

Not much protection for police

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they still have to live there like that.
“What can we do? We can't afford a room for each,” said the cop.

When this correspondent visited the camp on Wednesday around 11:00am, most of the policemen were out on duty. Their used uniforms and mosquito nets were seen hanging from the sticks meant for hanging the nets.

There has been no visible initiative to clean the room and spray disinfectants.

It is not like the authorities had made sure the policemen would not get infected whilst on duty either.

The cops are often on duty for more than 12 hours with no personal protective equipment (PPE).

“We managed masks and alcohol-based hand rubs on our own,” said a policeman.

The picture was similar at other police barracks, like Rajarbagh Police Lines and Mill Barrack of Dhaka. Between 30 and 40 policemen were living in a single room there.

At Rajarbagh, handheld infrared thermometers were being used for checking body temperature of policemen entering the dorms, officials said on Wednesday.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has about 34,000 members, according to the officials.

Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner of the DMP, told The Daily Star that they instructed officials to maintain hygiene, wash hands, and keep their rooms clean.

They have also asked the cops not to allow any guests, family members, and outsiders in the barracks, he added.

Cops at police stations are not much better off.

“We have received only four special suits today [Wednesday]. We do not know what will happen to other officials and in the coming days,” an

officer-in-charge of DMP's Lalbagh division told The Daily Star.

“Our officials have made arrangements for washing hands, wearing face masks, and gloves on their own and we have asked them to use the standard issue raincoats while on duty,” the OC added.

Alongside their regular duties, officials at police stations have been tasked with getting information about people who returned from abroad recently and ensure that the returnees quarantine themselves at home.

Kh Mahid Uddin, deputy inspector general (DIG) of Khulna range, told this newspaper yesterday, “We have received a good number of masks, sanitisers, gloves and special suits from the PHQ today [Thursday].”

It would help a good number of policemen but they were trying to arrange some more from “local sources”, he said.

“Besides, we have asked all field officials to use raincoats while on duty and visiting homes of returnees from abroad and hospitals,” added the DIG.

Most field-level police officials were seen wearing masks on duty.

“We did not get the sanitisers and gloves as it is out of market. We come in close contact with a huge number of people daily. I do not know what is in our fate but I have to continue my job,” said a traffic policeman, requesting anonymity.

However, Habibur Rahman, DIG of Dhaka range police, said they, making arrangements themselves, supplied all necessary materials for hand washing, and masks, sanitisers, and gloves to officers.

“But we are providing the special protection suits only to those officials working to find people who returned from abroad and ensure their quarantine,” DIG Habib told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

Regarding the failure to provide PPE to policemen, a top official at the PHQ told The Daily Star on Tuesday, “We were not able to provide PPE to the officials as we did not get any support from the government.”

Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general of the PHQ, told The Daily Star that they had taken steps to collect PPE on their own. “We would distribute the special protection suits to different police units gradually,” he said.

Meanwhile, a number of returnees from abroad started communicating with police after the PHQ issued a circular asking them report to their local police stations.

Police officials are now requesting them to communicate over phone or send relatives as police officials do not have enough PPE.

“We are discouraging the returnees to come to the police station. Rather they can call us over phone,” said a policeman at Adabor Police Station.

A banner was hung in front of the police station advising visitors to wash their hands before going in. They were allowing one visitor at a time.

From 8:00am to 2:00pm on Wednesday, the police station was visited by 25 returnees from countries like Italy, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and mostly from India.

“We didn't get any PPE. But our policemen are wearing masks and gloves they managed on their own,” Abdul Latif, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station, told The Daily Star.

On Wednesday, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Mohammad Javed Patwary during a video conference with DIGs, metropolitan commissioners and district police officials asked lists be made of people who had returned home from abroad recently and home quarantining them. The IGP asked cops to use PPE, hand sanitisers and gloves.

One killed

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Contacted, Abdul Latif, director of Rupali Bangla Jute Mills, said he promised to pay a week's arrear but the workers did not listen and started throwing brick chips.

Sheikh Md Nasim Habib, officer-in-charge of Biral Police Station, said they had to fire rubber bullets, tear shells and charge baton to take the situation under control.

