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Your Right to Know

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HELPING THE POOR

Govt needs to do more, faster

Say experts as authorities prepare list of those in dire need of food aid, other support amid coronavirus fallout

WASIM BIN HABIB, REJAU KARIM BYRON and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Anwara Begum was seeking alms sitting in front of her shanty at the capital's Bhashantek slum with the summer sun dipping towards the horizon yesterday.

The widow in her mid-60s received only Tk 150 from the slum dwellers in the previous two days, but yesterday turned out to be even more difficult for her. She got just Tk 20 the entire day.

"People are stuck at home and shops are closed. Who will give [me] money? I cannot even go outside the slum now," said a frustrated Anwara, whose day labourer husband died years ago.

For decades, Anwara has been depending on her daily income to survive. Asked whether she had any money left at home, she said she could not save anything after buying food and paying a monthly rent of Tk 1,200 for her 50 square feet room, where she now lives alone after marrying off her three daughters.

"If I don't earn much, I don't know how will I survive," she told The Daily Star.

Like Anwara, thousands of other marginalised people are left in a tight spot amid a 10-day government shutdown from Thursday. They cannot go out of their home and earn their living.

The government is enforcing the shutdown as part of its efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus, which so far has claimed five lives in the country.

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A volunteer pours hand sanitizer into the palm of a rickshaw puller to help him guard against novel coronavirus in the capital's Sadarghat area yesterday. Shuddho Path, a voluntary organisation, also gave out masks to the people from low-income families and sprayed disinfectant on rickshaws and motorcycles.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Two doctors among four new cases

70-yr-old man with virus-like symptoms dies in Jashore

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four more people have tested positive for novel coronavirus in the country, taking the number of confirmed cases to 48, said the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) yesterday.

Of the four, two are physicians, said IEDCR Director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora at her regular press briefing on Covid-19.

They are aged between 20 and 60. All of them, except one, were infected after coming in contact with Covid-19 patients, she added.

Briefing journalists through video conferencing from the capital's Mohakhali, the IEDCR director urged people to follow the instructions of the government, IEDCR,

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A plea from the valley of death

PORIMOL PALMA

Ignatius Rozario, a Bangladeshi living in Milan, is acutely depressed. The 45-year-old man who always likes to dress up and look sharp now has a black-and-grey beard after staying home for two weeks amid Italy's countrywide lockdown.

"Dead bodies and coffins are occupying the hospitals. Doctors are struggling to cope with the situation. Is there anything more tragic than losing both parents and not being able to see them for the last time?" Ignatius told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Lombardy in Milan is the place where the virus has struck the hardest. We are seeing the highest number of infections and deaths. This is something beyond my worst nightmare."

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COMMENTARY

Story of a 'circular' and its withdrawal

Is monitoring private TV channels a way to fight coronavirus?

MAHFUZ ANAM

We condemn the official who issued it, commend the one who withdrew it and ask the question why it is necessary?

When the whole world is in panic and our country is deeply concerned about the pandemic and when every part of the government machinery is being (hopefully) geared to face the challenge at hand, is this how the information ministry proposed to fight the coronavirus?

On Thursday evening, the ministry issued a circular, thankfully withdrawn a few hours later, announcing the formation of a cell to monitor whether private TV channels were broadcasting misinformation or rumours regarding coronavirus. If found guilty of doing so, the "cell" would immediately stop the airing of such programmes through the intervention of the ministry. Fifteen high officials -- four additional secretaries and 11 deputy secretaries -- of the ministry were assigned, each to monitor two TV channels.

The first question that comes to my mind is how will these 15 functionaries do the monitoring? How will they identify which news is "misinformation" and which one is a "rumour" and do so on a real time basis? What will be the criteria of their decisions? Is there a common definition of what constitutes "misinformation" and "rumour"? How will they handle "breaking stories"?

What these officials have been tasked with is virtually impossible to perform. We are afraid this will lead to

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Factories can run but must ensure safety of workers

Govt to owners

REFAJET ULLAH MIRDHA

The government yesterday said the factories making protective equipment against coronavirus or working on previous orders can remain open.

However, the factories will have to ensure adequate safety measures for the workers, Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) said in a statement.

The statement comes a day after Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association asked its members to consider shutting down the factories.

The DIFE statement said different information regarding factory closure were being spread by different media outlets.

The factory owners are confused as to what they should do, it said.

The factories that have

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Biman folds its wings

Suspend flights on all international routes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday decided that it will suspend flights on its two remaining routes to London and Manchester from March 30 till April 7, marking a temporary halt to all its flights, both international and domestic.

Biman Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Mokabbir Hossain disclosed the decision.

Biman will operate its next flights to London and Manchester on March 29 and fly back to Dhaka on March 30, he said.

After that, the suspension will be effective, he said, adding that they may extend the suspension, depending on the situation over the coronavirus outbreak.

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STAY HOME, STAY WELL

Build stronger emotional ties

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

People need to have strong mental connection with each other at this time of social distancing, said a noted psychiatrist while talking about fighting coronavirus.

Mekhala Sarkar, associate professor of the psychiatry

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A health worker in hazmat suit stands with an ambulance driver and a child at the entrance to corona isolation unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday. The driver and the child run the risk of being exposed to coronavirus as they are only wearing face masks.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Foreigners flying back home amid virus scare

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A large number of foreigners are leaving Bangladesh as the government has put the country on a 10-day shutdown since Thursday to prevent contagious spread of coronavirus.


Some foreign governments are also sending charter flights to fly their citizens from the country.

The diplomats of different countries met Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Wednesday and informed him that some of their non-essential staffers wanted to return home, said a foreign ministry official.


Khalilur Rahman, additional foreign secretary, said the foreign ministry authorities told the diplomats that there was no issue at all if the foreigners wanted to return.

"We said they could use charter flights of Biman Bangladesh Airlines or other airlines. In case of other flights, the carriers will have to fly to Bangladesh empty," he said.

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গণবিজ্ঞপ্তি




মুজিব বর্ষে স্বাস্থ্য খাত এগিয়ে যাবে অনেক ধাপ

- বিদেশ থেকে আগত, তাদের সংস্পর্শে বা ইতোমধ্যে করোনাভাইরাসে আক্রান্ত ব্যক্তির সংস্পর্শে আসা সকল ব্যক্তিকে ১৪ দিন পর্যন্ত স্থানীয় প্রশাসন ও স্বাস্থ্য কর্তৃপক্ষের নজরদারিতে কোয়ারেন্টিনে যেতে হবে। এ ব্যাপারে সর্বসাধারণের সহযোগিতা প্রয়োজন।
- সকলের চলাচল সীমিত করতে হবে। গণপরিবহন ও সব রকম জনসমাগম এড়িয়ে চলতে হবে। জরুরী প্রয়োজন ছাড়া ঘরের বাইরে বের হবেন না। ঘরের বাইরে গেলে পরস্পর ৩ ফুট দূরত্ব বজায় রাখতে হবে এবং মাস্ক পরিধান করতে হবে।
- বাজারে মাস্কের সংকট থাকলে তিন স্তর বিশিষ্ট কাপড় ব্যবহার করে মাস্ক বানানো যেতে পারে। কাপড়ের মাস্ক সাবান পানি দিয়ে ভাল করে ধুয়ে শুকিয়ে নিতে হবে।
- ঘন ঘন বাজারে বা দোকানে না গিয়ে এক সপ্তাহের বাজার করে রাখা যেতে পারে। নিত্য প্রয়োজনীয় পণ্য মজুদ করা থেকে বিরত থাকুন।
- দর্শনার্থীরা হাসপাতালে প্রবেশ করবেন না। জরুরী সমস্যা নেই এবং যাদের অস্বাভাবিক কয়েক সপ্তাহ বা মাস পরে করলেও চলবে, তাদের এখন হাসপাতালে ভর্তি হওয়া উচিত হবে না।
- জ্বর, সর্দি, হাঁচি-কাশি, গলাব্যথা বা গা ম্যাজম্যাজ ভাব হলে এবং শ্বাসকষ্ট না থাকলে বাড়িতে থাকুন। জ্বর কমানোর জন্য প্যারাসিটামল ও সর্দি-কাশির জন্য এন্টিহিস্টামিন (যেমন ফেন্সোফেনাডিন, ক্লোরফেনিরামিন ইত্যাদি) খেতে পারেন। গলা ব্যথায় কুসুম গরম পানি পান করুন। গরম পানি দিয়ে গড়গড়া করতে পারেন। বাড়িতে অতিথিদের আসা বন্ধ করুন। ঘন ঘন সাবান পানি দিয়ে কমপক্ষে ২০ সেকেন্ড হাত ধুতে হবে। হাত দিয়ে নাক, চোখ, মুখ ছোবেন না।
- ঘরে বসে চিকিৎসকের পরামর্শ নিতে কল করুন **১৬২৬৩ (স্বাস্থ্য বাতায়ন) বা ৩৩৩ নাম্বারে**। প্রয়োজনে সন্দেহভাজন করোনাভাইরাসে আক্রান্ত ব্যক্তির বাড়িতে গিয়ে নমুনা সংগ্রহ করা হবে।
- উপরোক্ত উপসর্গ থাকলে এবং বয়স ৬০ এর বেশি হলে বা অন্যান্য অসুস্থতা যেমন হাঁপানি, ডায়াবেটিস, উচ্চ রক্তচাপ, হৃদরোগ অথবা গর্ভাবস্থা থাকলে বা শ্বাসকষ্ট ও অন্যান্য জটিলতা দেখা দিলে দ্রুত চিকিৎসকের পরামর্শ নিন।



স্বাস্থ্য অধিদপ্তর

স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়



স্বাস্থ্য বাতায়ন ১৬২৬৩

জাতকালের সেবা, ২৪ ঘণ্টা

Factories can run

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international work orders and the factories producing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), masks, handwash, gloves, sanitisers and drugs related to coronavirus can remain open, said the statement signed by DIFE Inspector General Shubnath Roy.

The factories must strictly follow the health department instructions, it said.

The management must measure workers' temperatures with thermal scanners. If a worker has symptoms of Covid-19, they must be quarantined immediately and the management must ensure treatment of the worker, it added.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday announced a Tk 50,000-crore stimulus package for the export-oriented sectors of Bangladesh. She also called for protecting the workers' health.

The BGMEA in another statement yesterday echoed the DIFE regarding which factories could remain open.

"If they decide to keep it open, they will have to ensure maximum safety and hygiene for their workers and will have to take responsibility for their workers," BGMEA President Rubana Huq said.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association yesterday asked its members to keep their factories shut until April 4.

BKMEA President AKM Salim Osman in a statement asked the workers to stay where they are during the closure.

Law enforcers have been patrolling the streets across the country to ensure that people stay home and social distance is maintained, he said.

Besides, one worker infected with the coronavirus can spread the disease among many, he added.

Two doctors

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health ministry, and local administrations to contain the spread of the virus.

Earlier, IEDCR had a control room for addressing the queries of the people, but it has now control rooms in every district and upazila to help the people and make them aware, she said.

On top of that, a combined control room was launched, under the supervision of Directorate General of Health Services where different organisations are working to mitigate the crisis.

Reiterating that testing services are being extended, the IEDCR director said despite limitations, they were trying their best to fight the disease.

Besides IEDCR, three more organisations, including Institute of Public Health, Dhaka Shishu Hospital, and Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases of Chattogram, are now carrying out tests.

Ensuring personal protective equipment for all people concerned is a huge challenge, Prof Flora said several national, international organisations, NGOs, and local businesses were helping them to arrange PPEs for all.

Eleven people out of 48, who tested positive, were released from hospitals and five died from the virus so far.

Now 32 people are undergoing treatment at different hospitals, the IEDCR director added.

On March 8, the IEDCR confirmed the first case of coronavirus infection in the country. After a six-day gap, two more Covid-19 cases were confirmed.

Since then, the number of Covid-19 patients has been increasing. In the last 24 hours, 3,374 people was sent to quarantine. Over 50,000 people have so far been kept in quarantine, Prof Flora added.

Meanwhile, a 70-year-old man died yesterday after suffering from fever

in Kagojpukur village in Jashore's Benapole, reports our Benapole correspondent.

Family members said he came back from India a week ago.

Police hoisted a red flag at the house, suspecting that the man had coronavirus infections.

Shubhankar Kumar Roy, medical officer at Sharsha Upazila Health Complex, said they were not sure whether the elderly man died of Covid-19.

In Noakhali, a 24-year-old man breathed his last on Thursday night at Chowmuhani after vomiting blood and suffering from fever, reports our correspondent there.

Following the death, police imposed restrictions on entering and coming out of the building the victim was residing in.

Police also imposed similar restrictions on two adjacent buildings, said Harun-ur-Rashid, officer-in-charge of Begumganj Police Station.

Police said the victim was an office assistant at a local dental clinic.

He returned home from Dhaka with fever three days ago. Later, he took primary treatment, police added.

Asim Kumar Das, Begumganj upazila health and family planning officer, said the man had no coronavirus symptoms.

He said they collected samples and sent those to IEDCR for test.

In another development, fearing coronavirus infections, a 16-year-old boy was admitted to Chandpur General Hospital yesterday with cold, cough, and breathing problems, our district correspondent adds.

He was kept in isolation, said Sujauddaula Rubel, the hospital's resident medical officer (RMO).

Another RMO Asibul Hasib and two ward boys, who provided treatment to the patient, were sent to home quarantine, he said.

A plea from the valley of death

FROM PAGE 1

According to reports, the death toll from coronavirus in Italy is over 8,000 and there are over 80,000 confirmed cases. One Bangladeshi died of Covid-19 in Milan and 10 other Bangladeshis tested positive in the European country.

The Bangladeshi man was buried in the presence of four other men from his country. They, however, could not see the body as it was wrapped.

Seeing the developed country's health system get overwhelmed has shocked the world.

Ignatius said when Covid-19 was first detected in Italy, the government imposed restrictions on movement and asked shops to shut down. However, the instruction was not taken seriously. And many people violated it.

The number of infections for the first two weeks was not alarming, but then it went up dramatically and the hospitals were unable to treat everyone in need, he said.

Ignatius, a native of Natore, went to Italy over a decade ago. He has become a restaurant executive and

is now a permanent resident of the country. His wife and two children also live there.

"The cases of infection and deaths in Bangladesh at present are nothing compared to those in Italy. However, Bangladesh is a heavily-populated country with a health system not even comparable to that of Italy."

A lockdown is yet to be fully enforced in Bangladesh and people are still roaming about, he said.

