to be tested, which is an issue. Common cold symptoms do not equal to being infected with coronavirus. However, someone who has just travelled back from abroad might be at risk of contracting coronavirus if they have cold symptoms. If their family members within the household and other people in the area who have come in contact show cold symptoms, they are at risk as well, and their cases must be taken seriously.

Another issue is that doctors are denying treatment of patients showing cold symptoms. Where will these patients go now? They usually do not need to be admitted in wards, and mostly stay in the outdoor unit. Therefore, the PPE for outdoor doctors needs to be strengthened. A separate area could also be formed within hospitals for patients

showing cold symptoms.

A top-level decision is required about Bangladesh going into lockdown. WHO says that this must be done immediately, or else controlling the spread of the virus will be very difficult. Huge numbers of people have arrived from abroad and have spread all over the country. None of them are in quarantine, and are roaming around freely. They might be responsible for spreading the virus within our communities.

DR SHAGUFA ANWAR
Chief, Communication & Business Development
United Hospital Limited

In private hospitals, we usually deal with patients with non-communicable diseases. We get a lot of immuno-compromised patients. If a patient with an infectious disease comes to our hospital, they put others at risk. Hence, it is very risky to entertain these patients in our hospital.

We triage these patients by taking their history of travel, contact, etc., and try to detect the COVID-19 symptoms. Then we ask the potential suspects to go to IEDCR to get tested. The practical problem we are facing on the ground is their unwillingness to go.

Since we are a private hospital, the

patients coming to us are mostly middle or upper-middle-class. This group of people are in greater denial and it is much more challenging for us to send them over to the testing centres. So, what we have to do is break this fear. There is also a fear surrounding isolation. Bangladesh has plans on creating isolation units in various places but all of these places will remain empty because the patients would prefer to stay in their own homes regardless of whether they have tested positive or negative for the disease.

The government is taking a lot of initiatives but I feel that disseminating information in the right way and in the right language is very important.

Words such as “quarantine” are quite technical and so people do not really understand the difference between “quarantine” and “isolation”. “Home quarantine” actually means being quarantined in a single room.

IEDCR or Ministry of Health cannot do everything alone. All they can do is spread the awareness regarding the disease and the do's and don'ts which they are doing wonderfully. But to make sure all the necessary precautions are implemented, we need support from law enforcement agencies.

There should be other hotline numbers helping out with the non-health related concerns and queries.

We are also getting a lot of patients who are not properly disclosing their history to the doctors. We should motivate and encourage people to refrain from doing this. Media should take steps regarding this. We also need support regarding personal protective equipment. We also need to be aware of the types of masks we should be wearing and in what situations and how to wear and dispose of them.

PROF MD NAZRUL ISLAM
Professor of Virology, and Former Vice Chancellor, BSMMU

In Bangladesh, people have mainly taken up home quarantine, which has spelled disasters for us. People who are not maintaining the standards of home quarantine must be located by the health services. Patients must be tested before being shifted from quarantine to isolation. Isolation centres should be set up, up to upazila level. Patients with common cold symptoms will be treated in upazila and district level hospitals. However, patients with severe manifestations such as difficulty in breathing, or co-morbidity, should be taken to critical care. Critical care facilities must exist in district level and tertiary level hospitals, and the mass public should be made aware of which hospitals contain these facilities. Big hospitals such as Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) should create separate counters for patients with cold symptoms. Even patients requiring surgery must first visit this counter if they exhibit cold symptoms, before

USE ANY SOAP

TO PREVENT* THE SPREAD OF
CORONAVIRUS

*According to the WHO, washing hands with soaps is an effective way to prevent coronavirus.

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attempting to go into surgery.

Adequate PPE must be made available for personnel at every level who are handling patients. Many patients directly go to pharmacists for treatment instead of doctors; without PPE, the pharmacists will also stop working. Therefore, protection must be provided to them early on.

Politicians love talking about lockdown and state of emergency, but declaring these means the system has failed. We shall not fail; we shall tackle the situation. We will identify those who are spreading the virus in the villages, but a state of emergency cannot be declared on the entire country just because of a few cases. The country will function properly, while the health services, along with other services, control the coronavirus.



DR MUSTAFA JALAL MOHIUDDIN
President, Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA)

When the people of Bangladesh faced a dengue outbreak, they received care and treatment. But coronavirus is new to us. This virus first began to spread from China, but the country has since lowered its COVID-19 mortality rate significantly. The Ministry of Health in Bangladesh has been pondering for quite some time now on how to reduce the incidence of coronavirus and treat infected patients. Coronavirus has affected most countries of the world, and so WHO has called it a pandemic, but Bangladesh has not yet reached that stage.

Our Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been concerned about the outbreak for a long time now, and has held many discussions with her cabinet. She also sent many directives to the Ministry of Health, through the national committee on coronavirus. Large gatherings take place during meetings of the national committee on coronavirus and so future meetings will be through video conferences.

In the current context of the situation of coronavirus in Bangladesh, all preparations must be made by the Ministry of Health. The ministry has already set up two to four hospitals which can house coronavirus patients, such as government hospitals in Puran Dhaka. Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital has also been prepared for patients. A new gastroenterology hospital has opened, which can be used as well. It has also been decided that the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery of Dhaka Medical College will be emptied to be used for coronavirus patients. The area used in Bishwa Jtama has been handed over to the army, where they have set up tents for future use in treating coronavirus patients. The government and Ministry of Health are not working at the speed of light, but are making moderate preparations.

During the dengue outbreak, eight to ten doctors had died. We only thanked them for their service, but did not consider that they might have had family members who depended on them financially. The lives of the doctors need to be taken into consideration by the government this time.

Incidence of coronavirus could even surpass that of dengue. Public awareness is the most important factor in fighting the spread of the virus. The general people should turn in those who are not maintaining home quarantine even though they have returned from abroad. People need to be made aware of the proper ways of covering sneezes and coughs, washing hands, and physical distancing.

The Ministry of Health has cancelled holidays for its employees. Doctors may be directed to do the same if the situation worsens. Everyone must be united in their efforts to tackle the spread of coronavirus. 70,000 doctors in different districts of Bangladesh have already been made aware of the situation through seminars and symposiums.



PROF M A FAIZ
Professor of Medicine, and Former Director Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS)

COVID-19 is a global issue. Therefore, Bangladesh, which is a signatory, has been preparing to implement the International Health Regulations (2005). A National Action Plan for Health Security has also been prepared in light of many global documents. This disease has only been around for three months, and WHO has already recommended whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. Since the disease is new, natural immunity will grow within us, or new vaccines and drugs will be formulated for treatment. However, vaccines cannot be formulated and used within a year. In the meantime, we must work using the lessons learned from the experiences of countries tackling coronavirus, such as China, Korea, Iran, and Italy as soon as possible.

Global predictions have been made that the next epicentre of coronavirus will be the Indian sub-continent, and 30 crore people will be infected. Today, we have 24 coronavirus patients, and two of them have already died. In many countries, like Germany, only 30 to 32 patients have died out of 15,000 to 20,000 infected. China has achieved zero domestic indigenous coronavirus cases in the past two days.

An estimation is required on how many patients there might be in the coming days, and how many will need to be hospitalised, will need critical care or respiratory support. Non-therapeutic interventions need to be strengthened. Some have already been enforced, such as schools have been closed down, and some areas are under lockdown.

We have limited capacity of diagnosing the disease, and it is difficult to distinguish from other viral fevers. Therefore, patients exhibiting cold symptoms are told to stay home in isolation instead of going to the hospital, and are also asked to call the two hotlines of Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR). Patients should only come to the hospital if they have difficulty breathing. This means 80 percent of people are not required to do anything. 50 percent of our population is aged below 15 years. If they are affected, we will grow immunity against the virus. Therefore, everyone must follow this public notice.

Patients suffering from difficulty in breathing must be taken the most seriously. People over the age of 60 have many diseases, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney disease, and stroke. These patients are at high risk, and must be saved. Young people should not go to the hospital, especially the emergency unit, even if they are ill, because elderly people are at the hospital as well.

Asymptomatic people spread the virus the most, which is why mobility must be reduced as much as possible. Top-level government officials must enforce this. Communication must be done in easy language. “Quarantine” and “lockdown” are scary words, which should not be used. Alternatively, we should sincerely request those who have patients showing these symptoms in their homes, to stay isolated.

Adapting to this disease will require behavioural changes. Patients and their attendants need to bring changes in their lifestyles. The health sector must be kept alive; if our healthcare professionals fall ill, who will provide treatment? Non-essential services should be put on hold at this time, so that the health sector can slightly relax.

Infection prevention and control is required in all hospitals. We are unaware of which hospitals the coronavirus patients will go to, and so the essential requirements of infection prevention and control must be fulfilled. Community engagement must be strengthened as well.

Our target is to ensure the peak number of infected patients is not reached too quickly. If the peak is reached within three to four weeks, our health sector will not be able to cope with it. Iran, Italy, Spain, and China are countries which have more advanced healthcare facilities than we do, but the mortality rates there are 2.3 to 7.2 percent. We do not know what this rate will be in Bangladesh, but predictions suggest that it might not be as low as the more developed countries.

The mortality rate was much higher in the Wuhan province than in other parts of China, due to them not being prepared when the outbreak suddenly began. France says it is four weeks behind Italy, while Germany says it is two weeks behind Italy, and so we need to know how far behind Bangladesh is. We need to prepare within this time.



ASIF SALEH
Executive Director BRAC Bangladesh

One of the reasons why we do not know how far behind Bangladesh is in terms of other countries is that, we have not tested patients. Our testing facilities are very limited, which is a big concern going forward as more and more local transmission is occurring. The next two to three weeks are crucial for us. It is important to do whatever it takes to flatten the curve, so that it does not peak.

Given freedom, people often make the wrong choice. A few days ago, during such a situation, people went to Cox’s Bazar. People also gathered in front of Manik Mia Avenue to watch fireworks. There was no concern regarding social distancing during these situations. The reason these happened could be because of the lack of communication. Secondly, people might not be taking the disease seriously. While it is important to not panic, it is also important to understand the gravity of the situation. This could very well be the most serious thing this country has dealt with in terms of public health.

I would stress again on the importance of clear and centralised communication from the government in terms of how the government is preparing and what the citizens should and should not do. So far, we have been getting contradictory messages from political and technical leaders. In the

last two or three days, there seems to be a shift and the political leaders seem to have gotten more serious. This is good news.

Clear communication is also important to prevent rumour-mongering. The prevalence of misinformation has almost turned this into a two-pronged battle since with the advent of social media, it is so easy to spread misinformation. So, how do you fight it? It is important to trust only reliable information sources such as the government, IEDCR, WHO.

Next, there is the whole quarantine process which is something Bangladeshis are not familiar with. The importance of the right use of language is crucial here. The process needs to be explained to the masses in a way that they can easily comprehend. We also have to take into account that a lot of households do not have multiple rooms where people can be quarantined. Social distancing is not possible in slums.

Now, what a lot of people are asking is, what can you do if you are showing potential symptoms? The general trend is that 80 percent of the people will have very mild symptoms and the other 20 percent might need hospitalisation and more intensive care. Explaining this to people is very important since, in Bangladesh, a lot of people might be under the misconception that if they get it they will die. But, even if someone is asymptomatic, he/she might be carrying the virus so that is why social distancing is so important.

