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Tk 5,000cr for workers' pay

PM announces for export-oriented industries; narrates govt measures to fight coronavirus in address to nation

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday announced a stimulus package of Tk 5,000 crore for the export-oriented industries to fight the adverse impact of coronavirus on the country's economy.

She said the money would be used for providing the salaries and wages of workers and employees.

Hasina was addressing the nation in the evening on the occasion of the Independence and National Day 2020.

State-owned Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television simultaneously broadcast her address. Private television channels and radio stations also aired the over 23-minute speech.

The PM said Bangladesh Bank has already taken some pro-business steps. The central bank would not declare any customer loan defaulter till June, she added.

She said the timeframe for realising export earnings has been increased to six months from two months. Likewise,



Don't panic, stay at home

Follow home quarantine rules

Abide by health instructions

the timeframe for meeting import expenses has been increased to six months from four months.

The PM said the limit of mobile banking has been increased, the payment deadline for power, water and gas bills have been extended to June without any fine or surcharge and the payment of NGOs' loan instalments has been suspended.

"The whole world is now going through uncertainty, but our government is ready to face any kind of tough situation. We are the government of the people and we are always with the people. I am keeping my eyes on the situation."

Terming the fight against coronavirus a war, the premier urged the people to stay at home.

"We won in 1971 against our enemy by standing shoulder to shoulder. Fighting coronavirus is also a war. In this war, your responsibility is to stay at home. Inshallah, we will win the war with everyone's efforts,"

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BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia leaving Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) in a car around 4:15pm yesterday. On Tuesday, the government announced its decision to suspend Khaleda's sentence for six months on humanitarian grounds.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Khaleda Zia freed, gets back home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia was released from prison yesterday after 776 days.

The government through an executive order released her for six months on conditions that she will stay at her home in the capital and not leave the country.

The 74-year-old former prime minister is out jail at a time of global crisis over the Covid-19 pandemic.

Wearing her signature pink saree, surgical mask, and white gloves, Khaleda came out of the hospital cabin in a wheelchair around 4:15pm.

Hundreds of BNP leaders and activists who had been waiting there since the morning chanted slogans although the hospital authorities, law enforcers and party leaders repeatedly asked them not to form crowds.

She went to her home Firoza in Gulshan in her brother's car. There were four other vehicles used by her bodyguards and family members.

Many BNP leaders and activists wearing masks and

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Prices of essentials shoot up

City residents crowd kitchen markets prior to 10-day shutdown

ASIFUR RAHMAN and RASHIDUL HASAN

The prices of essentials, including rice, vegetables, cooking oil, spices, and cleaning items, have increased several folds over the last one week.

Even lemons, which were sold for Tk 10 a week ago, are now being sold at Tk 20-25 per piece.

As the country is in near-lockdown and a 10-day holiday for all government and most private organisations beginning from today, people thronged different kitchen markets fearing short supply.

A day after declaring the 10-day holiday, the government on Tuesday decided to suspend all public transport services to slow the spread of the

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COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION

It may be happening on a 'limited scale'

Says IEDCR, another dies from coronavirus raising death toll to 5; no new cases detected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For the first time, the IEDCR yesterday said novel coronavirus might have spread at the community level but "on a limited scale".

Besides, it reported one more death from Covid-19. So far, five people who tested positive for the virus have died in the country.

"The sources of coronavirus transmission [in two of the five cases] could not be known yet. For this reason, we think community transmission might have taken place," said Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

Briefing journalists through videoconferencing from her office, she said the IEDCR was working to know whether there was any community transmission. "Before confirming it, we need an analysis of information in detail."

Before yesterday, the IEDCR had maintained that there had been no cases of community transmission in the country, meaning all the coronavirus patients were either the ones who travelled from countries badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic or their family members who came in contact with them.

Prof Flora said the area where they suspect community transmission might have taken place has been isolated as part of efforts to contain the spread of the virus.

"So far, however, there is no such situation that this [coronavirus] has spread at community level across Bangladesh," she said.

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WHOLE OF HUMANITY AT RISK: UN -- PAGE 8

Noab urges all to read newspapers

Says newspapers don't spread coronavirus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab) yesterday urged people to keep reading newspapers, citing research findings that newspapers do not spread coronavirus.

In a statement, Noab referred to claims made on social media that the virus could spread through newspapers and said such ideas have no basis.

Rather, people should read the newspapers to know about the ongoing research, new health rules and methods that must be followed, it added.

The following is the full text of the statement:

The spread of coronavirus all over the world has made all people fearful and anxious.

This panic no doubt has

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RELATED STORY ON PAGE 2

Zero incidents of virus transmission from newspapers

Says Int'l News Media Association

EARL J WILKINSON

There has never been a documented incident where Covid-19 has been transmitted from a print newspaper, print magazine, print letter, or print package, according to the world's top doctors and scientists.

The International News Media Association (INMA) received inquiries about this. INMA has cited World Health Organization (WHO) guidance on the matter. Yet the unprecedented global pandemic naturally breeds a paranoia about everything we touch, so let me present to you what INMA knows on this subject.

This article distills research and guidance from four sources -- World Health Organization, The Journal of Hospital Infection, National Institute of allergy and Infection Diseases and John Innes Centre -- that debunk concerns.

WHAT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH SHOWS

"The likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low and the risk of catching the virus that causes Covid-19 from a package that has been moved, travelled, and exposed to different conditions and temperate is also low," says WHO.

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says "it may be possible" for a person to get COVID-19 by touching a surface that has the virus on it, "but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads."

Both statements sound like a hedging of the unknown — fair enough in these times. Yet the fact remains there have been no incidents of transmission on print materials.

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INDEPENDENCE DAY

Love in the days of war

SUSHANTA GHOSH

"Why can't I become a freedom fighter? I, too, took training. If we die, we will die together," Rama Das had said to her fiancé in 1971.

Rama is one of the few women who did not bid farewell to her beloved and wait for his victorious return from the war, as depicted in most movies and literature.

Rather, she herself joined the war for her motherland and was reunited with her betrothed, Parthasarathi Das, coincidentally. Forty-nine years later, the 74-year-old freedom fighter reflected on those tumultuous days of the war.

"We got engaged a couple of months before the war started. Our wedding date was set for the month of Boishakh," she remembered.

In March 1971, Rama was a Master's student at Dhaka University's Bangla department.

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A man washes his hands at a sink in the capital's Karwan Bazar yesterday while another man waits his turn. Dhaka Wasa set up the sink and placed soaps there in its efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus. Inset, a magistrate, using a megaphone, asking traders not to sell daily essentials at higher prices at a kitchen market in Motijheel.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS/ SK ENAMUL HAQ

49th Independence Day

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