"The way people thronged bus and launch terminals to go home from Dhaka is scary. If there are even a few infected people in those stations, the virus will spread like wildfire."

He is already shocked at the deaths in Italy and will not be able to bear it if something like this happens in his homeland.

"I appeal to everyone in Bangladesh, please stay home, don't go outside unless it is really essential. And, when you go out, please take all safety measures."

"I am saying this because you are yet to see the tragedy unfold in Bangladesh. Please take it very seriously."

Foreigners flying back

FROM PAGE 1

He also said, "We will take the best possible care of the foreigners who live in Bangladesh. However, people generally want to stay close to their families at their homes during such pandemics."

No ambassador of the foreign missions in Bangladesh is returning to their homeland, Khalilur affirmed.

An official of the Malaysian High Commission in Dhaka said, "Some 240 Malaysians left Bangladesh on March 24. Over 200 more are going on March 28 [today]."

Malaysian authorities are chartering their flights for the Malaysian citizens, mostly students studying in medical colleges in Bangladesh.

"Colleges have remained shut. Besides, businesses are closed. So, they thought it was better for them to spend time with their families. They will return as the situation normalises," the official of the Malaysian High Commission told The Daily Star.

Some Sri Lankan and Bhutanese citizens also left for their homes this week.

Some employees of European Union countries, the US and UK have also flown to their homelands, while some are planning to fly, according to the officials of the foreign missions concerned.

"In a case of emergency, State Department gives options for its officials to return. This is not evacuation in anyway. Some officials

are opting to go back, but most others are not," said a diplomatic source without being able to give any figure of those leaving Bangladesh.

British High Commission in Dhaka has advised UK citizens to leave Bangladesh using Biman Bangladesh Airlines flights that are still operating on the Dhaka-London and Dhaka-Manchester routes. Flights of these routes will be suspended from March 30.

Meanwhile, the UK government has asked all its citizens abroad to return, said an official at the high commission.

The coronavirus pandemic has infected 532,696 people globally. At least 24,075 people have died.

Italy has been the worst hit by the COVID-19 after China. In Bangladesh, 48 were infected and five of them died until yesterday.

Bangladesh has declared a general holiday for most public and private offices from March 26 to April 4, shut down the educational institutions and suspended all the flights of Biman, except for Manchester and London routes.

Public buses, railways and domestic flights were also suspended to check movement of people and thus halt the spread of the deadly virus.

According to the home ministry, about 2.5 lakh foreigners from 44 countries are employed in more than 20 trades in Bangladesh.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

An army truck sprays disinfectant on a road near the Zero Point in the capital's Gulistan area yesterday. The army has been assisting the civil administration in fighting novel coronavirus since Wednesday.

Story of a 'circular' and its withdrawal

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increased bureaucratic interference in the work of private TV channels, hampering their regular work.

Why did such monitoring of private TV channels become a necessity and the information ministry had to take it up in such a hurry? Have our private TV channels shown irresponsibility by broadcasting unfounded news? Can the information ministry cite an example of irresponsible reportage that triggered the need for this monitoring?

So why this decision to "monitor"? It is nothing but a reflection of a mindset that fundamentally mistrusts the media and refuses to see and acknowledge the positive outcome of the role it plays. Take the present coronavirus crisis for example. All our TV channels are broadcasting awareness programmes and other related stories literally round the clock. So are the print and digital media. We humbly claim that in all social crisis like floods, cyclones, dengue, etc. media have always played a highly praiseworthy and responsible role.

The ministry must know that we, as journalists, receive hundreds of so-called "news". Do we rush to broadcast or publish them? Of course not. Each of us does our due diligence - investigate and confirm from reliable sources - before we even consider using them. Once the decision is made, with appropriate vetting, to use a story, it is written by professional reporters and edited by another set of well-trained sub-editors. Only after this process is complete is a story broadcast and published.

The formation of such a monitoring committee misses the fundamental point that TV channels - like every professional media house - when they broadcast a programme, they take full responsibility as to its authenticity. In fact, there are established laws that hold the media liable for publishing

news that is not authentic. I applaud the overall performance of our private TV channels who, in all challenging circumstances, have acted responsibly and professionally. Making such "monitoring cells" and empowering it to interfere in the day to day functioning of private TV channels is fundamentally antithetical to the principles of a free media.

If has mostly been a few Facebook posts that have caused havoc in Bangladesh by raising communal situations like in Ramu (2012), Pabna (2013), Nasir Nagar in Brahmanbaria (2016), Rangpur (2017) and Bhola (2019). These are the type of things that the government should monitor, and to the best of our knowledge, it does. Even here, there are reasonable grounds to believe that these incidents did not occur accidentally but were contrived and orchestrated by vested groups. How many of them have been punished till date?

I repeat that mainstream media in Bangladesh are mostly run by trained professionals and that they seldom broadcast or published anything that necessitates the setting up of a "monitoring cell". We in the media have never shied away from admitting that inevitable errors do occur in our work as we need to publish under strict deadline. But there are established channels of correcting them as and when mistakes occur.

Instead of forming "monitoring cells", the information ministry will be far better advised to work out "cooperation efforts". The information minister should sit with the media - print, broadcast, digital - and work how best we can all work together to serve the country most effectively at this moment of unprecedented challenge. We are doing it already on our own. We would be happy to come forward to assist the

government in any way we can.

From our own work ethics and to maintain our own credibility with our viewers and readers we, in the media, are far more concerned and alert about any misinformation or rumours being broadcast or published as "news". There is no need for any monitoring. In fact, such a move will be counterproductive as it will put the media and the government on opposite sides when in fact we need to work together.

Post script.

A few days ago, an assistant professor and a lecturer belonging to two government colleges in two different districts were temporarily suspended pending departmental inquiry. Their crime? They have allegedly made "undesirable" and "provocative" (translation from Bangla ours) Facebook posts. Without prejudicing the departmental inquiry, we would like to ask to what extent people in government employ surrender their fundamental right of freedom of expression? From our reading of the two posts nothing was said against the government. One was a rhetorical outburst against the general state of corruption and other an expression of concern for the healthcare personnel who were not receiving personal safety gears on time. In neither case was the government criticised. And yet the two have been temporarily suspended. We have two points to make: 1) is it good for the government to suppress personal views in such a manner? Do government service rules disempower educated professionals - they are both teachers and not bureaucrats - from expressing concern about the country that we all profess to love; 2) couldn't a demand for explanation suffice, instead of temporary suspension?

Why is there such propensity to "punish" and "harm" instead of to engage?

Govt needs to do more, faster

FROM PAGE 1

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 20.5 percent of the country's population of 16.6 crore are poor. Of them, more than half fall under the extreme poverty line.

Recently, the government has announced some initiatives taking the plight of these people in consideration, including measures to reach food to them, and to encourage them stay indoors.

The Department of Disaster Management (DDM), under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, has a stock of about 24,717 metric tonnes of rice. It also has an allocation of Tk 7.58 crore under its Humanitarian Assistance Programme to deal with the crisis.

On March 24, the department allocated 6,500 metric tonnes of rice and Tk 5.5 crore to the deputy commissioners of the 64 districts so that the DCs can help those in need.

The DCs along with the Upazila Nirbahi Officers and local government representatives are now preparing lists of those in need of support in their respective districts, said sources at the DDM.

Economists, however, said the government must start distributing relief materials immediately among the marginalised ones.

"The government needs to prepare a map with details of the beneficiaries and the places they live," noted economist Hossain Zillur Rahman, also the executive chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Another important thing is that the government must ensure that the initiatives do not get stuck in bureaucratic tangles.

Therefore, it has to be done immediately with coordination among DCs, city governments, NGOs and volunteer organisations, he added.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said since a large number of people have already moved to the villages from urban areas, their names might not be on the lists being prepared by the local administration.

"These people will have to be included in the list immediately so that they too get the relief materials," he said.

One major challenge would

be to identify those who lost their homesteads to floods or river erosions and shifted to the cities and other urban areas, he noted.

That section of people could not go back to their homes, said Prof Mustafizur, adding that the city corporations with help from other organisations should identify them and create a database so that they don't remain left out.

Volunteer organisations can play a big role here, he added.

Senior Secretary Shah Kamal at the disaster management and relief ministry said they would sit in a meeting next week to find out what else could be done.

He said the DCs were asked to send demand lists. "Once they send those, we will make arrangements," he said.

DCs AT HEART OF RELIEF EFFORTS "The DCs are the centre of the government relief efforts. They will work in coordination with the local government bodies to distribute relief materials among the poor," Shah Kamal told The Daily Star.

According to estimates of the local administrations, there are nearly 9.5 lakh day labourers in the country, he said.

He also said the DCs were preparing packets of relief materials - each containing 10kg rice, 5kg potato, one kg lentil, one kg salt, one litre soybean oil, and a piece of soap - for the distribution.

The relief materials will be sent to the homes of the beneficiaries as part of government efforts to ensure social distancing, which is vital to slow the spread of coronavirus.

Shah Kamal said they have already allocated 2,000 tonnes of rice and Tk 55 lakh for the poor people living in Dhaka and Chattogram cities. Of the amount, Tk 30 lakh has been allocated for those in the capital.

Of the allocated rice, 1,200 tonnes are for those in Dhaka while the rest for Chattogram, he said.

The secretary also said they were giving topmost priority to the villages as a huge number of people have already left for their village homes.

In Dhaka, the DC office and the city corporations will soon start working to distribute relief items among slum dwellers and day labourers.

Dhaka DC Abu Saleh Mohammed Ferdous Khan said they had already

received a support of Tk 20 lakh and 200 tonnes of rice from the DDM.

"We are still preparing the list of the needy people. Those who are in dire needs will be given priority," he told The Daily Star.

This newspaper reached the DCs in several other districts for comments. Sathkhira DC SM Mostafa Kamal said, "We're making a list of rickshaws and van pullers, auto-rickshaw drivers, cobblers, porters and day labourers."

"Our primary target is to give relief materials to 200 people in the municipality area and 100 marginalised people in each upazila," he said. Sathkhira has six upazilas and a municipality.

He said they were likely to begin the distribution today.

The district administration of Gaibandha also received Tk 20 lakh and 200 tonnes of rice. DC Abdul Matin said he instructed the UNOs to prepared lists of the marginalised people.

"We'll send the relief packets to people's home directly to avoid any sort of crowd," he added.

As part of the efforts to help the poor, the government is planning to lower the price of per kg rice to Tk 10 from current Tk 30 at the open market sale (OMS), said several sources.

Asked, Mosammad Nazmanara Khanum, secretary at the food ministry, however, said they were yet to get any instruction in this regard.

Sarwar Mahmud, director general of the Directorate General of Food, said they had an adequate stock of rice - around 18 lakh tonnes.

"If the government says, we have our manpower ready to distribute rice among the people," he said.

Only 17.84 percent of the poor people living in towns and cities receive support from the government's social safety schemes, whereas 35.77 percent of the poor people in rural areas get the benefits, according to a World Bank report released last year.

In the meantime, people in need want the government to distribute the relief without any further delay.

"I earned only a few bucks yesterday. There is hardly any passenger on the street," said Md Firoz, a rickshaw puller in the capital.

"What will I eat if things don't change soon?" he asked.

[Our Staff Correspondent Shaheen Mollah contributed to this report]

Man killed in 'gunfight' between two gangs

Claim police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man was killed in what police said was a gunfight between two gangs in Sathkhira Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The dead was identified as Wahed Ali Gazi, said Sharif Enamul, sub-inspector of Sathkhira Sadar Police Station.

He said based on information that heavy fire was being exchanged between two rival gangs, a team of police went to Chelardangi village around 2:00am.

They found the body of Wahed lying on the ground as other criminals fled away.

Later, the body was sent to Sathkhira Sadar Hospital for an autopsy, the SI said, adding that Wahed was accused in six cases, including two murder case.

Wife of the deceased said he was out of the house since July last year.

They used to communicate over the phone, she added.

Locals and police said the deceased was on the run to avoid arrest.

He was accused in a case filed for vandalism after the International Crimes Tribunal handed down death penalty to Jamaat leader Delwar Hossain Sayeedi in 2013.

Wahed allegedly shot dead a local Awami League leader Nazrul Islam in July last year.

He was also accused in the case filed over the murder of Nazrul's nephew and Jubo League leader Kabir in 2017.

Indonesia virus plans 'in tatters' as infections surge

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's coronavirus crisis is far worse than being officially reported and the government's response is "in tatters", the country's doctors association warned yesterday as the death toll climbed to 87.

The world's fourth-most populous country only reported its first confirmed infection this month but by Thursday, that had ballooned to over 1,000.

Indonesia's 87 confirmed coronavirus deaths are the highest toll in Southeast Asia, with public health and diplomatic officials warning that its weak health system is being rapidly overwhelmed.

"The government's plans are in tatters and they appear to be avoiding a lockdown," said Indonesian Doctors' Association spokesman Halik Malik.

"Our health system is not as strong as other countries."

A London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine study warned this week that cases in Indonesia -- with a population of more than 260 million people -- could be vastly underreported.

The government's virus task force has estimated as many as 700,000 people were at risk of infection nationwide.

Build stronger

FROM PAGE 1

department at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), in a conversation with The Daily Star, said, "The more we establish mental attachments with others, the more we feel relieved."

"It will make us feel that we are not alone. It will boost our mental strength."

To restrain the outbreak of highly contagious COVID-19, people across the globe have been maintaining social distance following recommendations of health experts.

In the wake of coronavirus spread, the government suspended all public and private offices and urged citizens to stay at their homes.

To enforce the homestay and other precautionary measures, army personnel started assisting the local administration at divisional cities and district towns.

Mekhalha said it was unfortunate that the pandemic created a severe crisis across the country but it also had some positivity.

"We now have leisure time in hand to finish our pending tasks, pass quality time with children and other family members, play indoor games like Ludo and Carrom, and do many more things that we usually fail to manage time for," she said.

Mentioning the risks of anxiety disorder among the people who are panicked and over thinking, she suggested that breathing exercise and physical activities could help people fight anxiety.

"We have to keep communicating with the people through mobile phone and social media," she said, adding, "We have to think positively. This bad time will end soon."

The noted psychiatrist suggested that people should not be always thinking of COVID-19 as it could shatter people mentally.

"We should fix a time in a day to get updates on the virus. We must not always think of it," she said.