From BRAC’s side, we have about 50,000 trained community health volunteers. They will be targeting around five million households to convey these awareness messages. We are also starting a mass media campaign, working alongside IEDCR to synchronise the message that will come out. This will complement the household visits. The digital media campaign has already started. We are also distributing soaps to slums in partnership with Unilever.

A big concern is when people are calling the coronavirus hotline numbers, they are unable to get through. Our testing is centralised and the first step in getting tested is calling the numbers. Secondly, after calling and being authorised for testing, IEDCR will send personnel to conduct the testing at home. But, if we cannot get through the first step, the entire testing becomes stalled. So, what people are doing now is going to the local hospitals. If an infected person does so, they are putting a lot of people at risk. Therefore, the capacity of call centres needs to be increased, testing needs to be decentralised, and the district level hospitals need to be ready. Currently, there are no hospitals outside of Dhaka prepared to receive coronavirus infected patients.

Temporary facilities for isolation should also be built. The next two to three weeks are quite crucial because when the local transmissions start, it can peak quite quickly. If it peaks very quickly, the local healthcare system may get overwhelmed and might be unable to handle the sheer number of patients. This tremendously increases fatality. Therefore, flattening this curve is very important.



DR M MUSHTUQ HUSSAIN
Advisor, IEDCR

Bangladesh’s health institutions have a long history of controlling outbreaks. Right now, faced with coronavirus, we are only looking at the numbers of beds and testing kits available and getting disappointed after comparing the numbers with those of other developed countries. This country’s public health sector was successful in controlling diseases such as malaria. Smallpox has also been eradicated. We did not let the swine flu epidemic reach Bangladesh. It stopped at localised transmissions in Dhaka.

I would like to highlight that our public health sector is very experienced although there are some resource constraints. During outbreaks, what is more important than the availability of testing laboratories, is the availability of reporting facilities in case of huge mortality numbers. This is definitely available.

If anyone in any part of Bangladesh gets extremely sick, IEDCR will be alerted through a word-of-mouth chain where the neighbouring people inform the local MPs of the area and they in turn alert the health assistants and IEDCR. Every doctor and health technologist at IEDCR is a member of the rapid response team. There are central rapid response teams who have the power to go anywhere. The districts have district response teams and the upazilas have upazila response teams.

We should be given a little credit because the disease did not spread in our country from the beginning. Due to the natural course of the disease, it was inevitable for it to reach Bangladesh but it reached us after a lot of other countries.

When the disease spreads further, the testing facilities definitely need to be decentralised but the amount of pressure currently imposed on us is making the IEDCR employees distressed. Rapid testing facilities will soon be provided.

Wuhan’s first case was discovered on

December 31 while Bangladesh identified its first case on March 8 due to the group efforts of Bangladesh’s public health system, DGHS, IEDCR, and our airports. How can we not give credit to Bangladesh’s public health system and its government?

I would say, the people of our country are much more aware than the people of Italy. Why are the mortality numbers in Italy so high despite their health system being seemingly better than ours?

The people coming back from Europe were unwilling to quarantine themselves. They did not try to understand that although they may not show any symptoms they might still be a carrier and infect others. The inability to quarantine these people is a result of the equal failure of the countries these people came from.

When we tried to take these people to Ashkona Hajj camp, they resisted and complained of lack of food inside the camps but, that was not true. After a lot of resistance from them, to ensure that the situation did not aggravate, they were all let go. But all of their addresses and phone numbers were collected and provided to the local DC and SP offices. Then they were sent to their homes with police guards. As far as I am aware, none of these people who resisted quarantine was later found to be infected. It is the people who came before or after them who might not be maintaining proper quarantine and the people from the quarantine centre in Gazipur who were found to be infected.

Community transmission has not started yet but there is definitely a chance. We are asking everyone who came from abroad to quarantine themselves. For the 24 patients who were infected, we are tracing their contacts and asking them to be self-quarantined. But there is some lacking in this aspect. In some villages, we are also implementing community quarantine.

If the public health sector, the government and other relevant organisations put in all their efforts we will surely be able to stop community transmission. We have to be prepared for a situation similar to that of Italy. The hospital authorities need to ensure that their doctors have basic equipment such as masks and gloves to at least be able to diagnose potential COVID-19 patients. Personal protection equipment is only necessary for the doctors in the isolation ward, people working in sample collection, and the nurses taking care of the infected.

We need to stay one step ahead and take pre-emptive action. We will not lock down the whole country just yet. Control measures need to be adopted in densely populated Dhaka city, other cities and villages where committees should be established which can check on its residents’ health. These committees can also help out during community quarantines. We have instructed all public transport owners/drivers to wash their vehicles after every trip and all the bus stations must have hand-washing facilities. We have proposed closures of the prayer houses since people seem to be gathering there. We would advise everyone to carry out their prayers at home. Factories must ensure hand-washing facilities and its workers should maintain proper distance among themselves during the work hours.



KEDAR LELE
CEO & Managing Director Unilever Bangladesh Limited

The private sector should be innovative to help the country during this crisis.

Behavioural changes, such as hand-washing and social distancing, can stop the spread of the coronavirus. The human mind does not understand exponential growth. Hence it is important to flatten the curve through behavioural changes right now.

In my opinion, everyone, with the help of the government, must keep the people safe and stop the spread of the virus. Secondly, we need to control the panic by educating the masses so that they understand how to properly respond to the situation. One solution could be a daily bulletin from IEDCR talking about the current status of Bangladesh in regards to COVID-19. Why is it impossible for us to find a way for the people to get in touch with the government authorities? Grameenphone and Robi are two large telecom operators in Bangladesh. Why weren’t these telecoms asked by the government to man the call centres? This job should have been given to the experts.

We also need to maintain the flow of essential goods because a lot of consumers are panic buying. Essential commodities have to be made available in each neighbourhood.

The epicentre of this crisis will not be financial institutions. It will be the livelihood of the people. Thus the government needs to ensure that the livelihoods of people are not badly affected. Since people are forced to practice social distancing and not go to work, they have no means of earning. If the citizens do not get this financial support, the pandemic will eventually result in violence.

There are countries which have paid dearly and there are countries which have acted daringly in this situation. I just hope and pray that Bangladesh acts daringly to stop the spread of the virus.



DR FAZLE RABBI MOHAMMED
Associate Consultant, Respiratory Medicine Square Hospitals Limited

I have noticed a lot of discrepancies in patients regarding disclosure of their travel history. We have had multiple patients coming from abroad who have come to the hospital breaking their quarantine. We have a lot of pneumonia patients in our hospital and we have had them even before the coronavirus infection was declared in our country. The problem that we are facing is that we have a lot of viral pneumonia patients in our hospital but we are unable to detect if they are infected with the coronavirus. Therefore, I believe the testing kit facilities should be decentralised as soon as possible. Square Hospital is ready to help out the government since we have the facilities.

I, personally, have been afraid to diagnose patients and after requesting my hospital for a week, I was finally given personal protection equipment. For patients with respiratory tract infections, we have set rules in our hospital to wear masks and wash hands. But sadly, most patients are not abiding by these rules. Although we have provided masks to all hospital employees and have provided personal protection equipment to the vulnerable departments such as paediatrics, there are a lot of patients coming in and there is a chance that they can spread the disease amongst them. We are not turning back any patient and trying our best to treat all of them.



PROFESSOR MUZAZHERUL HUQ
Former Regional Advisor World Health Organization (WHO)

In Bangladesh, till now, two out of the 24 patients have died. According to this information, we can say that the casualty for senior citizens in this country is 100 percent. So far, the standard status is that 82 percent of the patients can get well at home. Of the rest, three percent will not make it through and the majority of these would be the senior citizens. To prevent casualties in Bangladesh, our priority should be to target the vulnerable population. This vulnerable population requires ICUs and ventilators. 15 percent of our population is senior citizens. So, we need to calculate and determine the number of ICUs required for this amount of patients.

The government must have a strategic policy to contain COVID-19. Next, there should be strategic planning for containment. It was a wrong decision to employ home quarantine since most people in the country do not have separate rooms with attached bathrooms for such isolation to be effective. This decision has only increased chances of community transmission.

You have to undertake a strategy if you want to contain community transmission. My suggestion, therefore, is that we should continue tracing and see if we can arrange for institutional quarantine. Doing so is very easy. In places like Shariatpur and Brahmanbaria we have already tracked up to 2,500 people. If we can put those people under institutional quarantine in those places, then we can contain the spread of the disease. We are all well aware of China’s experience and the steps it has undertaken. For instance, it has utilised its stadiums, gymnasiums and other such establishments for quarantining people. It has locked down people there so that no one can enter or come out of those places. Ultimately, they have been successful and now they are capable enough to help Italy and Bangladesh. We should learn from their experience.

Recently, we received a circular from the head of the institute of a medical college stating that they will not be able to supply masks to the doctors. Masks are essential for combatting coronavirus. Making these masks and PPE should not be a big problem for Bangladesh since our RMG sector already exports garments. We can see that China had instructed its firms to prepare for this and they did it and are even exporting it. Even after getting three months in hand, why have we not been able to prepare well enough to acquire protection gear, especially for the doctors and other healthcare providers? Also, just providing masks to doctors will not suffice; we need to provide all the gears for protection. So now we can rectify our limitations at personal, governmental and institutional levels by implementing home and institutional quarantine. Doing so will be very easy for the government. The implementation should be strict and done by utilising the law enforcement agencies.

We must have sufficient number of CCUs with ventilator facilities in designated hospitals. Doctors should be there in four shifts; three shifts will continue and one shift will be reserved. And all of this should operate under a team in a particular hospital. Additionally, we can give responsibility to two of our mayors to disinfect the entire city since dengue is also an upcoming threat. Thus, we need a strategic plan of action. Besides, priority should also be given to senior citizens.

USE ANY SOAP

TO PREVENT* THE SPREAD OF
CORONAVIRUS

*According to the WHO, washing hands with soaps is an effective way to prevent coronavirus.

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Artworks on exhibit at the event.

Group exhibition 'Bangladesh' marking birth centenary of Bangabandhu

ZAHANGIR ALAM

Contemporary art gallery Shilpangan has arranged a group painting exhibition, titled 'Bangladesh', marking the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The exhibition showcases watercolour paintings by four promising artists who have rendered the bucolic beauty of Bangladesh into canvas.

The four participating artists – Al Akhir Sarker, Kamruzzoha, Masud Ahmed and Palash Datta – have produced beautiful works going for

outdoor works across the country. Aesthetic composition, balanced use of colours, keeping white space on paper and an illusion of graceful wash are the predominant features of the displayed works.

From the lush green vegetation to the blossoming mustard field, to the unique beauty of the deer and dense mangrove forest of the Sundarbans, to the serpentine beauty of the hilly rivers of the Chattogram Hill Tracts – are being showcased at the gallery. It is a great tribute to Bangladesh and Bangabandhu, while displaying the diverse natural and cultural strength of our beloved motherland.

Al Akhir Sarker's *Banglar Bondhu* delineates a fisherman fishing on the river with net and basket, a common sight of riverine Bangladesh. It simultaneously represents the greenery of the country. *Jibon Sriti* by Akhir depicts two men fishing on a pond with hooks, against the backdrop of a paddy field.

Poddo Pukur by Kamruzzoha is one of the most aesthetically soothing paintings at the exhibition. The piece portrays a beautiful red lotus in a pond of Sylhet. A peaceful shade

of blue, together with the illusion of wash technique and precise white space, enhances the mystique quality of the painting.

