

TRAWLER CAPSIZE IN MUNSHIGANJ

3 kids go missing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three children went missing after a trawler with around 60 passengers on board capsized in the Padma near Shimulia ghat in Munshiganj's Louhajang upazila last night.

Sub-Inspector Shahidul Islam, in-charge of Majhirghat river police camp of Shariatpur's Jajira, said the trawler coming from Shimulia capsized after colliding with a goods-laden trawler around 8:00pm.

"Most of the passengers managed to swim ashore, but the three children went missing. We were searching for them," he said.

Three injured passengers were rushed to Jajira Upazila Health Complex, Mahmudul Hasan, Jajira upazila health and family planning officer, told The Daily Star.

Two of them were referred to Shariatpur Sadar Hospital and another was to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, he said.

India declares

FROM PAGE 1

"The measures we took two weeks ago are starting to have an effect," civil protection service chief Angelo Borrelli told the daily La Repubblica before Tuesday's toll came out.

He said more data over the next few days will help show "if the growth curve is really flattening."

There were some positive signs of China too, where the virus first emerged in December.

Residents of Hubei province -- the initial epicentre of the disease -- who are deemed healthy will now be allowed to travel from midnight under moves to lift restrictions on about 50 million people.

The relaxation of rules will not apply to the hardest-hit city of Wuhan until April 8, but China may prove to have turned a corner.

In Geneva, WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said infections in the United States had greatly increased.

Over the previous 24 hours, 85 percent of new cases were in Europe and the United States, and of those, 40 percent were in the United States.

Six hundred people have died from the new coronavirus in the United States, while the number of confirmed cases now stands at 49,768, a tracker maintained by Johns Hopkins University showed yesterday.

Asked whether the United States could become the new epicentre, Harris said: "We are now seeing a very large acceleration in cases in the US. So it does have that potential."

Modi, in a national television address, declared the lockdown warning people to obey government order.

"From 12 midnight today (1830 GMT Tuesday), the entire country will be in lockdown, total lockdown .To save India, to save its every citizen, you, your family... every street, every neighbourhood is being put under lockdown," he said to the nation.

India has lagged behind other nations in the number of COVID-19 cases, but there has been a sharp increase in recent days to 519 infections, including 10 deaths, according to the government.

Modi warned that Indians had to observe the lockdown if they wanted to stop the spread of the deadly virus.

"This is a curfew... We will have to pay economic cost of this, but to save every family member, this is the responsibility of everyone -- the biggest priority," the prime minister added.

"If these 21 days are not managed, the country and your family will go back 21 years... I am not saying this as your prime minister, I am saying it as your fellow citizen, family member."

Govt to free Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1

Khaleda is now "at the best hospital [Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University]", he said.

The minister did not entertain further questions from reporters.

After the briefing, Anisul refused to comment when The Daily Star asked him whether Khaleda would be allowed to talk to the media or be involved in politics in the six months.

Following the law minister's briefing, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told journalists that the government decision came as a relief for them but they still had concerns.

"We are eagerly waiting for her release. It is a relief that she will get peace for at least six months. But we are concerned that if she could not go abroad, how could she have proper treatment," he told journalists at the party chief's Gulshan office.

Fakhrul said his party would come up with a statement on the issue later.

Contacted, one of Khaleda's family members said someone from the

family approached the PM personally.

"We are thankful to the almighty, and the administration for this, even though it's late," said the family member, wishing not to be named.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International South Asia said, "We welcome the Bangladeshi authorities' decision to conditionally release the opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia from jail on humanitarian grounds. As she is suffering from a life-threatening illness, she must be given unrestricted access to the healthcare she needs."

The BNP chief landed in jail on February 8, 2018, after a special court sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case.

On October 30 that year, the High Court raised her punishment to 10 years after dismissing her appeal.

The same special court jailed Khaleda and three others for seven years in the Zia Charitable Trust corruption case on October 29 that year. The HC rejected her bail petition three times and the Supreme Court once in the case.

Genocide Day today

FROM PAGE 1

1970 elections.