PHOTO OF THE DAY

PRABIR DAS



A deserted Bijoy Sarani intersection on a Friday morning. Until a couple of weeks ago, the roundabout was being given a major makeover to mark the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, but all that has had to take a back seat in light of recent events.

CHATTOGRAM

No shortage in supply, yet prices surge at pharmacies

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Asad Haider, a resident of port city's Rahattar Pool area, has been suffering from peptic ulcer for a long time. He was prescribed medicines for three months. One of the medicine he has to take is Sergel (Esomeprazole 20mg).

Although he could buy a pack of that for Tk 62 even last week, now the price has risen to Tk 68.

"I asked the salesperson about the reason for the increase in price and he said it was shortage of supply," Haider told The Daily Star.

"I don't understand the reason behind this shortage. The government has instructed medicine shops to remain open, but many in the area have been closed since the evening of March 25," he said, adding, "The supply chain of medicine should be uninterrupted in any situation for the sake of patients."

Malati Sarkar, a resident of Jamal Khan Road, had the same experience yesterday. She too said the medicine she bought cost more now than a week before.

"They told me it was because of a supply crunch," said Malati. "I had to buy the medicine at a higher price as the doctor asked me not to miss a single dose," she said.

Expressing concerns, SM Nazer Hossain, central vice president of Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB), told The Daily Star, "They [pharmacies] have increased the price of medicine in different areas and it is the responsibility of the drug administration to monitor the market, but the officials are not performing their duties properly."

Contacted, Mozammel Hossain, deputy director of Directorate General of Drug Administration, said demanding high price for medicine during a crisis is not only illegal but also unethical. "There is no shortage in supply of medicine throughout the country... we will definitely look into it," he said.

Shibu Prasad Das, executive member of Bangladesh Chemists and Druggists' Association, Chattogram district, also said there was no shortage in supply of any medicine, except for one brand of paracetamol.

"There is no reason for pharmacies to demand high price for medicine," he said, adding, "We have strictly instructed our members to sell medicine at regular prices."

DEATH FOR WAR CRIMES

Azhar's lawyers preparing to challenge SC verdict

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Defense lawyers for convicted war criminal ATM Azharul Islam are preparing a petition containing at least 10 grounds for seeking review of the Supreme Court verdict, that upheld his death penalty for his involvement in genocide and crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

The review petition will be filed with the apex court on April 5 when it will reopen after its ongoing closure, Advocate Shishir Manir, a lawyer for the Jamaat-e-Islami leader, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The SC was originally scheduled to reopen on March 29 after an annual vacation. But the authorities have declared general holidays at all courts across the country till April 4 due to the coronavirus outbreak.

"We have almost prepared the review petition for ATM Azharul Islam, including 10 to 12 grounds on which the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court may consider to exempt him from the charges brought against him", Shishir Manir said, adding that statements of the witnesses don't fully support the incidents of charges brought against Azharul.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Mahubey Alam told The Daily Star that his office will oppose the review petition when the Appellate Division holds hearing on it.

If the SC dismisses the review petition, Azharul will have an option but to seek clemency from the president confessing to his guilt, he said.

"If the Supreme Court dismisses the review petition and the president rejects the mercy petition of Azharul Islam, if he seeks review and mercy, there will be no legal bar for the authorities concerned to execute the death sentence of Azharul," the attorney general said.

The SC on October 31 last year upheld the death sentence of ATM Azharul Islam. A four-member bench of the SC's Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, by a majority view delivered the verdict around five years after the International Crimes Tribunal-1 handed down capital punishment to Azhar for crimes committed in Rangpur in 1971.

It upheld four charges against Azhar, but acquitted him of another. The SC released the full text of the verdict on March 15 this year, clearing the way for Azharul to move a petition seeking review of the verdict.

Azhar (67), who is now in Gazipur's Kashimpur Jail-2, was the commander of notorious Al-Badr force and president of Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of Jamaat -- a party which opposed the country's liberation -- in Rangpur during the 1971 war.

Law Minister Anisul Huq earlier told The Daily Star that the government would execute the apex court verdict on completion of all legal procedures.

Expressing satisfaction at the judgement, he had said Bangladesh has moved one step ahead in ensuring justice and rule of law.

'Country not in lockdown'

Says info minister, regrets harassment of people leaving home for urgent reasons

UNB, Dhaka

Mentioning that there has been no countrywide lockdown, Information Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud yesterday said it is very regretful that people are being harassed by members of law enforcement agencies when they go out for urgent reasons.

"No lockdown has been imposed in the country... anyone can come out and go to the streets, if necessary. It's very regretful that people face harassment when they come out and go to the streets. Police have not been asked to do so," he said.

The minister made the remarks at a Facebook live press conference from his official residence in the city.

He said the government has suggested people not to roam on streets unnecessarily.

Dr Mahmud said even the police headquarters on Thursday asked all its field-level officials that one can come out to the streets, unless required, and suggested the officials to send people back to their residences convincing them if anyone goes out to streets unnecessarily.

So, he added, it is not right to harass anyone when they go out for a necessity.

He also criticised BNP for the gathering of thousands of people when its chief Khaleda Zia was released on Wednesday, amid enforcement of social distancing to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

"BNP manifested nothing other than its utter irresponsibility by allowing gathering of thousands of people," he said.

Noting that the whole world is facing a pandemic, he said they do not want to see the political blame-game at this time of disaster.

How sweet is home?

Employees share experience of working remotely

MATHEWS CHIRAN

Empty roads, shuttered shops and few people in sight, the effects of the coronavirus can be seen everywhere across the country. And yet, even during these times, work must carry on for many residents of the city.

Considering the circumstances, many corporations have instructed their employees to work from home. Remote work is not a new concept: it has been successfully implemented in many workplaces across the world. But for Bangladesh, it is somewhat of an uncharted territory.

Right now, there is no other option for many than to adapt to this new reality. Despite how difficult or strange it might feel at first, many are getting used to this new lifestyle and are trying their best to deal with the workload.

This correspondent has recently talked to several employees who are working from home, and they shared their experiences about what is it like to have meetings, submit assignments and give presentations, all using the virtual space.

While they all agreed that working from home is comfortable and relaxing, coordinating with colleagues can be a hassle. They mainly blamed it on the shortcomings of technology, as they think it is not quite there yet, at least in Bangladesh.

Shahadat Apurbo, a deputy manager (communications) at Brac, finds a comfortable spot at his Rampura residence and gets ready for work at 8am.

By 5pm, he closes all work-related software, which means he is done for the day.

"Working from home is undoubtedly

relaxing, as you have full freedom to follow your own workstyle. You can work at your own pace as long as you can successfully execute everything," Apurbo said. "However, proper coordination with colleagues is an issue and a reason for delays."

"Besides, you have to constantly keep your eyes on the computer screen for checking emails, having video conferences and much more, which is sometimes stressful," he added.

Iqbal Hasani, a public relations officer of Nuclear Power Plant Company Bangladesh Ltd, sits down to work an hour later than Apurbo but finishes at the same time, doing everything from his house at Bangla Motor.

"Who doesn't want to spend time with their family? Working from home is truly comforting," Iqbal said.

But working in the public sector brings its own set of challenges. "All government files are yet to be digitally converted, and it's not easy to coordinate with everyone," he added.

Shourav Ahmed, a systems integrator at IT company Ding, loves his current work arrangement but dreads the technical issues.

"You can give your 100 per cent at home since the environment is very convenient. But technical problems such as shoddy internet connection are a challenge," Shourav said.

"On top of that, you don't get the guidance you would while working from office," he added.

Even though this arrangement is relaxing, at the end of the day, individuals need to socialise face-to-face to strengthen

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

A little foresight goes a long way

Sylhet private hospital preempts Covid-19 outbreak; ensures PPE for staff, sets up ICU, isolation units for patients

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Days before the nation started to panic over the crisis of personal protective equipment (PPE) for medical professionals and sufficient resources for infected patients, a private medical college hospital in Sylhet was prepared.

It ensured PPE for all its staff members, set up isolation units for patients, prepared ICU and post-ICU units, and managed ventilators -- the most important tools for treating coronavirus patients.

The institution concerned is North East Medical College Hospital, situated at Chandipul in the city.

"When coronavirus started spreading from Wuhan earlier this year, we started our preparation to fight it," said Prof Dr Shahriar Hussein Chowdhury, managing director of the hospital.

"Since the country lacks ICU facilities, we decided to focus on that. We have set up ICU and post-ICU units at our hospital," he said.

"We already installed three ventilators and two more will arrive next week. We have seven BiPAP machines (a device that helps with breathing) and prepared 17 observation beds," he said.

They also managed PPE for all their doctors, nurses and support staff, he said, adding that there are 450 staff members working at the hospital in three shifts.

"When our colleagues at different hospitals are worried for their safety while tending to patients, we are being able to serve people without any fear,"



Wearing PPE, the emergency medical officer of North East Medical College Hospital in Sylhet is busy at work. The hospital not only ensured safety gears for its staff members, but also set up isolation units and ICU for patients.

Sajeed Roy, the emergency medical officer at the hospital, said.

The hospital opened two hotline numbers to provide guidelines about coronavirus and its official Facebook page is now connected with "Corona Bot" -- which helps people know more about the virus and global situation.

"We are trying to get more equipment... although there is a shortage," Dr Shahriar said.

"These are challenging times and

we are possibly moving towards a perilous period. The government should remain more cautious and prepared. All retired and expert doctors should be asked to rejoin as the country needs their service," he added.

"Presently, the government is focusing on treating suspected patients at isolation centres... We have also prepared our institution and are ready to support the country," he said.



A goods-laden truck lost control and crashed into a newly-built footbridge in Shyamoli on Mirpur Road early yesterday, severely damaging the structure. Had the roads not been empty due to the coronavirus outbreak, the damage could have been much more serious.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Law enforcers handed over daily essentials and bottles of hand sanitiser to families of some 120 conservancy workers in Kathakhali area of Mymensingh city yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

How sweet is

FROM PAGE 3
connections with each other, some said.
Sazia Afrin, a communications officer of Save the Children in Bangladesh, on a typical day, grinds through her work from 8:30am-4:40pm.
"You don't have to worry about reaching office on time and rushing your morning ritual in the process," Sazia said.
"However, an important factor, socialising, is missing, which is an ingredient for forming strong bonds among coworkers."
Tasbir Ifekhar, programme producer of Imagine Radio -- who plans shows,

generates ideas and writes scripts from 10am-6pm -- echoed Sazia's experiences and commented on his own situation.
"My workplace allowed us to be flexible with our hours. Currently, we're focusing on delivering our projects on time. If I'm doing that, I can work conveniently," said Tasbir.
"At the same time, I'm feeling deprived of face-to-face communication, since most of us talk through phone calls and video chats," he said.
"Even colleagues having lunch together can positively impact the work they do," said Tasbir.

Sanaullah Miah passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Advocate Sanaullah Miah, a BNP leader and a lawyer for party chief Khaleda Zia, died yesterday at the age of 60.

He died at Gonoshasthaya hospital at 9pm, confirmed Syrul Kabir Khan, an official of BNP's press wing.
He left behind his wife, two daughters and a son to mourn his death.

Miah, the legal affairs secretary of BNP, has been suffering from various diseases including cancer.

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman and Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir expressed deep condolence on his death.



Man hacked to death by son

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A man was killed and his wife injured allegedly by their son in Sylhet yesterday.

Police said the incident happened at Sunampur of Golapganj upazila.

Rahel Ahmed (35), was cutting a tree in front of their house in the area but his parents -- Abdul Karim (60) and Minara Begum (50) -- asked him not to do so, triggering an altercation. Rahel hacked them and fled the scene, said Golapganj Police Station OC Mizanur Rahman.

Karim was killed instantly and his wife was taken to MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, said the OC.

Azhar's lawyers

FROM PAGE 3

Five Jamaat leaders have already been executed for committing crimes during the Liberation War, while another senior leader, Delawar Hossain Sayedee, was serving jail time for the same offences, until he died.

OFFENCE AND PUNISHMENT

As a leader of Islami Chhatra Sangha and the Al-Badr, Azhar played a significant role in the atrocities and aided the Pakistani occupation troops in committing horrific crimes, according to ICT-1 that handed the capital punishment.

The court said the verdict was delivered for his involvement in killing 1,400 civilians in Jharuarbeel, a wetland in Rangpur's Badarganj upazila.

Terrified of the marauding Pakistan army and its local collaborators, they had fled their homes and took shelter at Jharuarbeel, but men, women and children from a dozen villages still could not save themselves from the cold-blooded savagery on the summer noon of April 17, 1971.

Pakistani army men and armed members of local Chhatra Sangha surrounded the villagers crouching in the swamp bushes, and unleashed a bloodbath. Within five hours, they killed some 1,200 innocent people.

Azhar planned and himself took part in the massacre. He and his men also picked up more than 200 Hindu people and students from the area, and killed them after taking them to an unknown place.

The SC court upheld the ICT verdict for the offences, and also for the killing of at least 14 people in Badarganj upazila in Rangpur and murder of four Hindu teachers of Rangpur Carmichael College and wife of one teacher. Azhar was a student of the teachers and a resident of the upazila.

The SC also upheld his five-year imprisonment for torturing a freedom fighter and his brother.

The court, however, acquitted him from another charge of raping a woman in Rangpur Town Hall. The tribunal had given him 25-year jail for the charge.

Two war crimes tribunals have so far delivered 41 verdicts against 95 accused. Of them, 69 have been sentenced to death, while more than thirty appeals are now pending with the SC.

Jamaat leaders Motiur Rahman Nizami, Abdul Quader Mollah, Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, Mir Quasem Ali and BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury have been executed for war crimes.

COVID-19 DETECTION

RMCH gets PCR machine

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The machine for Polymerase Chain Reaction testing, known as PCR, has reached the laboratory of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) on Thursday evening, and will be used for detection of coronavirus.

Testing for Covid-19 would be possible when the Public Works Department completes the installation of the machine in a week, RMCH governing body Chairman Fazle Hossain Badsha told the Daily Star yesterday. "By this time, we hope that coronavirus testing kits would be made available at the hospital," Badsha, also a lawmaker from Rajshahi, said.

PCR machines were also provided to six other medical college hospitals across the country, he added.

"Using the machine, we will be able to test Covid-19 with samples of throat swabs and blood, and provide results within a day," said RMCH Deputy Director Dr Saiful Ferdous. He said the hospital is currently witnessing a rush of patients, but could not test them due to lack of testing facility.