Anwar Hossain, superintendent of Dinajpur police, said they managed to take the situation under control around 1:30am Thursday.

Suraj suffered injuries during the clash and later died. His body was handed over to his family members after conducting an autopsy at M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital.

Meanwhile, Abdul Kader, sub-inspector of Biral Police Station, filed a case accusing 1,100 unnamed people in connection with the incident.

A leisurely day

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solid due to vomiting,” the relative said.

Khaleda woke up at 12:00pm and ate some rice porridge. A doctor then went to her house and checked her insulin level and blood pressure.

Khaleda's elder son Tarique Rahman's wife Zobaida Rahman is supervising the treatment from London.

“Zobaida is coordinating the whole medical treatment and Khaleda's stay inside the house,” she said, adding that a nurse and a physiotherapist are giving her personal treatment.

When Khaleda came out of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, it was seen that her left hand was wrapped with a yellow scarf.

“Due to arthritis, her left hand is now bent,” Khaleda's relative said.

She also said Tarique Rahman and other family members are keeping in constant touch with her over skype and phone.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said doctors have already gave some guidelines and are hopeful of her recovery.

“We have strictly requested party leaders and activists not to gather in front of her house to meet her,” he said.

After spending 776 days in jail, Khaleda was released from jail on condition on Wednesday.

The BNP chief had been staying in the house since 2011, after she was ousted from her long-time home in Dhaka cantonment following a High Court verdict.

BNP's standing committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said Khaleda Zia's health condition is the first priority right now.

“Her physical condition is bad. She needs complete isolation. The way she was treated in jail was inhuman,” he said.

Consider

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4, said a press statement of the BGMEA.

The decision was taken at a board meeting of the BGMEA -- chaired by its President Rubana Huq -- in Dhaka, the statement said.

If authorities of RMG factories want to continue operations, then they will have to follow the highest safety measures to protect their workers, according to a decision of the board.

During her March 25 address, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced a Tk 5,000 crore package for export-oriented industries to face the economic fallout from the coronavirus outbreak.



Firefighters spray disinfectant over a residential area from a sky lift crane during a government-imposed lockdown as a preventive measure against coronavirus, in Chennai, India yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Police excesses

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Asif Iqbal, deputy managing director at Meghna Group of Industries, one of the leading importers and processors of commodities, said it may be that the local administrations were not properly aware of commerce ministry's instructions on facilitating movement of essential commodities and efforts of companies to cut scope of food shortage in the country. As a result, the unintended developments are taking place. If properly communicated, the number of such incidents will come down and things will be stable gradually, he said.

Kamruzzaman Kamal, director, marketing of PRAN-RFL Group, said sales representatives and delivery men across the country were harassed by law enforcement agencies. They were trying to sale and deliver essential food products and grocery items, he said.

If it continues, it will create food crisis in the market during the holidays, he warned.

Legal experts and rights activists condemned such actions and termed it “unlawful and harassment of public”.

Some footage of the police action went viral over the last two days. One of the incidents happened in Tangail's Bhuapur on Wednesday.

“Hey, where is your mask?” a policemen were seen asking whoever were on the road and roadside shops in Bhuapur.

Without waiting for any reply, police started beating up owners of groceries and mobile-banking service providing shops, bikers, rickshaw-pullers, auto-rickshaw drivers and people on streets. Even they forced them to squat.

But there is a guideline of the World Health Organisation (WHO) on wearing masks. It suggests that everyone need not wear masks.

“Wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing. If you are healthy, you only need to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person with suspected 2019-nCoV infection,” says the guideline.

The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) has also asked people to follow the WHO guideline.

Rashidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bhuapur Police Station, told this newspaper that they initiated “some awareness programmes in the locality”.

Asked whether beating up people for not wearing masks is lawful, he said they had been trying to free the streets from gatherings for the last several days. But people were not paying any heed to them, he said.

“So, we had to be tough. As part of our action, we tried to make people ashamed on streets. After this, the roads became empty...” the OC said.

In another incident, physician Suprove Ahmed was allegedly assaulted by policemen when he was returning home from his work at Pangsha Upazila Health Complex in Rajbari on Wednesday.