Puthiar Rajbari by Masud Ahmed offers a beautiful game of light and shade, in his painting. The artist's colour pallet soulfully depicts the epic of both architectural and archaeological heritage of Bangladesh. Clouds, trees, and the Rajbari remind the art lovers of the glorious past of this part of the world.

Gitimoy Sritimoy by Palash Datta showcases a silhouette human figure riding his bi-cycle, against the backdrop of the soft glow of the twilight. The grave silence of the setting sun together with the bold black shadow, makes the art piece an outstanding one.

State Minister for Information Dr Md Murad Hassan inaugurated the exhibition as chief guest on March 12. Renowned artist Afrozaa Jamil Konka and noted journalist Munni Saha attended the opening ceremony as special guests. The exhibition, dedicating to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is open for all daily until April 1.

Bidya Sinha Mim's quarantine times

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

National Award-winning actor Bidya Sinha Mim started her career with Lux Channel i Superstar. *Amar Ache Jol*, directed by Humayun Ahmed was her debut film. The actor was busy with modeling and films. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, she speaks about her works and current situation in the country.

What were the last projects you worked on?

I worked on an advertisement for Lux recently. I last worked on the movie, *Ittefaq*. Currently, all the projects are postponed due to the Coronavirus spread.

How are you spending your time now?

As all the shootings are closed for now, I am staying home. I work out in the morning, and then I read the newspaper for some time. I read books, watch movies and listen to music most of the time. I took up gardening, and

enjoy taking care of my own garden a lot. I am also spending time with my parents.

What are the books you are reading?

I bought the Himu collection from the Boi Mela this year. Humayun Ahmed is my favourite author, and I have read several of his books. Though I read a few Himu books before, I never got a chance to read the whole collection. As I am staying home and quarantining myself, I am spending time with my books as well.

Do you have anything to say to readers in these troubling times?

The most important thing is to be careful. I would request everyone to not go out unless it's an emergency. Stay away from crowded places, stop going for gatherings, hangouts. Maintaining proper hygiene when you're staying home is also very important. Everyone should be careful and aware other people of the situation as well.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



Salman Khan



Shah Rukh Khan

PHOTOS: COLLECTED

Indian artistes in self-quarantine

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, from New Delhi

Superstar Prabhas of *Bahubali* fame has announced that he is in self-quarantine, upon his return from abroad, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

In a short statement posted on Twitter today, the actor said he recently returned from Georgia after completing a film's shoot and therefore, decided to keep himself in isolation.

The actor is currently working on filmmaker Radha Krishna Kumar's untitled film, which also features Pooja Hedge.

A number of Indian celebrities are under self-quarantine after their return from abroad, including Anupam Kher and Shabana Azmi.

The coronavirus cases in India rose to 324 recently, in various parts of the country and six deaths have been reported so far.

Superstar Salman Khan appealed to his fans to take the risks of coronavirus seriously and follow the government's instructions for observing social distancing.

He asked the people to not treat the lockdown as a public holiday and stay indoors.

In a video posted on Instagram, the actor started by lauding all those who are fighting the battle against COVID-19.

"I want to appeal to everyone that the government is



Prabhas

asking something, so please take it seriously and don't spread rumours," Salman said. "It is a problem with everyone for a long time that they believe it will not happen to them. Anyone can get infected with the coronavirus, be it in bus, train or in market place. So why do you want to take that risk?"

Shah Rukh Khan, Karan Johar, Akshay Kumar, Ayushmann Khurrana and Hrithik Roshan among others have applauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for a 'Janata Curfew' to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

A cultural workshop for indigenous children held at Mymensingh

AMINUL ISLAM, from Mymensingh

A five-day cultural workshop for indigenous children, held at Indigenous Cultural Academy auditorium in Haluaghat, Mymensingh, concluded recently.

It is the first of its kind, organised by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy under the management of Mymensingh Zila Shilpakala Academy. The workshop included musical and classical dance both in Bengali and Garo language and rhythmic instruments, dama and tabla.

Around 200 children from

indigenous community in Haluaghat took part in the workshop.

On the concluding day, the participants took part in their stage performance at the academy premises. The trainers were Tilottoma Kubi Benu, Md Hatem Ali, Baduli Dalboth and Shimul Rangsa.

Md Rezaul Karim, upazila nirbahi officer of Haluaghat attended the programme as chief guest. President of Tribal Welfare Association in Haluaghat Bhadra Mrong, secretary of the organisation, Jemes Jorhesh Chiran and school teacher Josef Sangma were present, among others. Mymensingh District Cultural

Officer Arzu Parves delivered the welcome speech while Sarwar Jahan hosted the event.

The speakers highlighted on that the traditional indigenous culture is disappearing as the younger people of this community do not pay attention to it. There are around eight indigenous groups in Haluaghat and only the Garo community is active while the rest others are at extinction.

The spontaneous performance of the children at the workshop raised hope amongst the trainers. According to the speakers at the event, this kind of workshops will help to revive indigenous culture.



PHOTO: STAR

Stay home for three months
UK tells 1.5m people most at risk

AFP, London

Up to 1.5 million vulnerable people in Britain, identified as being most at risk from the coronavirus epidemic, should stay at home for at least 12 weeks, the government said yesterday.

Those with underlying health conditions such as bone or blood cancers, cystic fibrosis, or who have had an organ transplant have been advised by health officials to do all they can to shield themselves from the virus, including confining themselves at home for a long period.

"People should stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives," Communities secretary Robert Jenrick said in a statement.

He added that the government was asking "extremely vulnerable individuals" to take "extra steps to shield themselves".

Paul Johnstone, director of Public Health England, said those contacted should "not go out for shopping, for leisure or for travel".



This combination of pictures taken yesterday shows deserted areas during a one-day nationwide Janata (civil) curfew imposed as a preventive measure against the Covid-19 coronavirus (clockwise) near the Jama Masjid mosque in New Delhi, JJ bridge in Mumbai, the Haji Ali Dargah in Mumbai and the statue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Amritsar.

PHOTO: AFP

Asia steps up efforts

Tighter travel restrictions imposed in several countries as second wave of infections strike

AGENCIES

Authorities across Asia ramped up efforts this weekend to stem the coronavirus amid fears of a second wave of infections in places where outbreaks had appeared under control.

Tighter travel restrictions were imposed in several countries while Malaysia deployed its army to enforce a lockdown as the number of cases in the region soared past 95,000 -- a third of the world's infections, an AFP tally shows.

Outside China -- where the virus was first detected in December and infected more than 80,000 people -- South Korea is the hardest-hit country in Asia with over 8,500 cases.

While China says it has drastically reduced the number of domestically transmitted cases -- the one reported yesterday was the first in four days -- it is seeing a steady rise in imported cases, mostly

from Chinese people returning from overseas.

Cases rose by roughly a third in Thailand overnight to nearly 600, fuelling scepticism about claims in neighbouring Myanmar and Laos of zero infections.

Three doctors treating virus patients in Indonesia died, taking the country's death toll to 48 with 514 confirmed infections.

Pakistan suspended international flights in a desperate bid to prevent the virus spreading in a country with more than 300 reported cases. Millions of people in India were in lockdown yesterday as the government tests the country's ability to fight the pandemic.

In Hong Kong the number of cases has nearly doubled in the past week as more people fly back to the financial hub.

Prison guards opened fire on inmates in Sri Lanka's north after they tried to break out in protest over a ban on family visits to prevent spread of virus.

China scrambles to curb rise in imported cases

Thailand cases rocket to 600 as crisis fears grow

3 doctors die in Indonesia

Pakistan bans int'l flights after shutting borders

Lockdowns not enough to defeat coronavirus: WHO

Calls for health measures to avoid resurgence

REUTERS, London

Countries can't simply lock down their societies to defeat coronavirus, the World Health Organization's top emergency expert said yesterday, adding that public health measures are needed to avoid a resurgence of the virus later on.

"What we really need to focus on is finding those who are sick, those who have the virus, and isolate them, find their contacts and isolate them," Mike Ryan said in an interview on the BBC's Andrew Marr Show.

"The danger right now with the lockdowns ... if we don't put in place the strong public health measures now, when those movement restrictions and lockdowns are lifted, the danger is the disease will jump back up."

Much of Europe and the United States have followed China and other Asian countries and introduced drastic restrictions to fight the new coronavirus,

with most workers told to work from home and schools, bars, pubs and restaurants being closed.

Ryan said that the examples of China, Singapore and South Korea, which coupled restrictions with rigorous measures to test every possible suspect, provided a model for Europe, which the WHO has said has replaced Asia as the epicentre of the pandemic.

"Once we've suppressed the transmission, we have to go after the virus. We have to take the fight to the virus," Ryan said.

Ryan also said that several vaccines were in development, but only one had begun trials in the United States. Asked how long it would take before there was a vaccine available in Britain, he said that people needed to be realistic.

"We have to make sure that it's absolutely safe... we are talking at least a year," he said.

"The vaccines will come, but we need to get out and do what we need to do now."



Personal ties not enough, North Korea tells US

Donald Trump has sent a letter to Kim Jong Un detailing a plan to develop ties, state media reported citing the North Korean leader's powerful sister, but she warned their good personal relationship is not enough, as a hiatus in disarmament talks drags on. "In the letter, he (Trump)... explained his plan to propel the relations between the two countries and expressed his intent to render cooperation in the anti-epidemic work," an apparent reference to the coronavirus pandemic, Kim Yo Jong said in the statement. If the US continued to pursue its "unilateral and greedy intention", she said, relations between the two countries would continue to deteriorate.

Infections jump across Africa

Rwanda imposed a nationwide shutdown and border controls to combat the coronavirus at the weekend in some of the strictest measures taken in Africa, as infections spread across the continent and authorities warn healthcare systems are ill-equipped to cope. Africa has lagged behind the global curve for coronavirus infections and deaths, but in the past few days has seen a significant rise in cases. The continent has now reported more than 1,100 infections -- more than 1,000 of them in sub-Saharan Africa -- as the World Health Organization expresses concern that poor sanitation, urban crowding and the lack of intensive-care units, equipment and trained staff could hamper any response.



US help offer baffles Iran

The offer by the United States to help Iran fight the coronavirus pandemic is strange, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised speech yesterday, rejecting the offer. Despite heightened tensions between the longtime foes, Washington has offered humanitarian assistance to Iran while it struggles with the coronavirus outbreak. Iran is the most-affected country in the Middle East with over 1,500 coronavirus deaths and 20,610 infected people. Khamenei said the Islamic Republic had the capability to overcome the crisis.

SOURCE: AFP

Is China a model for the world?

AFP, Beijing

The head of the World Health Organization believes China's battle with the coronavirus offers a beacon of hope, but others question whether Beijing's strategy can be followed by other countries -- particularly Western democracies.

China has reported only one new local infection over the past four days, a seemingly remarkable turnaround given the chaos that surrounded the initial outbreak in the city of Wuhan.

While some experts caution against accepting Beijing's figures at face value, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted China's success "provides hope for the rest of the world".

But China is a particular case -- a centrally-controlled, one-party authoritarian state that allows no dissent and can mobilise vast resources on a single issue.

CLOSE DOWN AND CONTAIN

In January, China effectively shut down Wuhan and placed its 11 million residents in effective quarantine -- a move it then replicated in the rest of Hubei province, putting 50 million



people in mass isolation.