Along with the PCR machine, a fresh supply of 1,000 PPE; 1,000 masks; 1,000 hand-gloves and enough sanitiser for doctors and laboratories have also reached the hospital, he added.

Meanwhile, Mymensingh Medical College will receive a PCR machine today, said Prof Dr Chitta Ranjan Debnath, principal of MMC. It will be set up at a lab at the microbiology department.

The lab will be conducted under the supervision of IEDCR, Dr Debnath told our Mymensingh correspondent.

Constituent assembly

FROM PAGE 12
who had been affected by the Pakistan occupation army's atrocities. Bangabandhu makes the observation when a delegation of women calls on him. He adds that the government has allocated sufficient funds for the rehabilitation of the victims.

INDIA-BANGLADESH TRADE ACCORD SIGNED

India and Bangladesh today sign an agreement covering trade and cultural exchanges between the two countries. The proposed agreement will allow export of fish, limited quantity of jute, poultry, newsprint and matches from Bangladesh and import of coal, cement, pharmaceutical raw materials from India. A cultural exchange in the form of exchange of motion pictures, books and journals, etc. will also be covered under this agreement.

73 SPECIAL TRIBUNALS TO TRY COLLABORATORS

Bangladesh government today announces the formation of 73 special tribunals for expeditious and fair trial of those who collaborated with the Pakistan armed forces in committing genocide in the country. The tribunals are set up under the Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunal) Order 1972 issued on January 25.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS TO GET PREFERENCE IN RECRUITMENT

The government has directed all

government, semi-government, autonomous and private organisations to give preference in the matter of recruitment in new posts to freedom fighters who hold certificates signed either by commander-in-chief of Bangladesh Forces or secretary of Ministry of Home Affairs. The candidates holding certificates and fulfilling the requisite qualifications prescribed for the post will be given preference in 30 percent of the vacancies.

FREE BOOKS FOR PRIMARY STUDENTS
The government has finalised arrangements for the distribution of 78 lakh books free of cost among the students of primary level and sale of another 3.16 lakh books at concession rates among students of secondary level throughout the country.

FRENCH TEAM CALLS ON MUJIB
The visiting French parliamentary delegation today calls on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at his official residence.

On the other hand, French President Georges Pompidou yesterday told the newly appointed Bangladesh Ambassador to France, Abdul Fateh, that Bangladesh can depend on the cooperation of France.

SOURCES: March 29, 1972 issues of Ittefaq, The Bangladesh Observer, Azad, Morning News, Dainik Bangla and Purbodosh.

Biman

FROM PAGE 1

The national flag carrier usually operates 14 flights a week to and from these destinations in the United Kingdom.

In the wake of the global coronavirus pandemic, the national airliner has now stopped operations on all 17 international routes, said M Mohibul Haque, senior secretary, civil aviation and tourism ministry. With the new measure, Dhaka now have air communications only with China, Hong Kong and Bangkok, thanks to flight operations continued by airliners of those countries.

Earlier, Dhaka had suspended air communications with 10 countries with effect from March 22 until March 31 as a precautionary measure to stop the spread of coronavirus in the country.

Passenger flights to and from Bangladesh with Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Turkey, Malaysia, Singapore and India will remain suspended, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said on March 21.

Biman previously stopped its flights on 15 out of 17 international routes on separate dates and for different periods, mainly because of restrictions of the respective countries amid the global coronavirus pandemic.

On Thursday, it extended the suspensions. As per the decision, Biman's flight suspension to Jeddah, Madina, Riyad, Dammam, Kuwait, Doha, Muscat and Bangkok have been extended till April 5, Abu Dhabi till April 7, Dubai till April 9, Singapore till April 11, Kathmandu till April 12, Kuala Lumpur till April 14 and Kolkata and Delhi till April 15.

Last week, the national flag carrier also suspended its operations to all seven domestic routes for an indefinite period. Biman incurred a loss of Tk 450 crore in the last one and a half months, Mokabbir Hossain told this newspaper on Thursday.

Meanwhile, private carrier US-Bangla Airlines will continue flight operations on Dhaka-Guangzhou route only on Sundays from March 29, the private carrier said yesterday.

Its flights to and from Doha, Kolkata and Chennai will remain suspended till April 15, Kuala Lumpur till April 14, Singapore till April 7, Muscat till April 29 and Bangkok till May 18.

Besides, its domestic operations will remain suspended till April 4.

UK PM tests positive

FROM PAGE 12

weeks of finger pointing between the two countries, especially the White House's repeated references to "the Chinese virus".

The coronavirus first emerged in China late last year before spreading globally, with 539,360 declared cases registered in 183 countries and territories.

Beijing managed to contain its spread

with lockdowns and quarantines and its epicentre Wuhan is in the process of easing severe movement restrictions in place for two months.

China was also readying to bar entry to foreigners out of concern over a surge of imported cases, highlighting the difficulty of containing a virus in a globalised world.

Three billion people around the world have been told to stay indoors,

as health care systems even in the most developed nations are stretched to breaking point.

Medical workers have been having to make difficult choices.

"If I've got five patients and only one bed, I have to choose who gets it," Sara Chinchilla, a paediatrician at a hospital near Madrid, told AFP.

"People are dying who could be saved but there's no space in intensive care."

OC withdrawn over custodial death

FROM PAGE 12

-- Inspector Manoranjan Mistry and Assistant sub-inspector Arif Hossain -- were suspended on the same day following allegations that they tortured the man to death.

ASP Tofayel of Barguna police is leading a three-member probe committee to investigate the murder.

Shanu Hawlader's 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, OC Abul Bashar and Manoranjan Mistry tortured Shanu to death, they claimed.

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.

Bashar, however, denied the allegations. The suspended officers also refused to comment further on the issue.

Govt falters in its promise

FROM PAGE 12

But again, referring to the spread of coronavirus in the country, the minister said, "I don't think we will be able to hold the polls in April."

He added that it would take at least six more months to prepare the fresh list. "We will need time to prepare a flawless list."

On December 15 last year, the ministry published the list containing the names of 10,789 persons.

It was supposed to include those who collaborated with the Pakistan occupation army in 1971. But many freedom fighters were utterly shocked to see their names on the list.

Announcing the list, Mozammel said it was prepared based on records preserved at the home ministry and that it was the first of the phases in which the government would make public the names of razakars.

CONTROVERSY
This newspaper found the names of at least 25 freedom fighters or war organisers on the list.

The list included the name of freedom fighter Sudhir Kumar Chakraborty, whose family gets the

freedom fighter's allowance from the government. The Pakistan army killed him in August 1971.

It even contained the names of freedom fighter Ghulam Arief Tipoo, chief prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal, and freedom fighter Mirza Abdul Latif, who led a group of 500 freedom fighters in the country's northern region in 1971.

In the face of nationwide outrage and angry protests after publication of the list, Mozammel said they just published the list provided by the home ministry without any modification.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said his ministry provided the list following a request from the Liberation War affairs ministry.

He added that his ministry sent a "note" to that ministry to scrutinise the list, but it did not take the "note" into consideration.

The home boss said it was actually a list of the accused in cases filed under the Collaborators Act.

At least 996 people were acquitted of the cases, but their names were still on the list. The Liberation War affairs ministry published the list without

dropping those names, he added.

In January 1972, the government enacted the Collaborators Act to try war criminals and those who collaborated with the Pakistan army. Later, 37,000 people were arrested and sent to jail, and 26,000 of them were freed following the announcement of a general amnesty.

Around 11,000 were behind bars when the government of Justice Sayem and General Ziaur Rahman repealed the Collaborators Act on December 31, 1975. An appeal spree and release of war criminals en masse followed the scrapping of the law.

Liberation War researcher ASM Shamsul Arefin, who had published books carrying the names of 12,000 razakars, said Pakistan had initially planned to recruit 50,000 razakars and 12,000 to 15,000 Al-Badr and Al-Shams members.

He added that Pakistan had recruited around 35,000 razakars, and there were no statistics on Al-Badr and Al-Shams members.

Shamsul said he had published the names based on salary sheet of razakars recruited by police.

ইস্টার্ন রিফাইনারী লিমিটেড
উত্তর পতেঙ্গা, চট্টগ্রাম-৪২০৪, বাংলাদেশ

বিষয়ঃ দরপত্র (Ref: 28.0000.028.07.006.19/PDB, Date: 10/03/2020) জমাদানের নতুন তারিখ ও সময় নির্ধারণ প্রসঙ্গে

উপর্যুক্ত বিষয়ে জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, "Replacement of PDB Bus including Switchgears, ERL (Ref: 28.0000.028.07.006.19/PDB, Date: 10/03/2020) কাজের (পুনঃ) দরপত্র জমাদানের ও উন্মুক্তকরণের তারিখ নির্ধারিত ছিল ৩০/০৩/২০২০। কিন্তু করোনা ভাইরাসের কারণে উক্ত সময় সরকারি ছুটি থাকায় এবং দেশের বর্তমান পরিস্থিতির কারণে উক্ত দরপত্র জমাদানের ও উন্মুক্তকরণের নতুন তারিখ যখনই অফিস খোলা হবে সেদিন থেকে ২ (দুই) দিন পর নির্ধারণ করা হলে এবং সময় অপরিবর্তিত থাকবে।

খোন্দকার মুস্তাফিজুর রহমান
জিডি-৬২৬
জিএম (ইএন্ডএস)

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
College Education Development Project (CEDP)
College Name: Govt. Debendra College, Manikganj
College Address: Manikganj

Corrigendum of Invitation for Tender

Reference No. GDC.2020.CEDP-1157/W-01/44 Date: 25-03-2020

The undersigned has to inform that due to unavoidable circumstances tender last selling, closing and opening dates & time of Package No. W-01 (Package Name: Renovation of subproject office rooms, classrooms, washrooms, common-rooms, library, and Departments (All tiles, Thai glass, Screen for windows, Painting, False roof) are revised as follows:

Sl. No. in published IFT	Description	Original date & time	Revised date & time
17	Tender last selling date	28-03-2020	Tender selling date is extended from the just official opening day after the general holidays announced by the Govt. of Bangladesh to the next consecutive 3 official working days.
18	Tender closing date and time	29-03-2020, 1:00pm	Tender closing date and time is fixed on the next day at 1:00pm just after the ultimate selling date mentioned above.
19	Tender opening date and time	29-03-2020, 2:00pm	Tender opening date and time is fixed on the next day at 2:00pm just after the ultimate selling date mentioned above.

Note: It is mentioned that if the tender closing and opening date is holiday in that case tenders will be closed and opened in next available working day at same place and same time.

All other things of published IFT (Reference No. GDC.2020.CEDP-1157/W-01/38, Date: 09-03-2020) will remain unchanged.

Md. Nurul Amin
Principal
Govt. Debendra College, Manikganj

GD-701

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Project Director (ACE), RHD
SASEC Road Connectivity Project-II
Improvement of Elenga-Hatikamrul-Rangpur Road to a 4-Lane Highway
Sarak Bhaban, Tejgaon, Dhaka

Memo No. 35.01.0000.069.17.001.2017-328 Date: 25 March 2020

Bid Cancellation Notice

Project No. 40540-BAN: South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Dhaka-Northwest Corridor Road Project, Phase2.
ICB No. and Title: SASEC-II/ICB/MP-1/WP05 (Lot 1); SASEC Road Connectivity Project-II: Improvement of Elenga-Hatikamrul-Rangpur Road to a 4-Lane Highway.
Invitation Reference No.: 35.RHD.0000.PDSASEC-II.07.004.2017-50, Date: 20 July 2017.

Lot No., Description of the Works and Intended Completion Period

ICB No.: SASEC-II/ICB/MP-1/WP05 (Lot 1)
Part-1: Improvement of road from Elenga to Bangabandhu Bridge (East Side) (13.60km) to a 4-Lane Highway along with Slow Moving Vehicular Traffic (SMVT) Lane & Structures. Completion time for construction phase works-1095 days and
Part-2: Performance Based Maintenance. Works on Improved 4-Lane Highway along with SMVT Lane and Structures from Elenga to Bangabandhu Bridge (East Side) (13.60km)
Completion time for maintenance phase works-2190 days.

This is for information of all concerned that, the bids invited vide above reference for Lot 1 (ICB No. SASEC-II/ICB/MP-1/WP05 (Lot 1)) under "SASEC Road Connectivity Project-II: Improvement of Elenga-Hatikamrul-Rangpur Road to a 4-Lane Highway" is hereby cancelled.
Fresh Bid will be invited in due course of time.

Quazi Shahriar Hossain
ID No. 000291
Project Director (ACE), RHD
SASEC Road Connectivity Project-II
Sarak Bhaban, Tejgaon, Dhaka

GD-705



US indicts Maduro for 'narco-terrorism'

The United States indicted Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and several top aides on Thursday for "narco-terrorism" and offered a \$15 million reward for information leading to his capture. The Justice Department accused Maduro of leading a cocaine-trafficking gang called "The Cartel of the Suns" that shipped hundreds of tons of narcotics into the US over two decades, earning hundreds of millions of dollars. Investigators say the cartel worked hand-in-hand with the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). US officials charged that Maduro, Venezuela's president since 2013, used cocaine as a "weapon" to damage US society.

Prince Harry, Meghan now based in California: report

Prince Harry and his wife Meghan have permanently relocated to California amid the coronavirus pandemic, media reports said yesterday. The royal couple flew by private jet from Canada to Los Angeles last week before the border between the two countries closed because of the deadly virus outbreak, The Sun reported. The one-time actress also has a network of friends and work contacts in Los Angeles, where she could now restart her career. Disney announced on Thursday that she will narrate a new film about a family of African elephants, set for release next Friday.

Bob Dylan releases first original song in 8 years

Bob Dylan has released his first track in eight years -- a 17-minute song about the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy. The 78-year-old singer-songwriter shared a link to the track, called "Murder Most Foul," on Twitter on Thursday night. Sharing the link on Twitter, Dylan wrote: "Greetings to my fans and followers with gratitude for all your support and loyalty across the years. This is an unreleased song we recorded a while back that you might find interesting. Stay safe, stay observant and may God be with you. Bob Dylan."

SOURCE: AFP

China bans foreigners as imported cases rise

AFP, Beijing

China reported 54 imported cases of the coronavirus yesterday, hours after announcing a ban on foreigners entering the country.

In recent weeks China's tally of infections has dwindled dramatically, with only a handful of domestic patients each day.

But just as the country appears to be bringing the outbreak under control, nations around the globe are battling to control soaring numbers of infections in new hotspots.