“I was coming back from my duty around 2:00pm on a van when the Pangsha OC intercepted my vehicle. Even though I said I am a doctor, the OC hurled abuse at me and also beat me up with sticks,” said the medical officer in a Facebook post.

“At one stage, I said I am a government doctor and returning home after discharging emergency duties. The OC replied what matters that you are a doctor...?” the medical officer said, adding that he informed the upazila health and family planning officer, the upazila nirbahi officer and

the civil surgeon of the matter.

A colleague of the doctor, wishing not to be named, said they protested the incident, but the local administration and top local leaders were putting pressure on them to “solve the matter mutually”.

Officer-in-Charge of Pangsha Police Station Ahsan Ullah said they were “conducting awareness programmes” in the locality to fight coronavirus.

“The doctor was travelling on a van. He was aggressive and didn't give his professional identity first,” the OC said, denying the allegation of beating up the doctor.

The doctor took primary treatment from the upazila health complex. The Daily Star also got some pictures of mild injury marks on the doctor's legs.

Contacted, Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua termed the police action unconstitutional, unlawful, and unjustified.

“As there is no section 144 or emergency imposed, such actions by police were completely unlawful. It has no legal basis. The government requested the people to be self-quarantine; it's not an order,” he clarified.

The lawyer added that anyone could condemn this illegal action by police and seek for legal help.

“People who are going outside for daily needs, or even a doctor who is returning from duty are being beaten up... Police or magistrate can't give inhumane or degrading punishment. It's unconstitutional,” he said, adding that the victims have the right to file a criminal case against the police personnel concerned.

“We saw such video footage of our neighbouring country. Our police also followed the same. We are not sure if the sticks used by the police are carrying the coronavirus,” the lawyer said.

Asked about the police action, Shafiqul Islam, Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner, yesterday said people were already in danger now, so police personnel were not supposed to do any wrong with them.

“We instructed all police personnel to perform their duties with professionalism and handle any situation calmly. If any of them is found involved in any wrongdoings, punitive action will be taken against them,” said the DMP boss.

Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general of Police Headquarters, told The Daily Star yesterday that police were working hard across the country to ensure the safety of people from the coronavirus, risking their lives.

“Police are politely appealing to people to follow the government directives, and the PHQ directed all units to deal people with modesty, professionalism, and tolerance,” he said.

He also appealed to all to be respectful to police.

“Most often police don't get proper cooperation while working on the ground. And not all the allegations against police are true too,” said Rana, adding that if any policeman was found to be unprofessional in performing their duties, “we must take action”.

On Wednesday, Inspector General of Police Mohammad Javed Patwary in a video conference from the PHQ instructed all district police superintendents, metropolitan commissioners, and range police deputy inspector generals to create awareness among people.

He also asked them to ensure social distancing and restrict people's movement.

2 policemen suspended

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He was not an accused in the murder case, grieving family members and locals said.

His wife Jharana Begum and son Shakib Hossain alleged that police demanded Tk 3 lakh in return for releasing him.

As they could not arrange the money on such short notice, Officer-in-charge Abul Bashar and Manoranjan Mistry tortured Shanu to death, they added.

Shakib said he offered Tk 10,000 to the OC on Tuesday, but the officer refused to take the money and asked for the full amount.

“They tortured my father because we couldn't pay the money... When I wanted to see him, the OC told me to bring the money first,” he said.

OC Abul Bashar told The Daily Star that the allegations were false. The suspended officers refused to make comments.

On Wednesday, Shakib and his mother Jharana went to the police station to meet Shanu but they were refused by the police officials.

Jahanara's brother Rakibul Islam said, “I heard him scream in agony while I was waiting at the police station to meet him. But they did not let me see him.”

Shanu was found hanging from the ceiling fan in Inspector Manoranjan's room the next morning, according to OC Bashar.

He added that Shanu was taken to the bathroom by a constable around 6.30am. But he sneaked out of the

bathroom moments later and hung himself.

Police then informed the family about his death, but didn't let anyone enter the police station until about half an hour later, locals and family members said.