Across the rest of the country, residents were strongly encouraged to stay at home. Hundreds of millions of Chinese live in closed residential complexes where neighbourhood committees can police movement in and out -- meaning compliance could be closely monitored.

"Containment works," Sharon Lewin, professor of medicine at the University of Melbourne, told AFP.

Extreme social distancing and home quarantines have been used to

differing degrees by a rising number of European countries, with some US states following suit.

MASS MOBILISATION

At least 42,000 doctors and medical personnel were sent to Hubei province to shore up the province's health services which had, according to public health professor Zheng Zijie from Peking University, essentially "collapsed" under the strain of the fast-spreading epidemic.

China's ability to mobilise small armies of medical workers did not come

with protection from contagion. More than 3,300 medical staff were infected across the country and 13 have died from Covid-19, according to health ministry figures published early March.

Government efforts in China were backed by an arsenal of propaganda calling on citizens to be hygienic and stay home.

MASKS AND CHECKS

Widespread mask use may have helped slow the spread of the disease, "particularly when there are so many asymptomatic virus carriers", Zheng said. During the crisis China produced up to 1.6 million N95 respirator masks per day. These are considered the most effective protection, but need to fit correctly and be changed often.

To boost detection rates, temperature checkpoints were installed outside buildings and shops, or in public places. Many localities require citizens to show a QR code on their phone that rates them as "green", "yellow" or "red".

This assessment is now an entrance requirement for many businesses. Government announcements made clear coding system will remain in use in some form even after the pandemic subsides.

Gaza confirms first two cases

AFP, Gaza City

Authorities in Gaza yesterday confirmed the first two cases of novel coronavirus, identifying them as Palestinians who had travelled to Pakistan and were being held in quarantine since their return. The United Nations has warned that a Covid-19 outbreak in Gaza could be disastrous, given the high poverty rates and weak health system in the coastal strip under Israeli blockade since 2007.



India to test for virus at 111 labs

IANS, New Delhi

At least 111 labs will conduct test for diagnosis of coronavirus across India, the ministry of health and family welfare said on Saturday. These testing labs include both government and private sectors. However, the capping the prices of the tests is still under discussion. The testing labs have been designated by the apex research body in India, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

China sends millions of masks to Czechs

AFP, Prague

A giant cargo plane carrying over 100 tons of medical material from China, including millions of face masks, has landed at a Czech airport, the defence ministry said yesterday. The Czech Republic, which by yesterday had 1,047 confirmed coronavirus cases including six cured patients and no deaths, has been grappling with a shortage of face masks and disinfectants.

Air quality improving

AFP, Paris

Air quality is improving in countries under coronavirus quarantines, experts say, but it is far too early to speak of long-term change.

Images taken by the US space agency Nasa in February showed the concentration of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) fell dramatically in Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic.

NO2 is mainly produced by vehicles, industrial sites and thermal power stations.

As China moves past the peak of its crisis, however, recent images by the European Space Agency (ESA) show a resurgence in NO2 emissions.

A striking reduction has also been observed by the ESA in northern Italy, which has been locked down to fight a spread of the novel coronavirus, which causes COVID-19.

The European Environment Agency (EEA) reports a similar change in Barcelona and Madrid, where Spanish authorities issued confinement orders in mid March.

In northern Italy, "average NO2 concentration levels have been almost halved on average," Peuch

remarked.

As for other countries or regions that have told inhabitants to remain confined at home, notably Argentina, Bavaria, Belgium, California, France and Tunisia, specialists are poring over the data to see if the trend is similar.

Meanwhile, less NO2 does not necessarily mean purer air. Beijing experienced episodes of pollution owing to fine particles in February, Nasa's Earth Observatory reported.

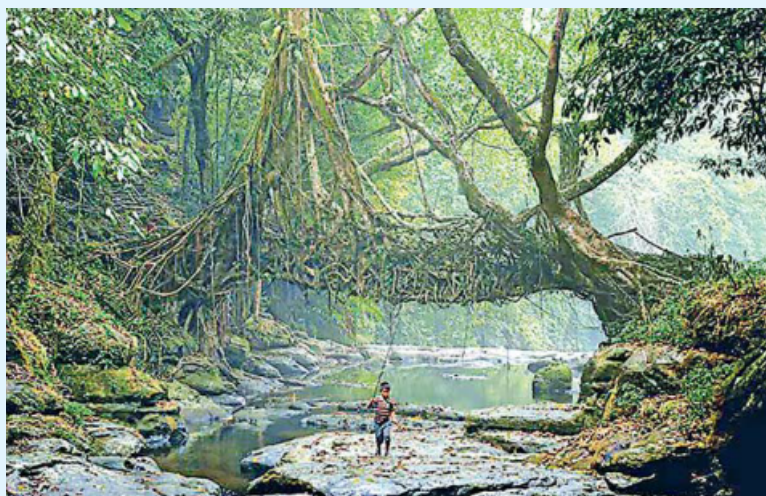
The air in Paris was also rated as moderately polluted Friday owing to the presence of fine particles and NO2 even though the population had already been confined at home for three days.

Confinement measures protect in two ways, by reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection and by easing pollution from road traffic, according to a group of French doctors known as Air-Sante-climate.

It is nonetheless hard to know how much benefit the world's population will actually experience. According to the health experts, that will depend on how long the measures will last.

QUARANTINE ACROSS THE GLOBE





An urban demise is on its way How can we stop it?

NUBRAS SAMAYEEN

"People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does."

— Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*

Throughout human history, people have claimed and controlled nature and have built empires of civilisations. Today, however, Mother Nature is angry. In a momentary flicker, a new battle has been forced upon the human-race. A bio-device named COVID-19 has become a pandemic, killing and infecting thousands around the globe. It has left us in forced self-confinement. So far, the urban cores have been the viral epicenters from where the disease stretches to surrounding areas at an accelerating speed. Though the genesis of COVID-19 seemingly started from the wrong choice of food (or, to the orthodox, a repercussion of their unfaithfulness), this menace is no insular occurrence. Its global ubiquity is a result of a multitude of entwined practices that includes remote architecture, urban design and planning practices.

It is a boomerang effect. Nature has finally counteracted the long-practiced capitalist systems of spatial production vis-a-vis city formation that have been regarded as progress. Our indifference to natural conditions, ecosystems and sustainability took nature to an intolerable boiling point. So, the question is: are humans and nature friends, or foes? Are we a part of nature or a split?

Cities have been the emblem of human civilisation for thousands of years. Defying ecological growth and natural orders, and more importantly with a deviance from thousand-year-old indigenous building practices, with globalising forces the cities of today are synthetic and picture perfect. World cities such as New York, London, Dubai, Paris, Beijing, Singapore, Shanghai and many others are all in a race to showcase their architecture. Soaring high-rises have become the *zeitgeist* (spirit of the age) and pride of each metropolis. Consequently, the land endorsing these developments has turned into a commodity, an asset, a lure to humankind. Inherently a part of earth, it has

become power and a controlling device.

But land-claims, land-fill and wet-land encroachment for development and urbanisation resist nature's plans. While most rural counterparts follow vernacular systems that are accommodating to natural ecosystems, the city is a product of the capitalist system. Its grids, plots and division help in ownership and urban infrastructure development. Consequently, they proliferate means of human influence.

Megacity Dhaka has become one of the most expensive stretches of real estate in Asia today. Yet with its unplanned development and unforeseen issues, the city faces a sort of schizophrenia and urban stagnancy. *Dhakaites* from all walks of life are grabbing land—even the wetlands—which were once the habitat for countless species and wildlife. For instance, Banani, the affluent neighbourhood colloquially meaning "woods," used to have foxes and even cranes on its lake. Dhaka's water and wetland research (2005) reveals that other impressive neighbourhoods such as Ashulia, Bashundhara and others were also built on filled wetlands. Once popular Motijheel was established on a *jheel*, a quintessential element of Bengal's deltaic landscape which has disappeared. Recent records also show that Dhaka has lost more than 150 rivers in the last five decades and consequently, an even greater number of fish and water-based species. Such land-grabbing has created a deep rift between humankind and nature. Greed and appetite for land, along with a colonial mindset and blind imitation of capitalistic models left behind by the British, are forcing us into unanticipated environmental issues. Theorist Kathleen James-Chakraborty of Dublin University points out how Dhaka's and South Asia's architectural trends are more akin to Western architectural trends and their chronology than to our own heritage. Therefore, she sees a similarity in language yet a rupture in the progression of local building vocabulary that developed from the *genius-loci* or the spirit of the place.

The omnipresent phenomenon of *katcha bazaars* (marketplace) and *bazaar*-like infor-

mality is paradigmatic of any South Asian megacity. With huge economic contribution, these informal sectors have become the core of cities like Dhaka. These *bostis* house a huge workforce that is an absolute necessity for Dhaka. But due to municipal negligence, hyper-density, unrestrained growth and unhygienic sanitation systems and livelihoods, they have become a tumour amid Dhaka's urban landscape and hence are often deliberately ignored. Korail, the largest *bosti* in Dhaka that serves neighbouring affluent areas, is completely unaware of and unprepared to deal with the COVID crisis. Wuhan's wet-market where COVID-19 germinated is similar to this informal urbanity.

Killing 8,000, infecting 200,000 and affecting the lives of millions, in just a few weeks, the COVID-19 has become the deadliest of all its viral predecessors. Research shows that the COVID-19, the Bird Flu (Avian Flu 2013), the MERS-CoV (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus), and the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome 2003) all came from animals. AIDS most likely came from chimpanzees, the deadly Ebola from bats. Bats and pangolins also possibly started the COVID-19 in Wuhan—one of the largest and most glamorous megacities of central China, populated with beautiful edifices and 11 million people.

A veterinary doctor at the University of Illinois has explained that animals are meant for forestry; it is their habitat. Since we are forcefully taking their homes and turning them into our own, their habitats are destroyed. And so they are moving into human habitats—our cities and even homes, taking refuge in the crevices of urban buildings. The animal and human world are overlapping; food chains are intersecting. Even in Bangladesh, the Nipah-2019 virus was spread from date-juice that was infected by bats and was transmitted via interpersonal contact. Nipah's spread was more limited presumably because it originated in a relatively sparser area and was not as deadly as what we currently face.

Moreover, most buildings across Dhaka open up to next door walls or

windows, diminishing the minimum level of privacy or buffer space that is required. Therefore, though most of these edifices successfully emulate Western models, they produce a concrete jungle. They fail to offer anything that complements our distinctively Bengali urban lifestyle. With complete reliance on active cooling systems and glazed facades, they rarely comply with sub-tropical weather conditions.

Meanwhile our *bazaars*, like Wuhan's fish markets, are an intermediary area where the animal and human world unite. They have become the production zone of recurring deadly diseases. Interestingly, the products of wild animals—whether sold as food or as consumer goods—are predominantly consumed only by the rich minority, yet they contribute largely to the national GDP. This inequality eventually makes policy making more complex and difficult. The recent killing of the rarest white giraffe and its calf in Kenya is an example of such convulsion, all of which is bringing forth a reality that we thought existed only on the screen, in movies like *Contagion* (2011) or *Pandemic* (2016).