There were another 55 new infections in China yesterday, the National Health Commission said, with one local infection and 54 imported cases from overseas.

Beijing has been racing to control the number of infections being brought into the country -- mostly Chinese nationals returning home from overseas, including large numbers of students abroad.

On Thursday Beijing announced dramatic measures to curb arrivals into the country, including reducing the number of international flights, limiting the capacity on board to 75 percent, and imposing a ban on foreigners entering China.

Non-nationals living in China with valid visas and resident permits will be blocked from returning to the country after midnight on Friday night, the foreign ministry said.

Diplomats and the crew of international airlines and vessels will still be permitted to enter.

A series of strict measures had already been put in place to try and stem the wave of infections coming in. All Beijing-bound international flights have been diverted to other urban centres, where passengers will first be screened for the virus.

In total 81,340 people have been infected in China, and the outbreak has claimed 3,292 lives.

'Difficult' days ahead Warns French PM as cases surge

AFP, Paris

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe yesterday raised the alarm over an "extremely high" surge in coronavirus cases in the country and warned things will be "difficult" in the coming days.

After 365 people died and more than 2,300 people were hospitalised in France in a single day, the military sent a plane yesterday to evacuate six patients from the hard-hit east of the country where hospitals are overstretched.

"We find ourselves in a crisis that will last, in a health situation that will not improve any time soon," Philippe said.

The premier warned the country must "remain extremely mobilised" in the fight against the epidemic that has so far officially claimed 1,696 lives. The toll is only for people who were hospitalised, not those who died at home or in old age facilities, which are badly affected by the outbreak.

Among the recent deaths was that of a 16-year-old girl, France's youngest coronavirus victim to date.

The country has some 14,000 coronavirus patients in hospital, with 548 placed in intensive care just Thursday. Over 3,375 are in a critical condition.

"The situation will be difficult in the days to come," the PM added.

Migrant workers and their family members walk with their belongings on a highway towards Uttar Pradesh as they leave for their villages during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Faridabad, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

LATEST UPDATES

DEATH TOLL CROSSES 25,000

At least 25,066 deaths have been recorded, more than 17,000 of which are in Europe, according to an AFP tally compiled at 1100 GMT Friday based on official sources. More than 547,034 cases have been declared in 183 countries and territories of which nearly 295,000 are in Europe, the worst affected continent. The true numbers are likely much higher, however. The countries with the most official deaths are Italy with 8,165, Spain (4,858), mainland China (3,292), Iran (2,378) and France (1,696).

UK PM JOHNSON INFECTED

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced he has tested positive for COVID-19, having developed mild symptoms. "I am now self-isolating, but I will continue to lead the government's response via video-conference as we fight this virus," he wrote on Twitter. Britain's Health Secretary Matt Hancock also said he had tested positive for COVID-19.

81,000 COULD DIE IN US

The coronavirus pandemic could kill more than 81,000 people in the United States in the next four months and may not subside until June, according to a data analysis done by University of Washington School of Medicine. The number of hospitalized patients is expected to peak nationally by the second week of April, though the peak may come later in some states. The report came as with nearly 86,000 cases, US surpassed any other country in the world.

TOURISM TO PLUNGE UP TO 30%

The number of international tourist arrivals will fall by 20-30 percent in 2020 due to the novel coronavirus, putting millions of jobs at risk, the World Tourism Organization said. The drop in arrivals will lead to an estimated loss of \$300-450 billion in international tourism receipts, almost one third of the \$1.5 trillion generated in 2019, the Madrid-based UN body said in a statement.

10-MINUTE CORONAVIRUS TEST!

Researchers in Senegal this week began validation trials on a COVID-19 diagnostic test that can be done at home and produce results in as little as 10 minutes - all for \$1. The plan is to dually manufacture the tests in Senegal and the United Kingdom and if the validation testing meets regulatory standards, they could be distributed across Africa as early as June.

SOURCE: AFP

Virus cases swamp hospitals in New York

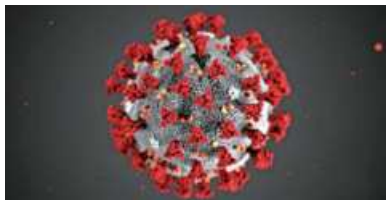
AFP, New York

In New York hospitals, staff are working extra shifts and searching desperately for more bed space as they battle a surging toll of dead and infected at the US epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, which has so far claimed 385 lives across the state, patients were mostly elderly or sick, according to one respiratory therapist, who works in the New York City borough of Queens.

"Now it's 50-year-olds, 40-year-olds, 30-year-olds," said the employee at the Jewish Medical Center, who declined to give his name.

They "didn't listen about not



going out or protecting themselves and washing their hands," he added.

"To watch somebody in their thirties die, it's hard. You can't have visitors. They're in the room by themselves on a ventilator. It's very depressing."

Governor Andrew Cuomo has ordered New York hospitals to increase their capacity by 50 percent, or even double it if possible, as the

state's coronavirus death tally soars.

"You have certain floors that will go COVID overnight," said an administrative worker at the same hospital.

"They're dedicating that whole floor to COVID patients and just seal that off and that's it."

Despite occasional shortages, the equipment nurses need to battle the virus -- masks, gloves, scrubs -- is still available, staff say.

There is also no shortage of artificial respirators and doctors have not been forced -- as they have been elsewhere in the world -- into choosing which patients to save.

But that hasn't stopped the dead piling up.

"We have a lot of deceased

patients," said a nurse at Mount Sinai Morningside hospital in Manhattan who wished to remain anonymous.

"It's mostly cardiac arrests. It's getting rough."

Officials have warned that the peak of the pandemic in New York is unlikely to occur for another two or three weeks, spelling more anxiety and stress for responders who are already at maximum capacity.

Anthony Almojeria, a leader in the emergency medical services union, said they were receiving "over 6,000" calls every day.

It is "breaking records. We didn't have this many calls on 9/11," he said, referring to the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

Can dogs sniff out COVID-19?

AFP, London

A British charity has teamed up with scientists to see whether dogs could help detect COVID-19 through their keen sense of smell, they said on Friday.

Medical Detection Dogs will work with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and Durham University in northeast England to determine whether canines could help diagnoses.

It follows previous research into dogs' ability to sniff out malaria and is based on a belief that each disease triggers a distinct odour.

The organisations said they had begun preparations to train dogs in six weeks "to help provide a rapid, non-invasive diagnosis towards the tail end of the epidemic."

The charity has previously trained dogs to detect diseases such as cancer, Parkinson's

and bacterial infections by sniffing samples taken from patients.

They can also detect subtle changes in skin temperature, potentially making them useful to determining if a person has a fever.

"In principle, we're sure that dogs could detect COVID-19," said Claire Guest, founder and chief executive of Medical Detection Dogs.

"We are now looking into how we can safely catch the odour of the virus from patients and present it to the dogs. The aim is that dogs will be able to screen anyone, including those who are asymptomatic, and tell us whether they need to be tested."

"This would be fast, effective and non-invasive and make sure the limited NHS (National Health Service) testing resources are only used where they are really needed."

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Upazila Engineer
Gaalanda, Rajbari
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.8229.000.14.016.19-198 Dated: 25.03.2020

Corrigendum to e-Tender Notice No. 04/2019-20

This is the information of all concerned that due to an unavoidable circumstance the following changes have been made to the tender which was published in The Daily Zai Zai Din, The Daily Star, The Daily Prothom Alo, Date: 06/03/2020.

Tender ID	Description of works	Original	Modified
426497,	Document tender	29/03/2020 at 13.00pm	07/04/2020 at 13:00pm
426498,	last selling (date & time)		
426499,			
4264500 & 434370	Tender closing/opening (date time)	30/03/2020 at 12.30pm	08/04/2020 at 12.30pm

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd) or (e-mail: ue.gaalanda@lged.gov.bd & Cell No. 01708161405).

Md. Bazlur Rahaman Khan
Upazila Engineer
Gaalanda, Rajbari
Phone: 06423-56143
Email: ue.gaalanda@lged.gov.bd

GD-704



'Printing money'

China, S Korea step up mask, test kit production
AFP, Beijing/ Cheongju

As the coronavirus pandemic that originated in a central Chinese city has gone global, factories in China and South Korea have nimbly turned to new and very profitable markets -- face masks and test kits for export.

At the height of China's outbreak in early February, Guan Zunze's company created a new mask factory in just eleven days. The factory, with five production lines in northeastern China, made the much-needed N95 face masks which were in huge demand as infection numbers surged.

As cases in the country have dwindled, the 34-year-old -- who was previously in pharmaceuticals -- is now profiting from new markets and exporting masks to Italy.

In the first two months of the year, a staggering 8,950 new manufacturers started producing masks in China, according to business data platform Tianyancha -- racing to fill the huge gap in demand.

But after the virus epicentre of Hubei province was placed on lockdown and the initial frenzy began to die down in China, virus outbreaks emerged in new hotspots elsewhere in the world.

Globally more than 400,000 have been

infected with the deadly coronavirus, and demand for protective equipment is still soaring as nations across the globe battle the outbreak.

"A mask machine is a real cash printer," said Shi Xinghui, sales manager of an N95 mask machine company in Dongguan city, southeastern Guangdong province. "Printing 60,000 or 70,000 masks a day is equivalent to printing money."

According to China's official figures, China's daily mask production has passed 116 million now, with many meeting overseas demand.

In South Korea, production of coronavirus test kits destined for export around the world has spiked as the global pandemic sends demand soaring.

SD Biosensor is one of five South Korean companies whose Covid-19 diagnostic tests are being used in the country, where a huge "trace, test and treat" effort appears to have brought the epidemic under control.

The company is now making 350,000 test kits a day and already exporting to eight countries including Germany, Iran, India and Italy, and is in discussions with around 60 more, led by the US.

Nearly 120 countries are now seeking to secure South Korean-made test kits, a foreign ministry official told Yonhap news agency yesterday.

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Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
College Education Development Project (CEDP)
College Name: Govt. Debendra College, Manikganj
College Address: Manikganj

Corrigendum of Invitation for Tender

Reference No. GDC.2020.CEDP-1157/G-07/45 Date: 25-03-2020

The undersigned has to inform that due to unavoidable circumstances tender last selling, closing and opening dates & time of Package No. G-07 (Package Name: Procurement of Air Conditioner (AC) for Departments, Teachers Auditorium and Sub-project Office are revised as follows:

Sl. No. in published IFT	Description	Original date & time	Revised date & time
17	Tender last selling date	05-04-2020	Tender selling date is extended from the just official opening day after the general holidays announced by the Govt. of Bangladesh to the next consecutive 11 official working days.
18	Tender closing date and time	06-04-2020, 1:00pm	Tender closing date and time is fixed on the next day at 1:00pm just after the ultimate selling date mentioned above.
19	Tender opening date and time	06-04-2020, 2:00pm	Tender opening date and time is fixed on the next day at 2:00pm just after the ultimate selling date mentioned above.

Note: It is mentioned that if the tender closing and opening date is holiday in that case tenders will be closed and opened in next available working day at same place and same time.

All other things of published IFT (Reference No. GDC.2020.CEDP-1157/G-07/43, Date: 16-03-2020) will remain unchanged.

Md. Nurul Amin
Principal
Govt. Debendra College, Manikganj

GD-702

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য ও পুষ্টি কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়
মেহেন্দিগঞ্জ, বরিশাল

স্মারক নং-উস্বাক/মেহে/২০২০/ তারিখঃ

বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বিষয়ঃ দরপত্র সিডিউল দাখিল ও দরপত্র সিডিউল খোলার তারিখ সাময়িকভাবে স্থগিতকরণ প্রসংগে।

এতদ্বারা মেহেন্দিগঞ্জ উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য কমপ্লেক্সের স্মারক নং-উস্বাক/মেহে/২০২০/১৮৮(২০) তারিখঃ ১০/০৩/২০২০ইং মোতাবেক ২০১৯-২০২০ইং আর্থিক সালের এমএসআর দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি মোতাবেক সিডিউল ক্রমকৃত ঠিকাদার প্রতিষ্ঠান এবং কমিটির সদস্যদেরকে জানানো যাইতেছে যে, সারাদেশ ব্যাপী করোনা ভাইরাস সংক্রমণের কারণে সকল প্রকার অফিস আদালত, যানবাহন চলাচল, দোকানপাট বন্ধ থাকায় এবং একস্থান হতে অন্যস্থানে চলাচলে সরকারিভাবে বিধিনিষেধ আরোপের কারণে মেহেন্দিগঞ্জ উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য কমপ্লেক্সের দরপত্র সিডিউল দাখিল ও খোলার তারিখ সাময়িকভাবে স্থগিতকরণ করা হইল। পরবর্তীতে সকলকে দরপত্র সিডিউল দাখিল ও দরপত্র সিডিউল খোলার তারিখ জানানো হইবে।

ডাঃ এস. এম. রমিজ আহমেদ
উপজেলা স্বাস্থ্য ও পুষ্টি কর্মকর্তা (ভারপ্রাপ্ত)
মেহেন্দিগঞ্জ, বরিশাল

জিডি-৭০৩

SPORT

No new recipes for downcast Jahanara

MAZHAR UDDIN

The Bangladesh women's national cricket team were one of the last sporting teams to return home before the coronavirus outbreak, landing in Dhaka on March 2 after completing their ICC Women's T20 World Cup campaign in Australia.

The cricketers were happy to get home safely but things escalated over the next few days, with sport worldwide halted in a global effort to contain the spread of the virus.

Restrictions were also imposed on movement and public transport by the government which led to all-rounder Jahanara Alam being unable to return to her hometown of Khulna and deciding to self-isolate at her Dhaka residence.

"I contemplated training for a few more days before returning home

but the sudden coronavirus threat changed everything and I decided to stay in Dhaka and not move. It's a very anxious time for me, I have never experienced anything like this in my entire life. At the same time, not being able to play cricket also makes it extremely boring," Jahanara told The Daily Star.

The pace bowling all-rounder, who is one of the most successful bowlers in the Bangladesh team, also enjoys cooking and sadly reported that her quest to learn new recipes during the time had also gone awry due to the unpleasant atmosphere.

"I love to cook whenever I am at home but recently, I've found that I don't even feel like cooking anymore. I try to pray, do some shadow practice and free-hand fitness exercises but something still feels amiss. It's a very critical time for all of us and we must ensure our safety first. I would like to request

everyone to remain home and stay with your family and take care of your health," she added.