During the attack dubbed "Operation Searchlight", the Pakistani forces mercilessly killed Bangalee members of the then East Pakistan Rifles and police, students, teachers, and common people.

They killed people indiscriminately, set houses and properties on fire, and looted business establishments, leaving a trail of destruction.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued messages on the eve of the Genocide Day.

In his message, the president said the brutal genocide carried out by the Pakistani occupation forces on March 25 is a barbaric and tragic incident in the history of the Bangalee nation.

He recalled with deep respect

the sacrifices of the martyrs of the Liberation War.

The PM in her message said March 25 is the most dreadful day in the life of the Bangalee nation.

On this day in 1971, one of the most horrific and brutal genocide of the world history took place in Bangladesh, she added.

Hasina paid homage to the greatest Bangalee of all times, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the four national leaders, and martyred freedom fighters whose supreme sacrifice has given the nation an independent Bangladesh.

She said the observance of March 25 as Genocide Day would be regarded as nation's memorial of eternal respect and testimony to the martyrs of the Liberation War.



Traffic is thin at the capital's Mohakhali intersection as a large number of people have already left the capital ahead of the 10-day general holiday beginning tomorrow. Right, with no seat left vacant, passengers are sitting on the floor of a train at Kamalapur Railway Station. Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport wears a deserted look as most of the airlines have suspended their flights due to a sharp decline in the number of passengers. Passengers wait on the platform of Kamalapur station. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ, RASHED SHUMON, PALASH KHAN



Closer to lockdown

FROM PAGE 1

either going to their villages or taking part in different festivals, negating the purpose of the government move.

A huge number of people also thronged the ferry terminals on the Shimulia-Kathalbari route yesterday to cross the Padma river. It forced the authorities to halt carrying vehicles on the ferries. Only passengers were allowed to board them.

Against this backdrop, the decision to suspend all passenger transport services came yesterday.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT 'LOCKDOWN'
In a video message around noon, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said a decision had been made to place "public transport services on lockdown" across the country between March 26 and April 4.

No goods-laden vehicles would be allowed to carry passengers, he said.

With this decision, buses, minibuses, CNG-run auto-rickshaws and other rental vehicles cannot operate on roads, an official of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) told The Daily Star.

All ride-sharing services would also remain suspended during the period. The service-providing companies have already been notified about the matter, said Lokman Hossain Mollah, director (engineering) of the BRTA.

Acting president of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation Shajahan Khan and General Secretary Osman Ali also urged the members of the platform to follow the government decision.

At an emergency press briefing yesterday, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan said Bangladesh Railway suspended operations of its 364 passenger trains until further notice. He said the move was aimed at containing the spread of coronavirus.

Freight trains, however, would be operated on a "limited scale," he said at the briefing at the capital's Rail Bhaban. Railways ministry's Senior Secretary Mofazzel Hossain and Bangladesh Railway Director General Md Shamsuzzaman, among others, were present.

At first, the BR suspended operations of 257 local, mail and commuter trains from yesterday morning and had planned to suspend operations of other intercity train services gradually, the minister said.

"But a new decision came from the Prime Minister's Office to suspend all passenger train services today," he added.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) also suspended launch services until further notice from yesterday afternoon.

Talking to this newspaper, Rafiqul Islam, director (Traffic) of the BIWTA, however, said operations of cargo vessels would continue as usual.

Operations of the 300 cargo vessels on India-Bangladesh route also remained suspended from Monday, he said.

Around 11:00am yesterday, BIWTA staffers announced through loud-speakers that no launch would be operated and asked passengers to leave the terminal at Sadarghat.

At one point, all launches, anchored at the terminal, were taken to the other side of the river, one of our correspondents reported from Sadarghat.

The government has also suspended flights on all seven domestic routes from 12:01am today until further notice, said Senior Secretary of Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry Md Mohibul Haque.

It means air communications from

Dhaka to Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Saidpur, Jashore, Barishal, Rajshahi and Sylhet would remain snapped.