In her book *Lo-TEK: Design by Radical Indigenism* (2020), Julia Watson, a faculty member of Harvard and Columbia University, proposes to rethink technology and biodiversity in designing urban environments. She suggests alternative solutions that focus on indigenous building practices from antiquity, in which nature can offer her boons as urban infrastructure. She challenges the one-size-fits-all model of institutionalised, commercial measures of architecture and sustainable practices. One such inefficient model is the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) that is standardised by the US Global Building Commission. Like a few other green institutions, LEED, leading in the market, aims for sustainable building solutions which often end up in superficial plug-ins to make edifices that are just categorically "green" by definition. A number of the buildings in Dhaka, particularly in Gulshan and Banani, also follow LEED without considering

sub-tropical needs and cultural influence. Watson says, "We can look to cultures that have been living with natural systems and understand how to develop civilisations with complex ecosystems as a grounding for moving forward as designers." Exemplifying tribal lifestyles of *Khasi* tribes and even fishermen villages of deltaic Bengal, she further explains, "It's a movement toward rethinking how urbanism interacts with nature."

All through history, humans have lived with germs, recurrent plagues, dire diseases like chicken-pox and consequently, developed immunity. But there might still come a plague with which we cannot coexist. Uncontrolled urbanisation and the resultant climate change that seeps its way through the melting ice, polluting the soils, may release nature's genie from its dormancy. A 2005 research reported by the BBC shows that NASA scientists successfully revived a bacteria that had been encased in a frozen pond in Alaska for 32,000 years. The microbes, called *Carnobacterium pleistocenium*, were frozen since the Pleistocene period. They began swimming once the snow covering them melted. Scientists also succeeded in reviving an eight-million-year-old bacterium that had been lying dormant in ice. These observations and discoveries must push us to think more about our built-environments and force us to ask: how do we build with nature?

What the current situation demands are strong regulatory bodies and laws. Otherwise, our physical and mental health—our lives—will become crippled. We, like a frog, are living in a pot that is being gradually heated. We will stay put and never jump out until we reach the boiling point. But if cautious now, we can perhaps reverse and stop the approaching urban demise and disprove Stephen Hawking, who once said "humankind is greedy, stupid" and that we are the greatest threat to Earth.

Nubras Samayeen is a doctoral scholar of architecture, landscape and heritage at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.





With very little flow, Sangdia-Bakultala canal in Badhal union of Bagerhat's Kachua upazila hardly serves the irrigation purpose for local farmers. *Right*, young plants at a Boro field in Rajnagar upazila of Moulvibazar are drying due to lack of irrigation.



PHOTO: STAR

Water crisis hampers Boro farming in Moulvibazar, Bagerhat's Kachua

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Scanty irrigation due to lack of water in canals worries Boro farmers in different areas including Moulvibazar district and Kachua upazila of Bagerhat.

The problem in Moulvibazar has arisen due to lack of dredging in several areas under the Manu River Irrigation Project while scanty rain aggravates the situation, reports our correspondent.

"I fear huge loss as water did not reach my land near the end of the canal. In some places water level saw a drastic fall," said Kader Mia, a Boro farmer of Ekatuna area under Moulvibazar Sadar upazila.

There is much less rainfall this year compared to last year's, said Chandra Biswas, a farmer of Dildarpur area in Kulaura upazila.

"The Boro planting season usually ends in January. But due to the water crisis, I could not start planting it on my lands. If there is further delay in planting, I would get much less than expected yield," said ATM Alamgir Hossain, a

farmer of Raisree area.

Saber Mia, a power tiller operator at Dakkhinbaligaon village in Moulvibazar Sadar upazila, said, "Due to lack of irrigation, we have to plough through the rough soil, for which engines consume more fuel."

Several farmers said they have to use more fertilizer as the dryness of soil makes it less fertile.

Solvent farmers are buying small machines for irrigation but poor and marginal ones cannot afford it, they said.

Rat infestation adds to the problem in some places.

Rakib Chowdhury, president of Moulvibazar Seed Farmers Association, said, "There is shortage of water at many places including Shamra Bazar, Ekatuna and Raipur areas, especially at the end of the irrigation canals. Most of the village canals have turned into grasslands. Six out of my 20 acres of land has remained uncultivated due to the irrigation crisis."

"We need a sustainable water reservoir to solve the problem," he said.

Kazi Lutful Bari, deputy director of Moulvibazar Department of Agricultural Extension, said, "To get a good yield of Boro rice, the farmers need to have a steady supply of water throughout the process from sowing to harvesting. Otherwise, the crop suffers from disease, malnutrition and pest attack."

"We need a long-term sustainable plan and its implementation to solve this problem," said Advocate Bazlul Majid Chowdhury, president of Haor Bachao, Sunamganj Bachao Andolon.

Ranendra Shankar Chakraborty, executive engineer of Water development Board, Moulvibazar said they have done repair work in some areas to raise the level of the embankment.

"This year Tk 50 lakh has been allocated for the project of 105 km dam and allocated. It is not possible to do everything with such a small allocation. Manu rehabilitation project

is being taken. Through this project, everything including canals, dam will be fixed," he said.

Our Bagerhat Correspondent reports: The farmers' of Badhal union in Kachua upazila of Bagerhat are facing severe water crisis to irrigate their Boro lands and fish cultivation as canals that earlier carried freshwater are drying up.

The canals in several villages including Sangdia, Afra, Kalmibuniya, Mosni and Bilkul of the union are in dying condition, locals said, adding that if the situation continues, freshwater of the ponds will dry, causing drinking water crisis.

"We are not getting water for irrigation of Boro paddy lands and fish farming. We need urgent dredging of the canals here," said Liton Sheikh, a farmer of Kalmibuniya village.

Kamrul Paik, another farmer of the village, said, "People throw waste materials into the canals and some people made wooden bridge in Sangdia-Bakultala canal, blocking two sides of the waterbody."

"The farmers and the owners of fish enclosures are in a great crisis as the canals of Kanderkhal, Kalmibuniya, Sangdia-Bokultala, Bilkul and Atarogati areas are dying. The Biskhali River, which supplies freshwater into the canals, is also silted up," said Nakib Foysal Ohid, chairman of Badhal union parishad.

"We urged the authorities to dredge the river and the canals as early as possible," he added.

Kachua Upazila Agriculture Extension officer Lovely Khanam said, "Boro paddy has been cultivated on 6700 hectares of land in Kachua upazila and 1050 hectares of it is in Badhal union. We have informed the district water management committee about the water crisis in the area."

Contacted, Executive Engineer of Water Development Board Nahiduzzaman Khan said, "We have a plan to conduct dredging work in the Biskhali river as well as some canals in Badhal union as early as possible, as it is badly needed for irrigation."

'Curbs on movement'

FROM PAGE 1

a mosque with the man who had succumbed to Covid-19 on Saturday.

Meanwhile, a UK-returnee, who was put in isolation at a Sylhet hospital with coronavirus symptoms, died early yesterday.

The woman, aged around 61, breathed her last in Sylhet Shaheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital around 3:30am, said Civil Surgeon of Sylhet, Premananda Mandal.

She returned from London on March 4 and was suffering from fever, cough and breathing problems for the past 10 days, the civil surgeon said.

On March 20, she was admitted to the hospital and was put in isolation as her condition deteriorated, he said.

A team of IEDCR collected her sample

around 11:30am and would examine it to confirm whether she was a Covid-19 patient, said Debapada Ray, director of health at Sylhet division's Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) office.

The body of the woman was buried at a graveyard near Manik Peer Mazar in Sylhet city around 2:00pm under the district administration's supervision.

Officials of health services were present during the burial, and all protocols for an infected patient was maintained as per the instructions of the government, Debapada said.

The family members of the woman were kept in home quarantine and an executive magistrate was tasked to ensure it until the test report of the woman was ready, said Md Abul Kalam, additional deputy commissioner (general) of Sylhet.

Coronavirus patient's doctor

FROM PAGE 2

after which he was transferred to Kurmitola General Hospital and put on a ventilator.

He had been running a fever and was taken to hospital after experiencing some breathing difficulties, according to hospital sources.

More forestland freed from grabbers

Tangail forest department recovered a total of 51 acres of land in Madhupur upazila

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Forest department yesterday recovered eight acres of forestlands from illegal occupiers and demolished fruit orchards under Dokhala forest area in Madhupur upazila.

The local foresters led by Jamal Hossain Talukder, assistant forest conservator (ACF North) in Tangail, conducted the drive.

With this recent recovery, the department has freed a total 51 acres of forestland under different forest in the upazila during special drives that started on March 8.

Abdul Ahad, range officer of Dokhala forest, said people from neighbouring areas had been cultivating banana occupying vast land inside the Sal forest for long.

ACF Jamal said they recovered 23 acres of forestlands in Gachhabari, Chawra Baid, Shukonpocha and



PHOTO: STAR

Community forest workers felled down banana trees raised on grabbed forestland in Dokhala area under Madhupur upazila in Tangail.

Chitakhola area during drives March 18.

Trees like Jarul, Hijol and Rain of forestland in Digorbaid area on Tree and different varieties of

other trees will be planted on the recovered forestland, he said.

Tangail Divisional Forest Officer Dr Jahirul Haque said they will continue such drive to free the grabbed forestlands. He also sought supports from all concerned in this regard.

Mentionable, the traditional Sal forest in Madhupur is shrinking very fast due to nonstop tree felling and illegal encroachment.

Over 20,000 acres out of a total of 45,565 acres of forestland in the upazila are currently under illegal occupiers. Many locals and influential outsiders raised different fruits and vegetables orchards on the grabbed forestland, according to sources at the forest department.

Forest officials said their department has been struggling to recover the grabbed forestland due to shortage of manpower and interference of powerful quarter.

Shortage of medical supplies

FROM PAGE 1

and shutting down all production facilities except those providing essential goods and services.

"We are facing the most serious crisis that the country has experienced since World War II," Conte told Italians during a live broadcast.

He cautioned citizens to be calm and patient, insisting there was "no alternative" than to impose further restrictions. Scientists have argued that avoiding even one infection means scores more are prevented down the line.

The Mediterranean nation of 60 million is now the epicentre of the disease, which first emerged in central China late last year before marching out to the rest of the world.

Across the Atlantic, more than a third of Americans were adjusting to life in various phases of lockdown, including in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. Other parts of the United States are expected to ramp up restrictions as well.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said the government is "literally scouring the globe looking for medical supplies." Health care workers from Oklahoma City to Minneapolis sought donations of protective equipment. Staff at a Detroit hospital began creating homemade face masks for workers.

His comment came after United States appealed for donations of respirator masks to combat a shortage of the lifesaving equipment. European countries, which have better health care than most of the world, also suffering from acute shortage of medical equipment, specially ventilators.

Ventilators, running in the thousands of dollars per unit, are used to help people with respiratory

difficulties to breathe. Worldwide, the devices have become shorthand for the rapid advance of the disease -- and the desperation of officials who fear their stocks are inadequate.

UK health minister Matt Hancock has acknowledged the existing stock of 5,000 ventilators is inadequate. Germany's Draegerwerk last week got a government order for 10,000, equal to a typical year's production.

Last week, Hamilton Medical shipped 400 ventilators to Italy, whose intensive care units have been overwhelmed by cases. About 50% of those with coronavirus in Italy accepted into intensive care units are dying, compared with typical mortality rates of 12% to 16% in such units.

In Britain, where yesterday was Mother's Day, the government had a stark message for millions: Visiting your mother could kill her. Prime Minister Boris Johnson implored Britons to forego traditional family visits, parties and Sunday lunches.