Similar to other upcoming events worldwide that have been postponed, the upcoming women's fifty over World Cup qualifiers scheduled from July in Sri Lanka this year are also in jeopardy.

However, according to Bangladesh T20 skipper Salma Khatun, the main focus for everyone should be on the precautionary measures being advised by the WHO and government.

"This situation is something very unusual for everyone but you must acknowledge that life comes first, ahead of everything else. And we should collectively follow the instructions to remain safe. We should all do our civic duty and stay home to make sure we don't spread this virus and cause further damage," Salma said.

The 29-year-old added that it

would be important for the players to take this solitary time to work on their individual fitness at home in order to prepare for upcoming events because she believes everything will become normal soon.

"You have to remain positive, I am certain that everything will be fine again. We have to be prepared for the coming days. It is the best time to evaluate your game mentally given the amount of free time we have on our hands now. We should work on our fitness at home so that we are prepared to play, given short notice, when the time comes," she said.

It's safe to say that the entire world is going through a terrible ordeal but optimists such as Jahanara and Salma believe that proper safety measures and a collective, organised effort can help us navigate our way out of this pandemic in a short span of time.



With all sport completely halted, including training camps, Bangladesh women's national team player Jahanara Alam has been maintaining her fitness regimen from home. PHOTO: COURTESY

BFF decides to postpone polls

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has decided to postpone its April 20 elections for indefinite period in face of growing demand for deferment from the stakeholders.

The executive committee made the decision yesterday through an online opinion conducted among the 21 members. All of them opined in favour of postponement except for Harun-Ur-Rashid, who did not respond to the e-mail sent to him by the BFF.

A statement from the BFF said, "Due to the World Health Organisation declaring the Covid-19 outbreak a pandemic and the government of Bangladesh imposing a nationwide lockdown from March 26 to April 4 to curb the spread of coronavirus,

any kind of public gathering is banned nowadays."

"The executive committee of the BFF has decided to postpone the BFF Elective Congress 2020, previously scheduled to be held on April 20, unless the situation becomes normal. The same will be communicated to AFC and FIFA," the statement further said.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag later informed that they would write to the FIFA and the AFC by tomorrow to seek approval to postpone the elections and mandate to hold the polls sometime in normal situation. The tenure of the current committee will expire on April 30.

Shohag also informed that the committee still wants to continue with the process of collecting names of councillors, extending the deadline for submission of names to April 7 from March 30.



The Bangladesh Football Federation started a programme yesterday to provide food to the less fortunate, especially those who have been struggling to earn a living due to the coronavirus pandemic. BFF officials handed out packets of food outside the BFF House in Motijheel and said that the programme would provide 300 people with food and would run until April 4. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Transfer window till Dec 31?

AGENCIES

FIFA is reportedly considering extending the summer transfer window until December 31, while expiring contracts could run beyond June 30 as the European football calendar remains up in the air with competitions on pause due to the outbreak of coronavirus.

Now, L'Equipe claims FIFA is studying the possibility of extending the summer transfer window until the end of this calendar year. Summer windows in Europe are generally held between July and September, although some of its smaller nations open for business in June.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

France manager Michel Hidalgo stands alongside legendary footballer Michel Platini.

France legend Hidalgo dies at 87

AFP, Paris

Michel Hidalgo, the coach of the great France team that won the 1984 European Championship, died at the age of 87 "of natural causes" at home in Marseille, his family said Thursday.

He is best remembered for his eight years in charge of Les Bleus, which culminated with the stylish team of Michel Platini, Alain Giresse and Jean Tigana winning Euro 84 on home soil, beating Spain 2-0 in the final in Paris. It was their first ever major tournament success.

Prior to that, he took France to the 1978 World Cup, their first appearance at the tournament in 12 years, and then led them to the semi-finals of the 1982 World Cup, where they lost on penalties to West Germany.

"As coach, Michel took the France team to its greatest heights, opting for a beautiful style of football which allowed each one of us to fully express our individual talents," said Platini in a statement.

"Michel Hidalgo left a considerable legacy. He rebuilt French football at international level. His vision and his work still resonate today in every match our national team plays."

Born in 1933, Hidalgo also enjoyed a richly successful playing career. After starting at Le Havre, he played for the great Reims side of the 1950s, featuring, and scoring, when they lost 4-3 to Real Madrid in the first ever European Cup final in 1956. Hidalgo went on to win two league titles and two French Cups with Monaco in the early 1960s.

'I'm still hungry to play'

Anderson says coronavirus won't end his career

AFP, London



England bowler James Anderson is determined that the coronavirus will not end his illustrious career as he focuses on keeping fit by taking part in "virtual" training sessions with his teammates.

Anderson, 37, whose 584 Test wickets are the most taken by any pacesman in the history of the game, is nearing the end of his playing days.

But the Lancashire veteran says despite having no cricket to play until the end of May at the earliest, the idea of not bowling professionally again has not crossed his mind.

"I've not actually thought about never playing cricket again," he said during a conference call on Thursday. "I feel like we will play again and I will play again at some stage."

"I'm still hungry to play, I've still got ambitions to play for England."

"So I think the fact I've been able to do this for a long time and I get to play a sport as a job means when I do get to do that again, I'm really going to cherish it and enjoy every single moment of it."

The England and Wales Cricket Board is planning to install coronavirus checkpoints and isolation units at grounds in its bid to resume international cricket without spectators.

The ECB had suspended all professional cricket till May 28, delaying the start of the new season, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, ECB director of events Steve Elworthy said they are looking at ways to resume play inside closed doors and that it would need a sterile "bubble" to ensure the identification of anyone in the vicinity who was carrying the virus.

With Britain under a coronavirus lockdown, Anderson is keeping fit by working out on-line with teammates including fellow pacemen Stuart Broad and Mark Wood.

"A few of the lads are training together virtually," he said. "I did a workout with Stuart Broad and Mark Wood yesterday."

"We've all got Pelotons -- the bikes. You can compete against each other. Stuart came out on top this time, with me a close second and Mark Wood in third."

Anderson made the most recent of his 151 Test appearances against South Africa in Cape Town in January before a broken rib ended his tour prematurely.

That followed an Ashes campaign last year in which he bowled just four overs because of a calf problem.

Anderson primed England left Anderson out for their recent tour of Sri Lanka, curtailed by the coronavirus, in a bid to get him fit for the English summer.

"To get injured again was a big frustration," he said. "But it was lucky in a way that it was a broken rib. If it was a muscle injury it would have taken much longer to recover."

The England and Wales Cricket Board last week put cricket on hold until May 28 -- just a week before the scheduled start of the first Test against the West Indies.

Anderson believes even if that return

date is feasible, the timescale could be tight unless players can train outdoors in May.

He is also wary about the prospect of matches being played behind closed doors, saying the game has to be played in front of fans.

Although he has long been a red-ball specialist, Anderson said he would be prepared to play white-ball cricket again, even in the new Hundred competition.

Anderson has an ambassadorial role with the Manchester Originals, one of the franchises, but no contract.

"I want to be playing cricket and if that is the only cricket going on, if it's the Hundred or the T20 Blast, I'd love to be involved in that," he said.

"If there wasn't any red-ball cricket this summer, it would be a long, long time for me to be ticking over in the nets."

Despite the frustrations as a cricketer during the coronavirus lockdown, Anderson said it was important to look at the bigger picture.

"People are sacrificing a hell of a lot for us to try and keep us healthy," he said.

"I think us sacrificing some of, and maybe all of, the cricket season and staying inside for a bit, I don't think that's a huge sacrifice."



Brazil superstar Neymar, who is currently in home quarantine in his native land, found himself in hot water after posting pictures of himself alongside his friends yesterday, with fans and media bashing the 28-year-old for flouting guidelines over maintaining social distance to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM



This is like nirvana in that we're home with our families, we sleep in our own beds, we eat home-cooked dinners and we can still work in one degree or another from home. It gives them a really good opportunity to recharge and we're looking at scenarios to make sure we'll be ready for whatever comes up.

JUSTIN LANGER
AUSTRALIA COACH



Bangladesh becomes first country to treat Covid-22 over phone

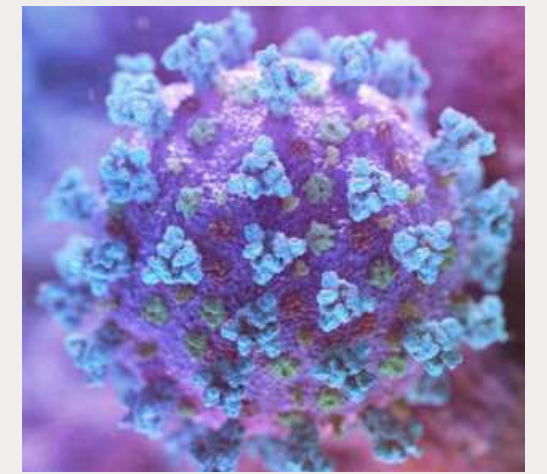
Call hotline to be asked basic questions and told you don't really have it

LUBNAN KHALEESI, OUR UNHEALTHY CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh became the first country in the world to treat coronavirus over phone. The country's Disease Uncontrol Centre run by Kooks (DUCK) came up with the brand new method even though THERE ARE MORE THAN ENOUGH TESTING KITS FOR ALL VIRUSES TM in the country.

"This virus is very easy to diagnosis. You don't even have to call our hotline. We hate all the calls we are getting. My social life has been in tatters ever since people started worrying so much about dying. It is the inevitable," Nawabzada Fauna, head of DUCK, told reporters outside her testing facility which has so many kits you would not even believe it.

"So your nose is blocked, you have a cough, and perhaps a little pneumonia. But have you recently been to a different country? Specifically these three countries? If not, then you do not have it. Take an aspirin and chill out," they said, adding that no one should panic if they are not tested considering the number of testing kits the centre



has can flood the entire country.

The new method of quick diagnosis has also instilled confidence in the country's people, with many now going out and about knowing they are not carriers of any virus.

Asked if the situation was so much under control, then why were all modes of public transport being suspended, Fauna said it was because too many people were using those to come to the DUCK headquarters.

"We have asked people on numerous occasions not to come here. But they just don't want to listen. Why are they behaving in such an odd way? There is nothing to see here except the billions of testing kits that we have. I promise. I swear to you," they said, breaking down in tears.

Fauna finally asked the reporters to leave and covered themselves with protective gear, including a bullet-proof vest and a very, very stupid looking hat.

Lubnan Khaleesi is a Nasa scientist with a moody disposition but a very sweet heart.

Mass gathering on social-distancing held; participants demand draconian laws be put in place now

OSAMA RAHMAN

A gathering of some 10,000 people -- standing 10 feet away from each other, decked out in gloves and masks -- yesterday demanded that draconian laws be enforced to tackle the growing virus outbreak.

"I read an article a few days ago which explained how during the plague even the most liberal countries had laws which even forced authorities to shut the sick in their homes for six weeks," one of the gatherers said. As they were wearing masks, this correspondent could not ask many questions. Who wears masks, if not the infected?

Others who had gathered echoed similar views.

"We need to all be put in a database and all our movements have to be tracked. This is no time to care about privacy and human rights," another participant said.

Pointing to the crowd, another participant highlighted how counterproductive the entire gathering exercise was. "We shouldn't even be here. But my son really wanted to be a revolutionary so I had to chaperone him here." We are using his quote to fill my word count quota.

Amid the congregation of sorts, calls grew for enacting something like the Plague Act of 1604, which made criticizing any government initiatives illegal.

"We need an act like that. Stop asking why all the construction work is still going on amid all this crisis. Construction workers have inhaled so much dust and stuff, they are immune to the virus. Its science. Look it up, stupid," one of those who had joined said.

Following the gathering, the country's absolute ruler made an amazing address to the people, where they spoke about absolutely nothing important but

"We need an act like that. Stop asking why all the construction work is still going on amid all this crisis. Construction workers have inhaled so much dust and stuff, they are immune to the virus. Its science. Look it up, stupid,"

congratulated the people for being citizens of the country.

They also said, for the first time in the ruler's history, that they had heard the people and would put in place really draconian laws. When asked whether

measures would be enacted to prevent criticism of the government, they laughed and said that had been in place for a very long time and whether everyone in the country had been sleeping all this time.

Asked about whether people would be forcefully quarantined, the ruler said, with a glint in their eye, that quarantine was now called "picked up for interrogation".

"With the courts closed, where are they going to run to?" they said with a smile in their eye and a song in their heart.

"I understand that some people are concerned. But we must not panic. We must deal with the situation calmly. Call the hotline. Stay at home. Stay out of our way. Just stop buying all the potatoes. What are you even going to do with those anyway."

While the address was going well, when the ruler asked people to stop spitting on the roads, another mass protest broke out. And so it began. And so it ended.

VIRUS FACTS AND FICTION: Are tigers back in Ramna Park? They were never there

THE CORRESPONDENT WHO WILL NOT BE NAMED

There is panic in the air. Rightfully so. A dangerous criminal has just been released amidst a possible withering away of the power structures as we know them. But before we get too caught up in Lenin's dreams, let's address some of the more important rumours and absolutely not debunk them.

The rumour: Reports and lies have emerged of Royal Bengal Tigers returning to Ramna Park after all the privileged people in the city went into self-isolation. As the environment began to improve in literally three days, the tigers made the arduous journey from god knows where to post up in the park, known as the lungs of the city.

FALSE: There are no tigers in Ramna Park. People have also not really gone into self-isolation because had they done so, how did they know there were tigers in Ramna Park? None of that really makes any sense whatsoever. Experts say it is more possible that what was thought to be tigers were actually just unemployed cricketers roaring at each other.

The rumour: Disinfectant will now be sprayed all over the city using helicopters.

PARTIALLY TRUE: While not exactly disinfectants, they are what is normally known as chemtrails. Chemtrails are the way, smoky lines you see behind planes. Look up and you will be sure to notice them. The planes are spraying chemicals down from the sky to depopulate the earth. This has been going around for years.



But considering that the human population went up from 1 billion in 1800 to 7.616 billion in 2018, we can safely say the chemtrail plan has been a spectacular failure.

The rumour: The men in green will be picking up people from their homes and murdering them to stop the spread of some virus.

WE WISH: We don't really wish it, although there are proponents for it in this country. These people are very loud or maybe they are the only ones talking in this time of immense crisis.

But if you are outside to hang out with your friends, because for some reason you think your close friends would never give you a virus, then I guess it's a simple choice of harming a million or harming one.