Mohibul, however, said the government was yet to decide on closing down the three international airports in the country. A few international flights from the UK, China, Hong Kong and Bangkok were still operating.

ALL COURTS TO SHUT
The Supreme Court authorities yesterday declared that all courts, including the Appellate and High Court divisions of the SC, would remain closed from March 29 to April 2. It said the move was aimed at containing the spread of Covid-19.

A notification, signed by SC Registrar General Md Ali Akbar, said the decision was made in line with the public administration ministry's gazette notification on March 24 announcing that all public and private offices would remain closed from March 26 to April 4.

Both the Appellate and High Court divisions were scheduled to reopen on March 29 after the ongoing vacation.

3 BANDARBAN UPAZILAS ON LOCKDOWN

Three upazilas of Bandarban -- Lama, Alikadam and Naikhongchhari -- were placed on lockdown from 8:00pm yesterday until further notice, said Shamim Hossain, additional deputy commissioner (general) in the district.

"We made the announcement after one coronavirus patient was found in Cox's Bazar, which is close to Bandarban," he said.

"No one will be allowed to enter Bandarban while people are barred from leaving home except for buying food or other daily essentials during the lockdown," he added.

(Our Bandarban correspondent contributed to this report)

Cops clueless about most of returnees

FROM PAGE 1

"We are trying to get their [the rest of the returnees'] locations but they are not found in the permanent addresses mentioned in their passports," said the official, requesting anonymity.

With an aim to address the alarming situation, PHQ has asked all expatriate Bangladeshis, who arrived in the country from March 1 onwards, to notify local police stations of their current locations and mobile numbers.

On behalf of the expats, their relatives can also provide the information to the police stations, said PHQ in a statement issued yesterday.

Failure to do so will result in legal action under the Communicable Diseases Prevention, Control and Eradication Act, read the statement.

Asked, Md Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general of PHQ, told The Daily Star yesterday that police have closed all public meetings in different areas of the country to prevent the spread of the coronavirus infection.

"We are circulating leaflets and also conducting different awareness programmes," he said.

Police are going door-to-door to know whether expatriate Bangladeshis are in home quarantine, but the expats who returned home within the aforementioned period are not staying at their addresses mentioned in the passports, said the AIG.

"Many of them are moving around, violating the government guideline and putting other citizens at risk."

"We have now advised the returnees to communicate with local police stations or else legal action would be taken against them. Steps can even be taken to suspend their passports," Sohel added.

According to sources, these returnees have been roaming around their localities, going to markets and even holding marriage ceremonies, instead of being in the 14-day quarantine.

Kh Mahid Uddin, deputy inspector general (DIG) of Khulna range police, told this newspaper that they are trying their best to keep the returnees in their homes to stop the spread of virus but are failing to do so as they are not getting any trace of the visiting

returnees.

Even the locals have failed to provide any helpful information as some of the returnees left their homes in their permanent addresses some five to 10 years back, said the DIG.

"We have so far managed to the trace locations of 6,252 people from February 1 till date," he added.

The police database shows that in the last 21 days, the highest number of people returned to Dhaka division, which is around 98,916 out of 2.98 lakh. The second highest number of people entered Chattogram division, which is 77,963.

Contacted, Habibur Rahman, DIG of Dhaka range police, told The Daily Star that they have so far able to locate around 6,649 returnees' locations.

In Chattogram city, authorities were able to trace locations of only 973 returnees, police officials said.

Asked, Khandaker Golam Faruk, DIG of Chattogram range police, said they are jointly working with the administration and the army to locate the returnees and ensure their home-quarantine.

Home rush ups fear of spread

FROM PAGE 1

continues to advise the travellers who are sick to delay or avoid journey to affected areas. It has also asked all travellers to wash hands frequently, cover mouth and nose with tissue papers while coughing and sneezing, and stay one metre away from sick persons.

But such advisories are hardly followed in this country.

Experts said the reason for such an exodus was that the government, before deciding on the closure, didn't send out any clear-cut message to people about staying indoors and social distancing.