"If your mother is elderly or vulnerable, then I am afraid all the statistics show that she is much more likely to die from coronavirus," Johnson said. "This time the best thing is to ring her, video call her, Skype her, but to avoid any unnecessary physical contact or proximity."

In Spain, Europe's hardest-hit country behind Italy, intensive care units in some areas were close to their limits even before yesterday's new tally of 28,603 infections and 1,756 deaths. The army was building a field hospital with 5,500 beds in a convention center in Madrid, where hotels are also being turned into wards for virus patients without serious breathing problems.

China reported its first local infection in four days yesterday. While the number of cases in the mainland

has slumped dramatically since the crisis began, there are fears in Asia of "imported" cases from other hotspots like Europe.

Thailand reported its highest daily rise in cases, taking its total to nearly 600, while Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia have also reported a spike in cases after numbers had plateaued earlier.

Millions of people in India were confined to their homes yesterday as the country went into lockdown with a one-day nationwide "self-imposed curfew".

Normally bustling streets in the capital New Delhi and the financial hub of Mumbai were mostly deserted and most shops shuttered.

India, which has reported close to 350 infections and 7 deaths, also imposed a transportation ban yesterday suspending all railway, metro and interstate bus services till March 31.

Tighter restrictions are now in place elsewhere in Asia, with Australia shutting its borders to foreigners and non-residents and Pakistan suspending international flights.

After recording its first two deaths, Singapore said it will fully shut its borders beginning tomorrow. All short-term visitors will be barred while returning locals will face a 14-day quarantine. Sri Lanka blocked all passenger flights and ships from entering and Pakistan banned all international flights.

The coronavirus has infected more than 1,100 across Africa too, where healthcare systems are limited and social distancing measures are difficult in crowded cities.

The Middle East also remains on high alert, where Iran -- which suffered a major outbreak -- reported 129 deaths on Sunday.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার	
উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার পরিকল্পনা কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়	
সদর, শরীয়তপুর	
shariatpursadar@uhfpo.dghs.gov.bd	
স্মারক নং- উপঃ স্বঃ ও পঃ পঃ অঃ/সদর(শরীঃ)/প্রশা/এমএসআর/দরপত্র/২০১৯-২০/২৭৭	
তারিখঃ ২১/৩/২০২০ইং	
এমএসআর দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি (OTM)	
উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার পরিকল্পনা কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়, সদর, শরীয়তপুরের আওতাধীন ০৪টি উপ-স্বাস্থ্য কেন্দ্রের ২০১৯-২০২০ইং অর্থ বছরের এমএসআর সামগ্রী ক্রয়ের নিমিত্ত গণখাতে সংগ্রহ আইন/বিধিমালা ২০০৩, ২০০৬, ২০০৮ ও ২০০৯ এবং তৎপরবর্তী সংশোধিত বিধিবিধান অনুযায়ী নিম্নোক্ত "ছক" মোতাবেক ফ্রপ ভিত্তিক পৃথকভাবে সীলগালায়ুক্ত খামে দরপত্র আহবান করা যাইতেছে।	
০১	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ
০২	এজেন্সি
০৩	সংগ্রহকারী সংস্থা/প্রতিষ্ঠান
০৪	সংগ্রহ পদ্ধতি
০৫	বাজেট/তহবিলের উৎস
০৬	দরপত্র আহবানের সূত্র ও তারিখ
০৭	দরপত্র প্যাকেজের নাম/দরপত্রের ধরণ
০৮	দরপত্রাদাতার যোগ্যতা
০৯	দরপত্র বিক্রয়ের স্থান
১০	দরপত্র তফসিল বিক্রয়ের তারিখ ও সময়
১১	দরপত্র তফসিল (সিডিউল) প্রাপ্তি এর মূল্য/নিয়ম
১২	দরপত্র দাখিলের স্থান
১৩	দরপত্র দাখিলের তারিখ ও সময়
১৪	দরপত্র বাস্তব খোলার তারিখ ও সময়
১৫	দরপত্র জামানতের (বায়নার) টাকার পরিমাণ
১৬	দরপত্র আহবানকারীর নাম ও ঠিকানা
১৭	বিল পরিশোধ সংক্রান্ত নির্দেশিকা
১৮	সরবরাহের সময়সীমা
১৯	বিশেষ নির্দেশিকা
ডাঃ আবদুস সোবহান কোড নং-৪২৮৫১ উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার পরিকল্পনা কর্মকর্তা, সদর, শরীয়তপুর	

SPORT



The halls of the BCB headquarters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium (Inset) are empty as part of steps to prevent the spread of coronavirus, but work continues for the groundsmen who are busy with the upkeep of the playing area.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Kohli is the best in the world'

AGENCIES

West Indies legend Shivnarine Chanderpaul, who was present in India for the Road Safety World Series 2020 this month, has given a huge praise to India captain Virat Kohli.

Speaking in an interview to Sportstar, Chanderpaul picked Kohli as the best batsman in the world. "Obviously, it's Virat Kohli. He has been working on all the aspects of his game, and the results are showing," he said.

"He is working hard on his fitness; he works on his skills. You see him putting in the hard work, and he is one of those guys who always wants to do well. He's proven it, day in and day out," the former left-handed batsman added.

"You have to give credit to him for that. It's not easy to stay at the top of your game for so long. You got to put in your work, and the results are showing," the 45-year-old further said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan legend Javed Miandad had also praised the Indian captain in a Youtube video earlier this week. "Whenever he wants to score, he can. He is powerful and has the ability to clear the ropes easily. But the best thing about him is that he is humble. It is visible that he loves his cricket a lot and respects his fellow cricketers a lot," he had said in the video.

"I have seen his conduct and he is friendly with the opposition also. I have played cricket at the same level, I can say this. Indian cricketers are now said to be aggressive. But there has to be some aggression on the field. However, there has to be a limit," he added.

It's a good time for introspection: Pollard

PTI, Port of Spain



West Indies' limited-overs skipper Kieron Pollard believes the break brought upon them by the COVID-19 pandemic is a good time to "introspect" about careers and players should use it to "stay mentally and physically fit".

The coronavirus outbreak, which has claimed over 12000 lives and infected more than 250,000 globally, has led to the cancellation and postponement of all sports activities across the world.

Pollard said it is a good time to reflect on his own's game.

"It is a good time for introspection, a good time for reflection, a good time to look at where you are as an individual in your career and what you want to achieve going forward," he was quoted as saying by Jamaica Gleaner.

Pollard, who was ruled out of the Pakistan Super League due to a niggle in his right thigh early this month, said it is time to work on his fitness and prepare for the season ahead.

"You have to take this time in order to do that and also keep yourself in good physical shape, and mentally as well, because when the bell rings and they say 'ok, everything is back to normal and we need to go on tour', it might not be enough time to be prepared, but you as an individual have to be prepared mentally in order for you to try to perform at your best," he said.

Cricket West Indies (CWI) had recently delayed the domestic season by a month in the wake of the deadly disease.

On Friday, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) suspended all professional cricket till May 28, delaying the start of the new season.

West Indies were scheduled to play a three-Test series from June 4, following warm-up matches against England Lions and Worcestershire on May 22 and 28, respectively.



Tigers' pace story starting to change?

MAZHAR UDDIN



Fast bowling has traditionally been Bangladesh cricket's weak link due to a lack of exposure, hardly any role models for youngsters to follow and, possibly the most prevalent, a lack of motivation on the not-so-friendly pitches and conditions that predominantly favour spinners.

There has always been a shortage of a consistent fast bowler in Bangladesh with Mashrafe Bin Mortaza probably the first and still the only pacer who has made a mark in the international circuit over a long period.

The former Bangladesh ODI captain is the highest wicket-taker in the 50-over format with 269 wickets in 218 games, and Rubel Hossain is second among the pacers with 126 scalps in 101 matches.

Rubel, who despite playing international cricket for nearly a decade, has till now not become a regular across formats. Despite having all the attributes of a genuine fast bowler, Rubel however has not been able to fulfil his potential properly.

is a huge difference between domestic and international cricket. It gives an immense confidence to any player if he is backed by the team, which helps a player grow," Rubel told The Daily Star.

There was a lift in the Tigers' fast-bowling department in 2015, when Mustafizur announced himself in grand style alongside another promising fast bowler Taskin Ahmed, and that raised hopes for the Tigers fast bowling department but both failed to take themselves to the next step.

There are other seamers like Mohammad Saifuddin, Shafiqul Islam, Al Amin Hossain and newcomers Ebadot Hossain and Hasan Mahmud in the Tigers' fast bowling unit, none of whom have yet set the world alight.

Things have started to change in tune with the Tigers' thought process with the selectors preparing separate fast bowling units across formats -- Bangladesh played with totally different fast bowling attacks in the Test and limited-overs games against Zimbabwe.

Jayed can be a good example of a bowler given the license and being prepared as a specialist pacer for the Tigers in Test cricket.



RUBEL HOSSAIN



ABU JAYED

Rubel's record in the longest format of the game is much worse than his limited-overs figures, as he has taken just 36 wickets in 27 Tests at an average of 76.77. He was recently dropped after the first Test against Pakistan at Rawalpindi earlier in February this year. Although Rubel picked up three wickets, it was his bite-less bowling during which he conceded 113 runs from 25.5 overs that led to him being dropped yet again.

Rubel was the joint-highest wicket-taker in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League T20 tournament alongside Mustafizur Rahman, taking 20 wickets, but was not considered for the limited-overs sides against Zimbabwe earlier this month.

"I think I could have definitely worked hard on my skill to improve over the years. Although I have played over 100 ODIs but you will notice that I have not featured regularly during these 11-year career. Fast bowling is a tough art and the more you play, the better you get. There

Jayed, who played nine Tests, has been the stand-out pacer for the Tigers recently as he showed the hunger in testing situations while all other seamers failed to make an impact in India, Pakistan and against Zimbabwe at home recently.

"My aim is to be among the top fast bowlers in Test cricket. I know it's not going to be easy as the conditions and pitches do not favour the seamers much in the sub-continent. Considering my pace, I want to become a workhorse who could bowl longer spells, hitting the right areas consistently with my swing," said Jayed.

Rubel idolised Andrew Flintoff and Jayed follows James Anderson, but both pacers echoed the same sentiment of not having a role model from their own soil apart from Mashrafe to look up.

It will be important for the youngsters to have enough motivation to become a fast bowler and perhaps the likes of Jayed and others would want to be the role model for many in the coming days.

The unsung hero of Bangladesh cricket

Reza-e-Karim, the former general secretary of the Bangladesh Cricket Board, was a shining beacon for the country's cricket. The history of Bangladesh's cricket cannot be put forward without noting the contributions of this giant. BCB director Ahmed Sajjadul Alam Bobby reflects on the life of the unsung hero, who passed away yesterday, leaving Bangladesh with a future to relish.

A legendary organiser, Reza bhai spent all his life with cricket. I remember the time when the EPSF (East Pakistan Sports Federation) used to run all sporting activities before the independence of Bangladesh and Reza bhai has been involved with cricket from that period.

During the Pakistan period, there were no separate headquarters for various sports. What is now the National Sports Council (NSC) was once the headquarters of the EPSF and on the ground floor was a conference room where the cupboards would each represent one of the national sports bodies like the hockey federation, the cricket board, the football federation and others.

