



With demand for hand sanitisers and disposable gloves soaring across the city, the products have descended from the shelves of pharmacies and supershops onto the footpaths. The seller says he is selling plastic gloves for Tk 20 per pair, as drug stores usually sell them in boxes and many cannot afford to buy a whole box, especially since their prices have risen. The photo was taken from Mirpur Road near Dhanmondi yesterday.

City corporations can't find overseas returnees!

Home ministry takes two weeks to issue directives; over 33,000 returned in March, only 3,732 listed

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

With the tally of coronavirus patients in the country growing every day and majority of confirmed cases being in Dhaka, the two city corporations appear to be all at sea regarding overseas returnees that are living in the capital.

With six new cases yesterday, 39 people so far have been confirmed infected with the virus, four of whom have died. The Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) on Monday said of the 33 infected cases till that day, 15 were from Dhaka.

However, it took two weeks for the home ministry since the first case was detected in the country, to instruct the two city corporations to find the overseas returnees in the capital.

The ministry sent letters on March 21 to Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) to take action to quarantine about 3,732 people (1,240 in DSCC and 2,492 in DNCC) who came to Dhaka from abroad since March 1, sources confirmed.

However, the home ministry documents show that over 33,000 people flew back to Dhaka between March 1 and March 21.

The chief health officer of DNCC said

they could find only 31 persons on their list, while the CEO of DSCC said they just begun looking for the returnees through its ward committees yesterday.

Contacted, councillor of DSCC ward-42 (Wari) Sarwar Hasan Alo said four people in his ward came from India two days ago. "I have asked them not to leave their homes. I even made announcements through the loudspeaker of mosques to make people aware of it, but they paid no heed," he said.

"Even today they went to the mosque," said the ward councillor. Besides the four, a total of 10 persons came from abroad in the ward, but they did not follow quarantine properly, DSCC sources said.

Asked about it, Sarwar said, "Those 10 persons have already completed their 14-day quarantine period."

Shahab Uddin, a resident of the area and a banker by profession, said, "What's the point of all this now? The returnees have already mingled in the community for long enough!"

DSCC Chief Executive Officer Shah Md Imdadul Haque said they have formed committees and engaged councillors of all 75 wards to find the returnees.

"They will go to the returnees' residences

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Edu institutions' closure extended till April 9

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday extended closure of all educational institutions and coaching centres till April 9, as a preventive measure against further spread of novel coronavirus.

On March 16, the government decided to keep all educational institutions and coaching centres closed till March 31.

"Educational institutions of all levels -- from pre-primary to higher studies -- will remain closed till April 9. All coaching centres will also remain shut," Education Minister Dipu Moni said in a statement, after holding a meeting with Deputy Education Minister Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury and top officials of the ministry.

"During the closure, students will stay home and abide by health directives issued by the IEDCR," she added.

She also said recorded lecture will be televised for students. Lectures for sixth and tenth graders will be aired starting March 28.

The education ministry oversees 41,906 schools, colleges, madrasas, and universities, which have 1.94 crore students and 5.59 lakh teachers, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS).

Meanwhile, Directorate of Primary

Education (DPE) Director General Md Fasiullah said they have also extended closure of all primary schools, madrasas and kindergartens till April 9. He urged guardians to make sure children stay home.

According to BANBEIS, DPE oversees over 1 lakh primary schools, madrasas, and kindergartens, which have over 1.74 crore students and 4.26 lakh teachers.

The government took the decision after another coronavirus patient died in the country and six more new cases were confirmed. With this, the number of deaths from Covid-19 stands at four and infected at 39 in the country. The first case was confirmed on March 8.

On March 22, the government postponed HSC and its equivalent examinations scheduled for April 1 for indefinite period.

Education Ministry Senior Information Officer Abul Khair said the next date for the exams will be announced on the first week of April.

Over a million students are expected to sit for HSC and equivalent exams, supposed to be held at over 9,000 educational institutions under 10 education boards -- eight general, one madrasa and a technical education board.

TACKLING CORONAVIRUS

Army starts patrolling

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Army yesterday started to spread out troops in major cities to ensure social distancing and implementation of precautionary measures to curb coronavirus transmission.

"The personnel have been moved out to divisional and district headquarters and they are set to launch full scale anti-Covid 19 campaigns from today, finalising their operations with divisional and deputy commissioners," a defence ministry spokesman told the news agency.

The ministry's Inter Service Public Relations Directorate (ISPR) official said armed forces commanders were discussing with administrative chiefs of the divisions and districts to detail out the work plan.

"On completion of the coordination process, the army will launch their works in full scale from today," ISPR, meanwhile, said in a statement.

It added: "The army personnel will prepare lists of coronavirus-infected persons, extend cooperation and cooperate with the local administration to ensure quarantining of people who returned from abroad."

According to the statement, if required, the army would provide medical assistance at divisional and district level as well.

ISPR officials said personnel from all the three armed services of army, navy and air force will be on duty to take precautionary measures against the spread of Covid-19.

The naval forces will be on duty in coastlines to extend their assistance to the local administrations while air force will mobilise their resources in reaching necessary medical equipment and emergency transportations.

A helping hand during times of crisis

Uthshargo making 10,000 bottles of hand sanitiser



Uthshargo Foundation is distributing hand sanitiser in several districts to those who cannot afford it. The foundation has already produced 5,000 bottles with only 11 volunteers and are on their way to make 5,000 more.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

MATHEWS CHIRAN

As Covid-19 has everyone worried across the country, people are compelled to take precautionary measures, such as frequently washing hands and using hand sanitisers to ward off the highly contagious disease.

Due to the high demand, supply of hand sanitiser has thinned. And even if it were readily available, people with low incomes cannot afford it anyway. Keeping that in mind, a couple of organisations are doing their best to provide sanitiser to those who cannot afford it.