There was a gap in the government's message; it advised people to stay indoors but didn't shut down public transport services, they said.

Prof Nazrul Islam, virologist and former vice chancellor at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, termed the decision "self-destructive".

"The objective with which the government closed offices was not successful. The virus could spread across the country, as so many people left for homes crammed in buses, trains and launches," he told The Daily Star.

The government made a mistake by closing offices without proper planning just like it had done earlier this month by allowing Italy returnees to go on home quarantine.

"We are seeing a rise in positive cases as the returnees from Italy were allowed to go home," he said, adding that the situation would have been different if the returnees were kept in institutional quarantine.

"The government thought it would announce a decision and things would start working automatically. But it's not that simple," Prof Nazrul said.

Pointing out a lack of coordination on the part of the government, he said the 31-member national advisory committee on Covid-19 doesn't have

adequate number of specialists and healthcare professionals.

"It is not clear who is doing what." Prof Mushtuq Hossain, consultant at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said, "Now the virus may spread everywhere."

He, however, said if people do not comply with health advisories, it is difficult to ensure social distancing.

The authorities could not sense that such a situation would arise after the holiday announcement, added Mushtuq.

Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, a passenger welfare platform, termed the government decision "suicidal".

"The decision to announce holidays, right after closing schools and colleges, without suspending public transport is suicidal and shows a lack of farsightedness," Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, secretary general of the platform, said in a press release.

German state to take in Italian virus patients

AFP, Berlin

Hospitals in the German state of Saxony will take on at least six Italian coronavirus patients who are unable to receive treatment in their own country, state premier Michael Kretschmer said Monday.

"The Italian government asked us a few days ago whether we could help by taking care of patients who are not being taken care of in Italy," Kretschmer said.

Following consultation with doctors over hospital capacity in the eastern German state, Saxony has agreed to welcome six Italian patients to hospitals in the cities of Dresden and Leipzig, he added.

"In Italy they are now making an ethically very difficult decision... choosing six people to be put in the aeroplane," said the state premier.

Kretschmer said that the treatment of Italian patients would be a chance for doctors in Saxony to learn about the novel coronavirus, and also a sign of solidarity.

"This is a very important sign that we are also able to help others," he said.

German news agency DPA, meanwhile, reported without citing sources that a total of eight patients would be transported to Germany.

Italy has been the country worst hit by the novel coronavirus pandemic, with a world-topping death toll of over 6,000.

With its health service has been stretched to breaking point, other countries such as Russia and the Czech Republic have also offered aid.

Germany has registered over 22,000 cases according to the latest figures from the Robert Koch Institute for public health.

Saxony is one of the lesser affected of the country's 16 states, with only 658 cases so far.

Nigeria tells city-dwellers to 'stay home'

AFP, LAGOS

Nigeria on Monday urged people in its largest city Lagos and capital Abuja to stay home, as the country shut its land borders to halt the spread of coronavirus.

"All Abuja and Lagos residents are strongly advised to stay at home, avoid mass congregation of any kind as well as non-essential outings, until further advice is given," the presidency wrote on Twitter.

Africa's most populous nation is scrambling to stop rising infections after it reported 36 confirmed cases and its first death from COVID-19.

The authorities further closed off the country from the outside world by snapping shut its land borders to all "human traffic" for the next four weeks.

Elderly man dies

FROM PAGE 1

"In the past 24 hours, the IEDCR has tested 92 samples while the total number of samples tested stands at 712. So far, 39 patients have been diagnosed with coronavirus infection. So, in the past 24 hours, six more people have been diagnosed with the disease," Meerjady said at the briefing.

Among the six new infected people, one has died taking the death toll to four, she added.

She also said that the dead was aged above 70 and undergoing treatment at a hospital for a long time.

The IEDCR director said among the other five infected people, one is an imported case from Saudi Arabia and the rest have been infected locally through coming in contact with previously diagnosed COVID-19 patients.

According to government data, a total 27,180 people are now in home quarantine while 40 people are in isolation and 46 in institutional quarantine.