One has to understand that cricket back then was not a very popular sport in the Bangladeshi scenario. It was, at best, a second-tier sport or even lower. It was a not an apt time to be involved with cricket since there was no money in the game and even a cup of tea had to be bought with one's own money.

In this state, people like Reza bhai and Raisuddin Ahmed took the initiative to move the country's cricket forward diligently. That cupboard was the cricket board and their activities were all related to those files in the cupboard. Late in the afternoon, the people in charge of the different federations would gather in the common room just as teachers



Reza-e-Karim shakes hands with players during a local tournament in the early 90s at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. Ahmed Sajjadul Alam Bobby is to his left. PHOTO: COLLECTED

do in schools or universities and there were times that Reza bhai was seen working on cricket-related papers with only the light from a candle to help him.

Reza bhai, who used to play cricket and participated in organising clubs, had also

umpired First Division matches, where the rivalry was fierce. Many of the clubs had an army of supporters and not many umpires were interested in officiating the matches. Reza bhai would don an apron and a hat to get on the field. He was always well-respected

by the clubs and not only did he maintain standards on the field, but also acted as a mediator from the cricket board's side to resolve conflicts between clubs.

Muzzafar Hossain Paltu, the first general secretary of BCB, Raisuddin and Reza himself worked tirelessly to keep cricket going when there was no money to work with following the liberation war. It was a difficult time to organise cricket, with the country in tatters following the war. But through their initiatives, they were able to start the Dhaka League in an independent Bangladesh.

Cricket is an expensive game if you think about it. You need clothing, bats, balls, stumps and also refreshments for the players. They were able to reintroduce cricket through their organisational skills and even though the country was financially stressed after the war, in 1974 the first league was completed. Then in 1977, Ted Clark's MCC (the first cricket team to tour Bangladesh) visited Bangladesh to play a series of matches and it became apparent that there was a support for cricket among the general populace as people turned out in droves. That love from people was what they capitalised on to pave the way for Bangladesh to get ICC's associate membership.

When played in our first-ever international tournament during the ICC Trophy in '79

at England and Reza bhai was the assistant manager of the side. So, he was a member, joint secretary, treasurer, vice-president and later on acted as the general secretary as well. His contribution to cricketing laws is tremendous too and, along with journalist Ataul Haque Mollik, we published MCC's 'laws of cricket' in Bangla which was distributed throughout the country.

In Kenya in 1994 we lost the ICC Trophy but prepared for the 1997 edition, knowing that matches would be played on astroturf. We brought three astroturfs with Reza bhai's foresight and Rais bhai's (former director of Bangladesh Biman) influence, the latter helping to bring them in for free from England on Biman flights. We played the league for two seasons on astroturf and it had a huge impact on us winning the 1997 ICC Trophy -- the turning point for our cricket and also how we got to where we are now -- and later playing the World Cup.

Reza bhai has left us but he has left us and Bangladesh cricket with many of his contributions. He has departed with our love but there is a lot of history of Bangladesh cricket which he has taken with him and we couldn't know them. We only learnt from our personal dealings and from watching him at work. He is the dedicated, knowledgeable, unsung hero of Bangladesh cricket.

FELLAINI FIRST CASE IN CHINESE LEAGUE

Footballer Marouane Fellaini has tested positive for the coronavirus, his club Shandong Luneng said Sunday, the former Manchester United player becoming the first known case in the Chinese Super League (CSL). The 32-year-old Belgian international midfielder has a normal temperature and is feeling fine, Shandong said, but “is under observation and having treatment at a designated medical facility”. “The club will do its best... to help in the treatment and recovery of the player,” Fellaini is the first confirmed case in the CSL, dealing a blow to the league’s hopes of starting the season as early as next month. The campaign has been indefinitely postponed by the outbreak. -- AFP



A man wearing a face mask stands in front of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic flame being displayed outside the Miyako railway station in the Iwate prefecture of Japan yesterday. The flame arrived from Greece to a scaled-down welcoming ceremony as doubts grow over whether the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will go ahead on schedule. PHOTO: AFP

IOC readying plans in case of deferral?

REUTERS, Athens

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) faced mounting opposition on Sunday to the current schedule for the Tokyo 2020 Games as athletes, teams and federations called for a delay because of the coronavirus pandemic.

IOC President Thomas Bach, who has insisted the Games will go ahead as planned, said yesterday: “The Olympic Games cannot be moved like football to next Saturday.”

He also ruled out a cancellation but sources told Reuters on Sunday that organisers were drafting alternatives to holding the Olympics this summer.

“We have been asked to make a simulation in case of a postponement,” a source close to the organising committee who is involved in drafting the scenarios said. “We are making plans - plan B, C, D - looking at different time-frames,” said the official, adding the scenarios included cost estimates for different delays.

Former Real president Sanz dies after contracting coronavirus

AGENCIES, Madrid

Former Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz, who was hospitalised with coronavirus, died on Saturday at the age of 76, his son announced.

Sanz was in charge of the Spanish giants from 1995-2000, overseeing two Champions League titles.

“My father passed away. He did not deserve this ending and in this way,” tweeted son Lorenzo Sanz jr. “One of the best, bravest and hardest-working people I have ever seen. His family and Real Madrid were his passions.”

Three days ago, Sanz Jr. said that his father had been admitted to a Madrid hospital after suffering the symptoms of the coronavirus which has killed more than 1,320 people in Spain.

With Jupp Heynckes as coach and star players such as Davor Suker, Roberto Carlos, Clarence Seedorf, Fernando Hierro and Raul, Real won the Champions League in 1998 by beating Juventus in the final under Sanz’s supervision.

It was their seventh European Cup but first in 32 years and the only goal in the final being scored by Predrag Mijatovic, who described yesterday as “one of the saddest nights” of his life.

“Leaving like this, without being able to say farewell, without being able

to say a final goodbye, is very hard, very sad,” Mijatovic said via Marca. “It’s one of the saddest nights of my life.

“The sadness at not being able to go to visit him because of the contagiousness that is always there is very cruel. I still can’t believe it. I considered him as a father. I had so much love for him. In life, there are people that leave a mark on you and Lorenzo was one of them.”

Two years later, in Paris, Real

claimed an eighth by beating Valencia in the final. However, that same year, Sanz was ousted as president by Florentino Perez, who opened a new era at the club, adding five more Champions Leagues in two decades.

Current captain Sergio Ramos said: “Very sad day for Real Madrid. Lorenzo Sanz connected yesterday and today with two numbers for history -- 7 and 8,” tweeted Ramos in reference to the key Champions League titles.



Lorenzo Sanz celebrates with Real Madrid Champions League win in 1998, which ended a 32-year drought without a European triumph. PHOTO: TWITTER

Jibon, Tapu counting days ‘in quarantine’

SPORTS REPORTER



National team striker Nabib Newaj Jibon and centre-back Tapu Barman are counting days to return to the field from ‘seemingly home quarantine’ as Bangladesh and the rest of the world goes through an unprecedented time due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Bangladesh Football Federation postponed the Bangladesh Premier League for up to March 31 following directives from the youth and sports ministry on March 16, leaving majority of the clubs suspending their training camps and releasing their local players.

League leaders Abahani were supposed to resume their training yesterday following a five-day break, but the six-time champions again deferred the resumption by, leaving Jibon frustrated.

“Yesterday [Saturday] afternoon I felt really bad as I am not being able to play or practice in the present situation created by coronavirus,” Jibon told the Daily Star over phone from his residence in Mirpur.

“We are confined inside the house in fear of coronavirus. Training was supposed to resume today [Sunday] but it will now resume on March 26. We are counting days to return

to action but I am doubtful whether training will resume anytime soon,” said the Abahani striker.

“I am trying to maintain my fitness by doing exercise at home. I have been doing core training. Besides, I also have some gym instruments at home which help me follow my training regime,” said the Bogura-lad, who is worried after an infected person passed away in his neighbourhood.

“I heard that one person died of coronavirus in Mirpur and some 600 flats have been locked down. I think the whole country should be locked down for 15 to 20 days to avoid the spread of the virus,” said Jibon.

Like Jibon, Bashundhara Kings defender Tapu is mostly confined within his home in Narayanganj even though he often ventures out for running in a bid to maintaining his fitness ahead of the resumption of the professional league.

“I’m staying at home and doing core training to keep myself fit so that I don’t gain weight during this time. I going out to run at the small ground adjacent to our house,” said Tapu, who is reportedly the highest paid among the local footballers.

“We are eager to return to the field as training of Bashundhara Kings is supposed to resume on March 25, however, we see no hope of that considering the deteriorating

situation. We have a Whatsapp chat group of Bashundhara Kings where team doctor and trainer are regularly updating all of us by sending messages of how to maintain hygiene,” said Tapu.

“Each and every family in our neighbourhood has been passing through an anxious time and no one goes outside except for emergency work. My father also goes out only once a day to buy groceries,” said Tapu, who is also keeping his team’s prospects in his mind, being concerned about their 4-3 defeat against Chattogram Abahani in their last match.

“Despite taking a 3-0 lead, we let Chattogram stage a strong comeback due to our mistakes. The players got puzzled after conceding the second goal and never fought back. Our confidence level was good for the first 60 minutes only.

“Our defence is still the best in the country but I must admit that there are problems there, which is why we conceded goals in every match. The results against Mohammedan and Chattogram Abahani are now past. As team, everyone has a responsibility to defend. If we can play as a team, I think we can get rid of this problem. Otherwise, it is not possible for the defence to defend all time,” said Tapu.

Abahani in AFC Cup’s Magic Moments

SPORTS REPORTER

While six-time Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani have made an early exit from the AFC Cup this time after being knocked out of the prequalifying phase, the Sky Blues had reached a new high for Bangladesh football by reaching the inter-zone playoff semifinals last year. In doing so they became the first club from Bangladesh to reach that further in the second-tier club competition of Asia.

Abahani’s journey was a see-saw affair as they eked out into the knockout rounds following a stoppage-time goal in their last group match against Minerva Punjab in Guwahati. That goal, and Abahani’s journey thus far, made it to AFC Cup’s Magic Moments, featured on their official website on Friday. Here’s how AFC relived that journey:

Abahani’s stoppage-time joy

Bangladeshi teams featured in the first three AFC Cups and then again between 2015 to 2018, but had never made it out of the group stage in seven attempts.

Abahani picked up four points in both 2017 and 2018, with India’s Bengaluru FC dominating the South Zone, and little was expected of the Bangladesh champions ahead of the 2019 campaign.

However, with Bengaluru failing to qualify, Abahani began the group stage – alongside Indian duo Chennaiyin FC and



Minerva Punjab, as well as Nepal’s Mahang Marshyangdi Club – as the only side with Continental experience.

Four points from their first three games left them off the pace but a come-from-behind 3-2 Matchday Four win over Chennaiyin brought them right back in it, before the Dhaka side eased past Manang 5-0 to set up a gripping climax.

It all came down to the last game against Minerva in Guwahati, with Abahani needing to equal Chennaiyin’s result to advance. But with Chennaiyin 3-2 up against Manang and Abahani scoreless as the clock ticked into stoppage time, the dream appeared to be over.

Step forward Afghan international Masih Saighani.

A deep corner from Nabib Jibon was headed back across goal by Kervens Belfort and Saighani headed in from close range to spark joyous scenes as Abahani booked their ticket to the Inter-Zone semifinals.