Uthshargo Foundation Bangladesh, a non-profit volunteer organisation, is producing 10,000 bottles of hand sanitiser for those in need.

"We've produced 5,000 bottles so far. We distributed some among rickshaw-pullers and labourers in different parts of the country, including Khulna, Pabna and Dinajpur," said SK Shareyaz Panna, a volunteer of the organisation.

"We've also sent some to different hospitals for doctors," added Panna, also a medical student.

They are churning out bottles with only 11 volunteers, who are medical and

pharmacy students.

"We are making 50ml bottles. Following World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, we're producing them in a lab at Mirpur. The main ingredients include isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, distilled water and glycerol," said Gunjon Haque, a masters' student of pharmacy at Jagannath University.

So far, they have distributed hand sanitisers in 14 districts through their volunteers. They also distributed at different institutions, including Bangladesh Nursing and Midwifery Council and Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC).

BMDC Deputy Registrar Dr Liyakot Hosen, who received the sanitisers, said, "The foundation has recently given us three-dozen samples of their sanitiser, which is a commendable initiative."

According to Panna, while distributing sanitisers, they do not inform locals beforehand, as it might create a chaotic situation. Two to three volunteers visit a designated place where people from lower-income groups live.

The organisation started its operations

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

'Wolfpack leader' of Ansar Al Islam arrested by CTTC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of police yesterday claimed to have arrested the leader of the "wolfpack" of militant outfit Ansar Al Islam, that plotted to kill filmmaker Khijir Hayat Khan.

The arrestee was identified as Nazmul Hasan alias Osman Gani. A team of CTTC unit arrested Nazmul in front of a hotel in the capital's Paltan on Monday night, Saiful Islam, deputy commissioner of CTTC unit, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Nazmul was later placed in front of a Dhaka court yesterday with a 10-day remand, and court granted two days' remand after hearing.

Nazmul created a group on messaging app Telegram in 2018 for the wolfpack members, and communicated with each other to plan the murder, as they believed the film "Mr Bangladesh" -- written jointly by Khijir Hayat Khan and Hasnat Piash, and starring Khijir -- goes against their ideology and "jihad" in Islam, according to CTTC officials.

The film, directed by Abu Akhter Ul Iman, hit movie

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

12,500 sets of PPE to be distributed across country

STAR REPORT

To tackle the novel coronavirus, medical personnel must use personal protective equipment (PPE), but due to the global pandemic, the equipment is scarce in the country.

Considering the situation, fisheries and livestock ministry started distributing 12,566 sets of PPE to healthcare professionals from Monday.

All district and upazila departments of Department of Livestock Services (DLS) under all divisions started the distribution across the country, says a press release.

There has been a huge global demand for testing kits and PPE in the wake of the raging Covid-19 pandemic. As for PPE, local companies are struggling to manufacture enough due to, what they say, a shortage of raw materials, which are mostly imported from China.

Fisheries and Livestock Minister SM Rezaul Karim directed authorities to

distribute PPE immediately because of the crisis.

District administrations, civil surgeons, upazila administrations and health complexes of the eight divisions distributed PPE on Monday. District and upazila livestock departments also distributed the equipment yesterday.

The equipment was stocked in different district and upazila livestock departments.

"Initiatives of government and private institutions, and individuals are essential to control the outbreak," said the minister.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government has taken different initiatives to keep people safe. To protect health workers, this particular initiative was taken, he said.

SYLHET GETS 1,105 SETS OF PPE

DLS yesterday provided healthcare providers, including doctors, 1,105 sets of PPE from their stock in Sylhet division.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Buses lie idle at Mohakhali Bus Terminal. With a restriction on movement imposed to prevent the spread of coronavirus, less people are using public transport in the capital. In addition, public transport services will remain suspended from tomorrow to April 4 across the country, said Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

PRODUCING CORONAVIRUS DETECTION KIT

MJF to donate a day's salary to Gonoshasthaya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), a non-government and non-profit organisation, will donate one day's salary of its employees to Gonoshasthaya Kendra, in an effort to help the healthcare centre produce coronavirus-detection kits.

"We will donate salary worth around Tk 5 lakh to Gonoshasthaya Kendra soon," said MJF Coordinator Shahana Huda Ranjana yesterday. She told The Daily Star that the decision was taken to initially tackle the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

Earlier, founder and trustee of Gonoshasthaya Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury told this newspaper that they could make 10,000 testing kits in a month -- first 10,000 within a week. They also have a plan to produce five lakh or more kits in a month which requires Tk 20 crore on an emergency basis.

In light of that, MJF took the decision to donate the money to the healthcare centre.

The MJF official said her organisation would also distribute necessary items including hand sanitisers in more than 215 upazilas under the supervision of its 141 co-organisations.

A team of Gonoshasthaya-RNA Biotech Limited, a sister concern of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, claimed to have developed an affordable kit that can detect novel coronavirus infection in 15 minutes. They got the government approval to import raw materials which are scheduled to arrive from the UK today.

COVID-19 PREVENTION

Brac, Unilever join hands to reach vulnerable groups

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brac and Unilever Bangladesh are collaboratively going to distribute 5 lakh sachets of handwash to vulnerable people across the country within a week to help prevent the transmission of novel coronavirus.

In a press statement yesterday, the world's top-ranked NGO and the Bangladesh office of the transnational consumer goods company also said they would work to build community awareness in rural parts of the country during that time.

"We are working together to increase public awareness about maintaining personal hygiene, social distancing and respiratory etiquette, essential to limit transmission of the virus" said Brac Executive Director Asif Saleh in the statement.

He said that they are working closely

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4