At one point, a scuffle broke out with the law enforcers, locals said.

Maruf Hossain, superintendent of police in Barguna, visited Amtali Police Station hours later and suspended Manoranjan and Arifur.

He also formed a three-member committee headed by Additional SP Tofail Ahmed to look into the incident. The committee was asked to submit its report in three days.

“There will be legal action against anyone found guilty in the investigation,” SP Maruf said.

Shanu's wife Jharana broke down in tears in front of the police station and told reporters, “I want proper justice.”

Shanu's body was sent to Barguna's General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Shankar Prasad Adhikari, upazila health and family planning officer, said there were signs of torture on the body. “However, the exact cause of death will be known after the autopsy,” he added.

The incident caused a stir among locals, with community leaders demanding justice for Shanu.

“He could not have died by suicide inside the police station,” Gulishali Union Parishad Chairman Mohammad Nurul Islam said,

adding that police were trying to make the death look like it was suicide.

Upazila Vice-chairman Mojibur Rahman and Amtali Upazila Municipality Mayor Matiur Rahman told reporters that the police officers' roles were suspicious and they demanded justice.

Because they too

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InshahaAllah, nothing would happen.”

Rafiq, who lives in the capital's Lalbagh area, said, “Whenever I walk out, I always take dry food in my bag for stray animals.”

“All the dogs in Lalbagh even know me,” he said with a smile on his face.

“Yesterday [Wednesday] my mother made me swear not to do this. However, my wife is very helpful. She arranges the food for the animals,” he added.

Meanwhile, Rafiq distributed 200 packets of biscuits at Mohsin Hall, Surja Sen Hall, Bijoy Ekattor Hall, Modhur Canteen and TSC premises.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Ridoy, who posted the Facebook status, said that a team led by him would look after these animals and he would soon join Rafiq to continue helping the animals on the campus. “I am not in Dhaka at the moment as I am distributing hand sanitizers in my village.”

‘We believe in peaceful co-existence’

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basis of respect of people's sovereignty and equality of status, and on the basis of non-interference in our national affairs.

BHUTTO THREATENS TO HOLD BANGALEES HOSTAGE

Pakistan President ZA Bhutto has threatened to hold Bangalees in his country hostage for the return of the 93,000 Pakistani prisoners of war. In an interview with Kuldip Nayar, resident editor of the Delhi Statesman, Bhutto says, “I have let the nightingale out of the cage. Now I can only equate prisoners of war

with Bangalees. I hope it will not have to be done. But I have nothing in my hands.”

BANKING SYSTEM REORGANISED
Bangladesh Bank today announces details of the reorganisation of all old commercial banks in Bangladesh falling within the nationalisation scheme of the government, and says that the assets and liabilities of these banks have been taken by the six newly established government-owned banks.

TELECOM ACCORD WITH INDIA SIGNED
A telecommunication agreement

between Bangladesh and India is signed today. Under this agreement, an ordinary telegram from Bangladesh to India containing seven words or less will cost Tk 1.33. An extra 19 paisa will be charged for each additional word.

DISTRIBUTION OF SURPLUS LAND SOON

Agriculture Minister Sheikh Abdul Aziz discloses today that distribution of surplus land from owners having more than 100 bighas among the small and landless peasants will begin soon. The highest ceiling fixed by the government for a family is 100 bighas

of land.

417 DIE OF POX

Small pox has broken out in epidemic form in different parts of Faridpur and Barisal districts. The civil surgeon of Faridpur informs that he can confirm 193 deaths in Gopalganj and 32 deaths in Madaripur subdivisions so far. Health officials from Barisal confirm 192 deaths of small pox in the district.

SOURCES: March 28, 1972 issues of Ittefaq, The Bangladesh Observer, Azad, Morning News, Dainik Bangla and Purbodesh.

At a loss in Lebanon

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while prices of essentials have gone up significantly, according to international media.

Lebanon has also been going through a political crisis. Large-scale demonstrations demanding an end to corruption and the ouster of sectarian leaders, who have ruled the country since its civil war ended in 1990, brought down the government of Saad Hariri on October 29 last year.