The rumour: Mass prayers are the best way to fight a contagious infection.

UMM?: A highly infectious virus should be not be fought off with mass prayers. Does that make sense? If a virus spreads from one person to another, then why would you all congregate together and then pray it doesn't infect you. BUT, have you heard of the universal shared-consciousness theory? It posits that if a lot of people come together and will for something to happen, or if only one person does it, then the universe will listen. Dr Shahrukh Khan proved this theory in some movie where he said something about how the universe comes together to do what you want if you want it bad enough. So, we can be on the fence about this one, not because we want to, but you know it's the better option given considering how offended some of these folks can be.

The rumour: Women are safer on the roads as most of the men are gone. **FALSE:** Just no. They will come back. It's a pheromone thing.

Woman on the way for 38 years finally reaches office; gets fired

Due to the sensitive nature of this story, reader discretion is advised.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Her family members, colleagues and friends were stumped. Munnii, 24, had told everyone that she was on her way to work. That was in 1982. She reached only yesterday.

In a time before cellphones, the last call Munnii received was from her boss, who she told she was on the way and

would be in the office soon. But soon could not come soon enough.

Before that conversation, she had called her husband, who was also told that she was on the way. For 38 years, they all waited. Her husband remarried after a decade long wait, while her boss eventually hired someone to fill Munnii's position.

When she finally arrived yesterday, Munnii found herself without a job and a husband. She instantly broke down in tears.

"I was stuck in traffic. You know how horrible Dhaka traffic is!" she was quoted as saying.

She then set back on her way home. She has yet to reach.



Don't miss the second window of opportunity

More tests and better communication crucial

AS the coronavirus pandemic rages across the globe with increasing ferocity, it has become evident that many countries missed the first window of opportunity to contain the spread of the virus by taking timely measures. As of March 27, there are well over 24,000 deaths and 536,454 cases worldwide. The WHO, while criticising countries who wasted time in getting together resources to combat the pandemic, has urged that the second window of opportunity which is narrowing fast, should not be squandered. For Bangladesh, this should be a wake-up call to act fast and take all the steps needed to control the spread. So far, we have been slow to react, with many gaps in our contingency plans.

The government is trying to impose self-isolation and social distancing of people and regarding this, they have been only partially successful. There are still many areas where there are vulnerable people who need to be given special attention. Slum dwellers in particular, who live in small, congested areas, are at great risk. They must be given running water, soap and masks in order to protect themselves and others. Many people from Dhaka have gone to the villages in droves, as we have seen in pictures and videos. It is important to increase surveillance of these people and those they have contact with. Resources have to be mobilised to reach not only hospitals in Dhaka, but in other districts where we are getting reports of more and more cases. This includes PPEs, masks and surgical gloves for all health professionals who are at greatest risk when treating patients. Ventilators and ICU facilities need to be increased, which is the biggest challenge given how limited our resources are. According to a report in this paper, government hospitals have 508 ICU beds and private ones have 737, but only 10 are available for coronavirus patients in the capital. From what we have learnt through international media, a country like the US, which has some of the best hospitals in the world and despite being one of the richest nations, is struggling desperately to get more ventilators, PPE, masks and testing kits. We have not been hit as hard as countries in Europe but we must prepare for the worst and get more and more people tested. The numbers given by the IEDCR of 48 confirmed cases and 5 deaths do not give the real picture of the extent of the pandemic here because of the small number of people being tested. Although the government is trying to expand testing kits available to hospitals, we cannot emphasise enough that this has to be accelerated along with health facilities, before we lose the second window of opportunity as warned by WHO.

The government, moreover, must go all out in communicating with the public by giving the actual scenario of the pandemic. While self-isolation and social distancing are being imposed, most people are not aware of why this is so important, which results in violations of such measures. The gap in information must be removed so that people voluntarily cooperate with the directives. As a nation, we must all work together, each in our own capacity, to fight this virus.

Scarcity of testing kits daunting for Barishal doctors

Proper diagnosis crucial during pandemic

PATIENTS with fever are thronging hospitals and diagnostic centres on a daily basis, especially as fear has gripped the nation while more and more people continue to show symptoms of Covid-19. The shortage of testing kits across the country has further fuelled speculations surrounding those who are falling sick. A recent report sheds light on the dire conditions doctors are facing in Barishal.

According to an emergency medical officer of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) in Barishal, without testing, they cannot send patients to isolation wards as it may prove hazardous. However, failing to provide accurate diagnosis without conducting appropriate tests due to the shortage of testing kits, the doctors in Barishal are resorting to sending the "suspected" patients to isolation wards simply based on the symptoms shown by them. The report states that a total of 2,472 people are under home quarantine in the Barishal division. Currently, the isolation ward in SBMCH has 78 patients suffering from fever while many of them have reported dry cough and respiratory problems. It is yet to be confirmed who is infected by coronavirus and who is not.

Another grave concern for the doctors in Barishal, like elsewhere in the country, is the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE). The doctors in the medicine ward of SBMCH—the place for primary diagnosis, after which, depending on their condition, the patients are sent to the isolation ward—are at risk and distressed about the unavailability of basic masks, which they have been arranging for themselves. Unfortunately, this is not the first time that doctors' concerns regarding their safety have been raised.

Testing equipment as well as PPE are crucial during this time of crisis. As it is the season of different types of fever including the common flu, whose symptoms are similar to those of Covid-19, the right decision could be the difference between life and death for patients and doctors alike, and help prevent the spread of this contagion. Government intervention in this matter is of utmost importance. A special flight from China carrying 10,000 testing kits and 10,000 pieces of PPE landed in Dhaka on Thursday. The authorities should immediately allocate these crucial items in a sagacious manner so that they can be utilised most efficiently, wherever and whenever required. While Gonoshasthaya Kendra's timely initiative to provide affordable testing kits for the general public is surely a promise of hope, it will require some time. The government can provide the necessary backing to ensure the swiftness of operation in this regard. As the gravity of the threat continues to weigh heavily upon us all, we hope the government will extend its full support to the health care facilities grappling with the crisis.

Covid-19 and economic recovery

Concerted effort and strong intervention needed



AN OPEN DIALOGUE

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

THE Great Depression of the 1930s left its mark on every society and changed the way we think about life. The Great Recession, which started in 2008 with the collapse of Lehman Brothers, one of the most famous investment firms on Wall Street with a 158-year old history, marked another milestone that brought about phenomenal changes in the global landscape, particularly the US economy. Now, there is increasing fear that the upheaval triggered by the coronavirus pandemic may be leading to another massive round of readjustments as country after country cope with the economic slowdown, job losses, and financial meltdown that can only be characterised as an "economic pandemic". The question on everyone's mind is, how much worse can it get before we see a turnaround and how fast or how slow will it be?

In an earlier op-ed in *The Daily Star* on March 18, I wrote that many financial economists and investment bankers are afraid that the recovery of business, trade, and market orders from the coronavirus epidemic is more likely to be U-shaped than V-shaped, implying that the economy will move forward at a glacial pace. Seasoned market-savvy commentators such as Deutsche Bank Global Head of Economic Research, Peter Hooper, declared, "No V in other words. The coronavirus epidemic will weaken the US economy, and that weakness will last an uncomfortably long time."

Let it be known, though, that the idea of a U-shaped recovery is but a speculative one or a worst case scenario, since every country is fighting the economic and global fallout with full vigour. The US central bank, the Federal Reserve, rolled out its third emergency credit programme in two days, aimed at keeping the USD 3.8 trillion money market mutual fund industry functioning. The Bank of England cut interest rates to 0.1 percent, its second emergency rate cut in just over a week. The European Central Bank (ECB) launched a host of highly calibrated financial measures to head off a recession, including new bond purchases worth 750 billion Euro (USD 1.17 trillion). Saudi Arabia, Canada, South Korea, South Africa and Australia, among other nations, have also slashed their interest rates to new lows in recent weeks.

Governments of G20 countries have already announced, or are planning to do so soon, several trillion dollars worth of

stimulus that are set to boost consumer spending, support failing industries, and increase investment to stave off a deep global recession. China acted swiftly to unleash trillions of yuan of fiscal stimulus and South Korea pledged 50 trillion won (USD 39 billion).

Evidently, the Covid-19 induced downturn has affected every sector of the economy, both in developed as well as in the developing countries. At this stage, it is premature to measure the GDP decline or the rise in unemployment since we are still in the downhill trajectory. The stock market is taking the first hit and share prices have gone down 30 percent in the USA, and major benchmarks in Asia and Europe are falling. Millions are out of work at this moment and billions of people are under lockdown.

Secondly, the role and reach of the government, at the central and local government levels, are very fundamental in this crisis, which is unique. There are no pre-existing scripts to follow and you improvise as you go. The governments of China, US and Italy were caught unprepared, or "with their pants down". Initially, they each tried to suppress evidence, provide false hopes and continued in a state of denial. All governments have by now learnt their lessons and must find a balance between its responsibilities and propaganda.

Thirdly, to halt the spread of the virus, the government and people must agree on drastic steps that do not violate civil liberties. The "containment strategy" as recommended by the World Health Organization might involve forcible

to World Bank estimates, the annual global cost of moderately severe to severe pandemics is roughly USD 570 billion, or 0.7 percent of global income. The current Covid-19 pandemic is by all accounts an outlier, which means the economic cost in terms of lost income may well exceed 2 percent of world GDP.

Finally, the current economic crisis demands global collaboration. In the aftermath of the Great Depression, many countries adopted measures that harmed global trade, and followed a "beggar thy neighbour" policy. With the current Covid-19 pandemic potentially triggering a global economic slowdown, leaders are already looking for ways to shore up their countries' economies. UN chief Antonio Guterres, however, warned that a global recession, "perhaps of record



The Covid-19 induced downturn has affected every sector of the economy.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

How fast the economy can recover from this dystopian scenario will depend on five factors. First of all, the spread and ferocity of the virus have to be halted. As we have seen over the last three months from the experiences in China, Italy, Iran and Spain, everything is not within our control. Fortunately, China was able to finally push down the death rate and new cases with some incredible efforts from its state-run healthcare system and state-controlled administrative system. However, China's social model may not be applicable and relevant for the rest of the world. Italy, with a much smaller population and land mass, faltered because democracy, however imperfect, has its own sets of norms and practices.

imprisonment of healthy people in their homes, and this was practiced in China. Fortunately, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan brought the transmission of Covid-19 under control without such draconian measures. Therefore, the larger society must play a role in finding the right mix of containment and mitigation policies.

Fourthly, the government has to play a critical role in jumpstarting the economy or priming the pump. As people go back to their jobs, businesses and the self-employed need working capital as well as a well-functioning supply chain. During the downturn, many lost their capital, a big chunk of their retirement funds, and other forms of savings. According

dimensions", was a near certainty, and that "this is a moment that demands coordinated, decisive, and innovative policy action from the world's leading economies."

Ultimately, the approaches each country take to stimulate economic growth will have long-lasting effects, so they need to be chosen carefully. The key elements are preparedness, agility in response, and an all-out effort for recovery. As ECB President Christine Lagarde said, "Extraordinary times require extraordinary actions".

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and works in information technology. He is Senior Research Fellow at International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI), a think-tank in Boston, USA.

Against all odds



BLOWN' IN THE WIND

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

ANY bored individual who has nothing better to do than to read the comment threads while listening to some old songs on YouTube must have come across these two ideas: "Who is listening to this in 2020?" Or "So-and-so brought me here". Forced self-isolation has created opportunities for us to go back and forth in time to look at the past, look for uncanny resemblances and find food for future sustenance. The ongoing dystopian desolation, for instance, has made us revisit the Spanish flu pandemic that humanity survived a century ago.

Because of a contagious virus that thrives on crowds, we were forced to celebrate our Independence Day in a subdued manner. Our streets are eerily empty. The army was deployed on March 25; this time around, they were sworn in to protect us from threats and assuage fear in this moment of crisis. On this day in 1971, after the brutal carnage of Operation Searchlight, there must have been an unprecedented fear of not knowing who our allies are. Nearly fifty years ago, on this day, we must have been reeling from the ominous news of the "ides" (a date that divides) of March—a date that had finally set off the timer of our victory signalled earlier by Bangabandhu on March 7. We must have picked ourselves up from the terror and havoc unleashed by the Pakistani army, and made the spirit of freedom go viral. We must have pondered over the momentary setback, and tried to figure out our local situation in a global context.

I chanced upon this idea while reading 1971: *A People's History from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India* by the Toronto based Pakistani oral historian Anam Zakaria. The book deals with forgotten memories and locates them in the mills of state narratives, providing a rare insight into the way the history of the subcontinent unfolded at a crucial juncture of global history that was suffering from a bipolar disorder due to the Cold War. This ethnographic history brought me to political history—Srinath Raghavan's 1971: *A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*. Reading these two books side by side made me reflect on the odds that were against us, making our victory—

without taking away the slightest of credit from our valiant freedom fighters—nothing short of a man-made miracle.

The national narratives of the three countries involved in the "conflict" prefer to choose a preset line of thought that rests on "insularity" and "determinism". For us, 1971 is the War of Liberation where we realised our national dream of having a country of our own. According to Raghavan, from a Pakistani perspective, 1971 is a defining moment when "East Pakistan" carried out a secessionist uprising instigated by India that "betrayed the idea of Pakistan as the homelands for the Muslims of South Asia". For the Indians, "1971 is the third India-Pakistan war: a continuation and decisive resolution of the long standing military rivalry between the two countries as well as the contest between India's secular nationalism and Pakistan's two-nation-theory that posited Hindus and Muslims

At this insular moment of quarantine in which we are forced to reflect on the worldwide lockdown, Raghavan's thesis holds more water than we would like to admit. The huge onrush of refugees from then East Pakistan made India look for international support and aid. The US, still licking its wounds from the Vietnam War, had no appetite for getting involved in a regional dispute. The civil servants present in Dhaka, including Archer Blood, after whom the library at the American Center is named, sent a series of cables highlighting the "selective genocide" carried out by Pakistan. The White House under the Nixon administration, notwithstanding the sympathetic humanitarian stance of many Democratic senators, turned a deaf ear to the Pakistani carnage. On March 29, 1971, Nixon received a call from his foreign and strategic advisor Henry Kissinger and was told, "the use of power

Minister Edward Heath took a strong stance against Pakistani military action and told Pakistan's high commissioner in London in April that any aid to Pakistan would be guided by the British public's reaction to Pakistan's handling of the crisis. By mid-April, however, most of the Commonwealth countries sensed that Pakistan would split into two. The Canadian high commissioner informed Ottawa that "the Pakistan of Jinnah is dead" and the emergence of an independent East Bengal was inevitable.