CORONAVIRUS FALLOUT



Maldinis and Dybala return positive tests

Argentina striker Paulo Dybala said Saturday that he has become the third Juventus player to test positive for coronavirus while former AC Milan defender Paolo Maldini revealed that he and his son have also been infected.

“Hi everyone. I just wanted to let you know that we have received the Covid-19 test results and that Oriana (Sabatini, his girlfriend) and I are positive,” the 26-year-old Dybala tweeted. “Fortunately, we are perfectly fine. Thank you for your messages.”

Italian champions Juventus said that Dybala had been self-isolating since Wednesday. “He will continue to be monitored. He is well and is asymptomatic,” said the club in a statement.

Later Saturday, AC Milan said Maldini, now the technical director, and his 18-year-old son Daniel, a youth team player, were also infected. “Paolo and Daniel are both well and have



already completed two weeks at home without contact with others,” said a statement from AC Milan. “They will now remain in quarantine until clinically recovered, as per the medical protocols outlined by the health authorities.”

Maldini, 51, is considered one of the greatest defenders of all time. He won five Champions Leagues with Milan and appeared in 647 matches. Juventus teammates Daniele Rugani and Blaise Matuidi have also tested positive for the disease which claimed almost 800 more lives on Saturday, bringing the total in Italy to 4,825.

There is not too much concern at Milan about other possible contagions currently, Paolo Maldini hasn’t been at Milanello since March 5, even before the team then played against Genoa, as he was advised by the Milanese medical staff to stay at home when the first flu symptoms arose.

Even Daniel should not have crossed paths with the first team as he has been at home for about two weeks with illness, and last crossed his team-mates on March 6. --AFP

Self-isolating Siddikur urges people to stay home

Bangladesh’s ace golfer Siddikur Rahman urged people to stay home and take precautionary measures against the coronavirus after going into self-isolation in the city yesterday.

The two-time Asian tour winner, who returned from Malaysia on March 5 after a tournament, made this appeal on Facebook yesterday afternoon.

“My family and I have been at home for the past three days and I am requesting all of you to stay home. Don’t go outside unless it is necessary,” the 35-year-old golfer.

Siddikur, who was supposed to participate in tournaments in Thailand and Malaysia this month before they were cancelled, also reminded people to wash their hands frequently with soap among other measures. --SPORTS REPORTER

FIFA, AFC delegates to livestream BFF polls

Delegates from FIFA and AFC will not physically attend the upcoming Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) polls, said general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag yesterday.

“On Friday, AFC let us know that since there is a travel ban, it won’t be possible for them to send observers to the April 20 BFF polls. FIFA also informed the same over phone,” Shohag said yesterday.

However, he informed that FIFA and AFC would stream the polls online for officials to observe and that the elections would go on as scheduled on April 20.

“A FIFA official asked me whether it was

possible to watch the BFF congress live through the internet and I ensured them we would present live coverage. We will also include AFC in this process,” said Shohag.

Although two incumbent vice-presidents have urged the game’s governing body to defer the polls due to the coronavirus outbreak, Shohag added that they have no intention to defer the polls.

“We asked FIFA whether the polls could be deferred and they said it is too early to comment. They said Maldives held its congress today [on March 20]. Bangladesh and Maldives are neighbouring countries, so why should you decide on a deferral at this moment?”

Lucy to think of resuming training next week, says Torino president

Torino President Urbano Cairo said the idea of clubs wanting to return to training is “from another planet” following speculation that Lazio and Napoli both want to resume training.

On Friday, Napoli announced that their squad will return to training next Wednesday. “If I think back to the Lega meeting on March 10, there were still those who talked about training and returning to play,” Cairo told the Turin daily. “It is logical that time has been wasted. Those speeches, heard now, seem from another planet. I said ‘if we do not take drastic action, moving fans will also contribute to increasing the infection of others.’”

“Meanwhile, there are 16 clubs who don’t want to think about resuming training next week.” --AGENCIES

BHF suspends all activities

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday suspended all of its activities by closing the headquarters at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium following instruction from the BHF president.

“As part of precaution to avoid the transmission of coronavirus, all types of BHF activities have been suspended from March 22 till 31 following an instruction from BHF president and Air Chief Marshal Masihuzzaman Serniabat,” stated a BHF press release yesterday.

The BHF statement added: “All types of training and play at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium has been postponed and all officials have been instructed to work from home. All BHF office bearers and employees have also been directed to ensure the health of themselves and their families.”

The Bangladesh Cricket Board had announced on Saturday that they had decided to allow all of their staff to work remotely after having suspended all cricket in the country earlier.





DHAKA-MYMENSINGH HWY Govt mulls turning 87km stretch into expressway

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government is planning to turn a major section of the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway into an expressway to ensure better connectivity between the capital and Mymensingh division, where 10 economic zones will be established.

The 87-kilometre expressway from Gazipur's Joydevpur to Mymensingh will be implemented under Public Private Partnership (PPP). South Korea has accepted the project for implementation under government-to-government (G-to-G) initiative, Roads and Highways Department (RHD) officials said.

Once complete, this would be the first expressway in Bangladesh with eight lanes – four main lanes, two emergency and two service lanes, they said.

It will be the first road in the country with dedicated emergency lanes, the RHD officials added.

Between 2011-2016, the government had upgraded the two-lane Dhaka-Mymensingh highway to a four-lane one spending Tk 1,800 crore.

At least 193 intersections, 28 school

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Clockwise from left, employees at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital stretcher an elderly patient to the ambulance but would not touch the man. Instead, they call his attendant, who did not have any protective equipment, to carry him into the ambulance yesterday. The man was taken to the hospital with fever and breathing difficulties and kept in isolation for 10 minutes, before he was referred to the Kurmitola General Hospital.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

17 years old raped in Habiganj Man lands in jail for rape of schoolgirl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A girl was allegedly raped in Habiganj's Nabiganj upazila on Saturday, while a man was yesterday sent to jail on charge of raping a schoolgirl.

A man allegedly raped a 17-year-old girl on Saturday afternoon.

Victim's mother filed a case against Sayeed Mia, 21, of Kurishail village, with Nabiganj Police Station at night.

The victim is under treatment at Habiganj Sadar Hospital, said Rajib Chowdhury, a duty doctor of the hospital.

The victim's neighbours told The Daily Star that Sayeed had been stalking the girl for a long time.

Quoting the case statement, Atikur Rahman, sub-inspector of Nabiganj Police Station, said the girl was alone at home in the afternoon. Sayeed entered the house and raped her at knife point.

The accused went into hiding after the incident, the police official added.

In another incident, a Habiganj court yesterday sent Jewel Mia, 26, of Kazirgaon village in Nabiganj upazila, to jail in a case lodged over raping an eighth grader.

The victim's father told this correspondent that locals rescued her

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FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES Constituent assembly order promulgated



Members of the West Germany youth delegation call on Bangabandhu on March 23, 1972.

MARCH 23, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY OF BANGLADESH ORDER, 1972

The president of the People's Republic of Bangladesh today promulgates "The Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh Order, 1972". The Order comes into force at once and shall be deemed to have come into force from March 26, 1971. The Order provides that the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh shall consist of the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh who returned to the National and Provincial Assembly seats in the elections held between December 7, 1970 and March 1, 1971.

The Order also provides for holding by-elections in the vacant

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Maoist rebels kill 17 Indian policemen

AFP, Raipur

Hundreds of Maoist rebels gunned down 17 Indian security forces in one of the deadliest ambushes in recent years by the militants, a police spokesman said.

More than 300 armed rebels took part in the attack on a police commando patrol in the jungles of Sukma district of Chhattisgarh state in central India, police superintendent Shalab Sinha told AFP.

Large numbers of reinforcements were sent to the district yesterday.

"We have recovered 17 bodies and another 15 police are being treated for injuries," he said.

"We believe the ambush was carried out by between 300 and 350 attackers."

Other officials said four Maoists were killed in the battle on Saturday.

The toll was the worst for Indian security forces

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

Diamond samples reveal size of lost continent



MAIL ONLINE

Diamond-encrusted rock samples that have been found on a Canadian island fill "a piece in the puzzle" to reconstruct an ancient part of Earth's continental crust.

A fragment of the North Atlantic Craton (NAC) was found by geologists who were sifting through diamond exploration samples from the southern Baffin Island, Canada.

The NAC is an ancient part of Earth's continental crust that reaches around the top of the northern hemisphere, from Scotland to the Canadian region of Labrador, deep underground.

Researchers believe the NAC is up to 2.7 billion years old before its continental plate broke up around 150 million years ago.

Evidence of the ancient crust – which has previously been found in Scotland, Greenland and Labrador – is much sought after.

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Emirates to suspend all passenger flights

AFP, Dubai

Dubai carrier Emirates yesterday announced it will suspend all passenger flights from March 25 amid the novel coronavirus outbreak.

"By Wednesday 25 March, although we will still operate cargo flights, which remain busy, Emirates will have temporarily suspended all its passenger operations," the airline's chairman and CEO Sheikh Ahmed bin

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PRAYER TIMING MARCH 23

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4-55 12-45 4-45 6-16 7-45
JAMAAT 5-30 1-15 5-00 6-20 8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Man killed in 'gunfight' with police

Family claims foul play
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man was killed in an alleged gunfight with police in the capital's Khilgaon area early yesterday, hours after he was arrested from Airport Road area.

The dead, Sohel Hawlader alias Juna, 30, was an accused in 17 cases, including for murder and drug trade, filed with different police stations, police claimed.

His family members, however, alleged that police killed him and cooked up the story of a shootout to cover up the murder.

Mashiure Rahman, officer-in-charge of Khilgaon Police Station, said a police team, in association with Airport Armed Police Battalion, arrested Sohel from the Airport area yesterday evening after he reached Dhaka from Cox's Bazar.

Later, based on his information, police took him to Nagdarpar area in Khilgaon around 3:00am to recover hidden firearms

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The mother of Sohel Hawlader Juna, who was killed in a "gunfight" whilst in police custody, is grief-stricken when she sees her son's body at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

What happens after virus peaks?

AFP, Paris

Like a giant tidal wave, the Covid-19 pandemic is battering the health systems of several European countries, leaving experts scrambling to know when it will reach its peak.

What will the aftermath of this "tsunami", as Italian health workers have called it, be like? A general receding and a return to normality, or regular recurrences that will overwhelm hospitals?

CALM BEFORE THE STORM?

The wave seems to have already subsided in China, where the novel coronavirus first broke out late last year: over recent days no new local cases have been recorded.

But French public health specialist and epidemiologist Antoine Flahault in the Lancet medical journal wonders if the worst is yet to come.

China could so far have "experienced a herald wave, to use terminology borrowed from those who study tsunamis, and is the big wave still to come?" he wrote.

To understand the complexity of how epidemics evolve it is necessary to go back to the post World War I period, when in three waves the Spanish Flu killed nearly 50 million people -- more than the Great War itself.

Then it disappeared.

The question of why has tormented mathematicians. In the late 1920s Scotland's William Ogilvy Kermack and Anderson Gray McKendrick developed models in a bid to understand the dynamics of epidemics.

IMMUNITY THRESHOLD

Kermack and McKendrick discovered that an epidemic does not end because it runs out of vulnerable people, but because as the number of infections increases a so-called "herd immunity" threshold is reached.

"Herd immunity is the proportion of people immunised against the virus (either through infection or vaccination when it exists) that needs to be achieved to stop any risk

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