Combine of all the crises left the migrants, including some 1.6 lakh Bangladeshis -- of whom around 30,000 are undocumented -- on the margins. More than half the Bangladeshis are women who work as domestic workers.

Abdul Aziz said he had gone to Lebanon in 2014 to work as a sewing operator for a sofa manufacturing company, spending Tk 5.5 lakh. For the next two years, he had to pay Tk 3 lakh to his employer for getting his work permit renewed.

The next year, he paid Tk 1 lakh

more to his company for work permit renewal, but in vain. Since then he has been undocumented.

“I did not have regular job then, but still I managed some work and survived. However, for the last eight months I have no job at all. I am now borrowing money from my relatives in Bangladesh,” he said, adding that so far he took one lakh taka from home.

In five years, Aziz said, he could basically recoup the money that he had spent to migrate there. “This means five years are almost lost from my life. I could gain almost nothing,” he said.

Rana Ahmed, another Bangladeshi in Lebanon, shared similar views. He also said he had been waiting for going to Bangladesh for the last several months, but is yet to get clearance.

“I could work a few days only a month. Now with coronavirus, I am confined in a room. I had some money, but it's almost over. I am not sure what comes next,” he said.

Many of the Bangladeshi migrants in Lebanon he knows are borrowing either from relatives in Bangladesh or friends in Lebanon, he said.

“We are totally stuck here. Even the locals are trying to avoid all the migrants due to coronavirus that began since January,” Rana said.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh embassy is now not registering the undocumented workers for return home due to the virus outbreak, while all flights for Bangladesh have been suspended.

Abdullah Al Mamun, first secretary at the embassy in Lebanon, admitted that the situation was actually bad and that many of the Bangladeshi migrants were borrowing from home for their survival.

More than 7,600 undocumented Bangladeshi migrants had applied for travel permit to return home since October last year. However, so far the General Security Division of Lebanon has cleared nearly 4,500. Of them, 1,400 have already returned home, he

said.

Last week, 200 migrants were scheduled to return to Bangladesh, but failed to fly because the flights were cancelled, he added.

“We had approached the International Organization for Migration if they could help repatriation of the migrants to Bangladesh, but they said they could not do it because Lebanon was not a member of IOM,” Abdullah Al Mamun told The Daily Star on Monday.

The embassy is trying to ensure that undocumented Bangladeshis could return home as soon as possible.

“We are continuously communicating with the Lebanon's General Security Division that issues clearance certificates for those who want to return home after verification if they have any crime record.

“Now, the problem for migrant return is the suspension of flights due to coronavirus. We will have to wait for the Coronavirus crisis to be over,” Mamun said.

Last survivor

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he told Newcastle University.

Matilda was captured by slave traders in West Africa when she was just two years old, and was transported to the US with her mother Gracie, her three elder sisters and the man who would go on to be her stepfather.

She was sold to a wealthy plantation owner named Memorabel Walker Creagh and split up from her two elder sisters who were sold on to different owners.

The abolition of slavery in 1865 brought her emancipation, but her fight against injustice was far from over.

“Matilda's story is particularly remarkable because she resisted what was expected of a black woman in the US South in the years after emancipation,” said Dr Durkin.

“She didn't get married. Instead, she had a decades-long common-law marriage with a white German-born man, with whom she had 14 children.

“Even though she left West Africa when she was a toddler, she appears

throughout her life to have worn her hair in a traditional Yoruba style, a style presumably taught to her by her mother. She also changed her surname from Creagh -- her former enslaver's spelling -- to McCrear.”

Crear explained how Matilda having changed her name had meant much of her life had remained a mystery to him.

“My wife was researching our family history and we could only get so far,” he explained. “The name Creagh would come up but as ours is spelled Crear, we didn't make that connection. We didn't know it had been changed.”

Later in her life, Matilda travelled to the County Courthouse in Selma to make a claim for compensation for her time spent in slavery. Sadly her claim was dismissed.

“The story of Matilda and her family highlights the horrors of slavery, the abuses of the US South's sharecropping system, the injustices of segregation and the suffering of black farmers during the Great Depression, Dr Durkin said.