



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

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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

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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.

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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.