Canada, which supplied nuclear reactors to both India and Pakistan, was a key provider of aid to both countries. It was the second largest contributor of aid to Pakistan and was responsible for making sure that Pakistan remained tied to the western bloc during the Cold War. No wonder, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, father of the incumbent Canadian premier, was among the first to be briefed by Pakistan about the justification of its military action. Trudeau was advised by his civil servants to use its position to convince Pakistan of the futility of its military action. In response, the Liberal government led by Trudeau adopted a public posture of neutrality while providing humanitarian aid to refugees from East Pakistan and urging both India and Pakistan to maintain restraint. The big question is: why didn't Canada use its leverage to help Bangladesh earn its freedom? One possible reason is that Canada was trying to diffuse secessionist movements in its own Quebec province. Only in October 1970 had Trudeau sent the army to tackle the paramilitary group Front de libération du Québec. Canada pursued a self-delusional plan, asking the UN to deploy its personnel to initiate a political process in which Pakistan would be told to accommodate greater autonomy to its eastern province and the refugees would find confidence in going back to their home. An idea that makes one reflect on the Rohingya crisis.

Reflecting on our independence during these days of isolation, one truth grips hold of me: every man for himself. Every country for itself. We must learn to secure our interests before we decide to shake (or not to shake) hands with others. But that learning must involve a thorough understanding of the stories that make our existence possible.

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Nearly fifty years ago, on this day, we must have been reeling from the ominous news of the "ides" (a date that divides) of March—a date that had finally set off the timer of our victory signalled earlier by Bangabandhu on March 7. We must have picked ourselves up from the terror and havoc unleashed by the Pakistani army, and made the spirit of freedom go viral.

as separate nations". The determinist view, on the other hand, holds that the 1947 Partition that drew the bird like map of Pakistan with two wings was a non-starter. Salman Rushdie depicts the idea beautifully in *Shame*, stating, "the fantastic bird of a place, two Wings without a body, sundered by the land-mass of its greatest foe, joined by nothing but God."

Raghavan, however, dismisses the inevitability of Pakistan's breakup theory by carefully examining the breakdown process in which the Bengalis insisted on autonomy, first by seeking linguistic freedom and then economic parity. For him, "far from being a pre-destined event, the creation of Bangladesh was the product of conjuncture and contingency, choice and chance". Raghavan thus emphasises on the international dimension of our independence, which is often lost in our nationalistic fervour.

against seeming odds pays off. Cause all the experts were saying that 30,000 people can't get control of 75 million." To which, Nixon added, "30,000 well-disciplined people can take 75 million any time...look at what the British did when they came to India...anyway I wish Yahya well". Why such moral bankruptcy? Because the Nixon administration was using Pakistan to open a secret channel of communication with China, and General Yahya was instrumental in coordinating Nixon's visit to Peking.

The British were much more pragmatic. They decidedly did not want to take any side "while recognising the relative importance and strength of India." Britain's core interests in South Asia remained on securing trade, investment and influence, while "limiting Chinese and Soviet influence particularly in the Indian Ocean". Prime

Economic threats in the time of corona



WHAT will be the impact of Covid-19 on the Bangladesh economy? Overall, it seems inevitable that the GDP gains that were expected to be realised in the current fiscal year are likely to be wiped out. The threat of a recession—

two subsequent quarters of negative growth—looms large, especially if the current situation is not resolved before the end of the fiscal year on June 30, 2020. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, addressing the nation on March 25, clearly recognised this when she said that the coronavirus has created a crisis throughout the world and that no country has been spared.

Covid-19 is bound to severely impact the global economy. Businesses across the globe are temporarily halting production and many may even face bankruptcy. Global supply chains are critically dependent on imported intermediary inputs from China and other countries currently under lockdown. Large transnational companies do not simply rely on East and South Asia for their inputs but also as a lucrative market for retail sales—Samsung and Apple, BMW or Volkswagen are coveted brands for the emerging markets' middle-class consumers.

As the Center for Policy Dialogue noted at its timely briefing (March 21), the global uncertainties will transmit through both production and trade channels to the domestic economy of Bangladesh. Export demand will decrease as buyers postpone or cancel their orders. Inward foreign direct investment is bound to decrease and portfolio investments may also shrink, aggravating the bear market already gripping the country's stock exchanges. Remittances are bound to be affected negatively due to job cuts, putting further pressure on Bangladesh's current account and its exchange rate. Last but not least, official development assistance inflows may suffer, putting downward pressures on the Annual Development Programme's public investment.

Domestic uncertainties will cause entrepreneurs to postpone private investment, impacting employment and earnings in both formal and informal sectors. Supply chains will be disrupted and higher prices will be demanded. Most fundamentally, people will have less money to spend and consumer demand will contract.

The pressure on public expenditure will also increase. First, health expenditures will need to be beefed up dramatically. But equally, income support measures will be required for low income households and the poor. Simultaneously, public revenues from imports, value added taxes and advance income taxes will be reduced—in this fiscal year and into the next. What will happen to Bangladesh's economy? One approach to estimate the impact of Covid-19 on the

economy of Bangladesh at this early stage is to project the likely trajectories of macro-economic aggregates such as public and private consumption and investment, as well as imports and exports. Another approach would be to look at the sectoral balances—based on what is happening to the economy on the ground—and aggregate the likely output losses over the coming months ahead. The Asian Development Bank, for its March 5 briefing on the impact of Covid-19 in the Asia-Pacific region, opted to follow the sectoral approach, reconciling the country estimates across the region. It identified several scenarios, depending on the duration that the virus would thwart economic activity

(BGMEA) reported that 385 factories had work orders cancelled worth USD 1.05 billion. Three domestic airlines, Regent, US-Bangla and Novoair, each said that their losses for March alone would range between Tk 25 and 40 crore (USD 3 million to 5 million). Major city hotels, which had reported a healthy occupancy ratio of 70 percent, saw this plunge to near-zero. All public and private functions are cancelled. The Civil Aviation Board, operating airports that have ground to a halt, is said to be losing Tk 1 crore in revenues per day. International airlines serving Bangladesh have cancelled their flights: Qatar through to end of April and Emirates till end of June. The Dhaka Stock Exchange had its lowest

20). These were both linked to travelers coming from Wuhan. Just two days before the Chinese New Year of the Rat (on January 25), when everybody is on holiday for seven days and travel mania grips the country, Chinese authorities ordered the complete lockdown of Wuhan—an 11 million industrial city. Soon after, the whole of Hubei Province with its 59.8 million people followed suit. When John Hopkins University started its tracking, cases infected in Hubei were reported to have reached 444 with 17 deaths (January 22). In a single week, infected cases went up eight-fold, with deaths rising more than seven-fold. One month into the pandemic, infected cases stood at 33,366, with 1,068 deaths (February

manufacturing and utilities sectors during three months, as well as a 40 percent output loss in hotels, restaurants and transport services sectors for six months, starting from March 2020. This will cause aggregate GDP for this fiscal year to contract by 9.6 percent, mainly in the fourth quarter. Sectors which will take more time to recover—hotels, restaurants, transport and tourism—will throw a shadow over the prospects for the next fiscal year. Temporary employment loss in the formal and informal sectors may affect 8.5 percent of the total work force, that is, up to 6 million persons.

These extraordinary challenges will require extraordinary responses. The economic toolbox consists of measures to stimulate the macro-economy, to lower interest rates and ensure liquidity; to provide soft loans and grants to businesses and households; to reschedule or write-off debts; to boost public expenditure in priority sectors such as health and food security; and—last but not least—to provide direct income support to persons and households. Some measures are unlikely to work in our extraordinary situation. Macro-economic stimulus—à la Keynes—is one of these. While we have massive underutilised resources in the labour market, we cannot bring them together for work at this time. In her address to the nation, the Prime Minister announced a Tk 5000 crore package for the business sector (nearly USD 600 million), explaining that this is to ensure that businesses will remain solvent and can continue to retain and pay their workers, even if facing less demand. Lowering interest rates will help to sustain the already fragile banking sector, but not address the real challenges of people's incomes and livelihoods. Rescheduling or debt write-offs have a dismal record—those that don't need it seem to benefit, whereas those that do are often deemed ineligible. Drastically boosting public expenditure to beef up health facilities, execute large-scale testing and train personnel for treatment of the infected, should definitely become a top priority. Ensuring food availability in the markets at affordable prices throughout the corona crisis period will be equally vital. But it will be most important to sustain people's livelihoods. Low-income households, old-age pensioners, vulnerable groups and other registered poor should all be granted basic monthly income support and food rations at the current poverty line income.

None of the above will stop the juggernaut of slowdown and recession hitting the country. However, it will help to ensure that the health-crisis-turned-economic crisis will not also become a full-scale social crisis, wiping out the gains of reduced poverty which have been achieved over the last decade.

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By last week, these vendors were seen sitting idle on Dhaka streets as city-dwellers increasingly opted to stay home and practice social distancing. The streets are now totally empty of these informal sector workers as a result of the ten-day lockdown. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

as well as the resulting output losses. Its assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on Bangladesh in a hypothetical "worst case" scenario was a reduction of 1.1 percent of GDP, or USD 3 billion, using 2018 prices. Output loss in the business and trade sector would be the largest, in excess of USD 1.1 billion. Agriculture would stand to lose in excess of USD 600 million. Some 900,000 workers, in formal and informal employment, are at risk of losing their jobs.

With the impact of Covid-19 unfolding as it does, these estimates may need to be thought of as a "best case" scenario. Just over the last few days, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association

turnover in more than five years, with earnings of companies plummeting and price-earnings ratios too high for buyers to venture into the market.

The economic impact will critically depend on the timing, duration as well as intensity of the crisis as it unfolds. The Hubei province of China offers some pertinent insights. On Dec 31, 2019, Chinese health officials reported a cluster of 41 suspect cases of pneumonia to the World Health Organization (WHO). Within a week, Chinese authorities identified the novel coronavirus (nCoV, January 7, 2020). On January 11, the first death occurred in Wuhan, whereas the first cases were identified in Thailand (January 13) and the US (January

11.) Another month later, the number of cases shot up to 67,336 with 3,046 deaths. Only in the ninth week of the epidemic, the number of cases stabilised at 67,800 and 3,152 deaths (March 23). Some semblance of normality is slowly returning to Wuhan after more than two months of complete lockdown, rigorously enforced.

Assuming a two-month complete lockdown for Bangladesh provides a preliminary basis for some corrective computation to arrive at a credible assessment of the economic impact of Covid-19 in Bangladesh. We compute the impact of a 40 percent output loss in the business and trade sector as well as the light/heavy

The centrality of reason

The key lesson of the coronavirus pandemic



IT is one of the less salubrious facts of life that at times of profound concern and insecurity, charlatans, cranks and confidence tricksters come out of the woodwork. As the world cowers with fear at what the global threat of coronavirus will wreak, hucksters and snake-oil salesmen ply their trade with abandon. Whether it's colloidal silver or chloroquine in the West or cow's urine in India, reports are trickling in from all over the world about how a vulnerable public is being gullible into buying into myths that have no basis in fact.

It turns out, however, that nothing quite clears the public mind like a good old pandemic. Gradually, slowly, a consensus is growing around the world that at a time of crisis, our most critically important tool is fact—and by extension, a scientific temperament founded on rationality.

What's surprising is that it's taking this long. You would think that faced with what is one of the most dangerous, enigmatic

pathogens in recent history, people would instinctively look to the most dependable, factual sources to figure out how to deal with this existential threat.

Alas, you would be quite wrong. Science can take a back seat for all sorts of reasons. While the whole world scrambled to put in place social distancing to ward off coronavirus transmission, extraordinary images appeared of over 50,000 people huddling in Lakshmipur, Bangladesh, for a religious prayer. In the US, evangelical leader Jerry Falwell Jr, is welcoming students back to Liberty University while universities and schools—and in many cases whole states—are closing down.

Obsessive ideological bias is another enemy of common sense. The US and UK are now ruled by parties whose faith in markets is close to doctrinal. It's almost as if the Bible had opened with: "And God said, Let there be markets." Anything run by the government is anathema.

Now that push has come to shove, free market ayatollahs have been obliged to swallow their pride. Britain's chancellor of the exchequer Rishi Sunak has presented a budget that's given free marketers short shrift.

"Even during the second world war, the role

of the government did not extend to funding jobs across every sector of the economy," The Guardian observed. "Rishi Sunak ... revealed that the government would establish a coronavirus jobs retention scheme for all employers, large or small, that will cover 80% of wages, up to £2,500 a month. The scheme will initially be open for three months, but could be extended, and will be backdated to 1 March."

The United States has the redoubtable President Donald J Trump at its helm, who on a given day has the ability to show the middle finger to science, fact, and even coherence and common decency. His daily press meet has been a clown show of breathtaking mendacity, self-contradiction and incoherence. His chums at the Republican Party and the friendly choir at Fox news have been only too happy to egg him on.

Yet surprise, surprise! After the standard kabuki dance and nail-biting drama of Congressional negotiations, the US Senate has passed at press time (which the House is expected to pass and Trump sign in double quick time) an unprecedented USD 2 trillion bill that looks straight out of a Soviet five-year-old plan.

"The legislation would send direct payments of \$1,200 to Americans earning

up to \$75,000 ... and an additional \$500 per child," according to the New York Times. "It would substantially expand jobless aid, providing an additional 13 weeks and a four-month enhancement of benefits, extending them for the first time to freelancers and gig workers and adding \$600 per week on top of the usual payment."

In addition, the law provides USD 350 billion in federally guaranteed loans to small businesses, establishes a USD 500 billion government lending programme for distressed companies and gives USD 100 billion to hospitals on the front lines of the pandemic.

Of course, the Republicans tried to pull a fast one—the initial plan had a USD 500 billion fund to bail out companies that was entirely at the discretion of the Department of Treasury, essentially a no-strings-attached slush fund for Trump in an election year, but Democrats cried bloody murder. Now, no companies controlled by Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, members of the cabinet or Congress will be eligible for bailout funds.

This is not to say that the battle on behalf of science and reason is over. In the US, Trump is already getting antsy about the lockdown. He said he might open up businesses by Easter, which is less than three

weeks away. Experts are aghast, warning that that could be catastrophic for public health, but respect for science, alas, has never been Trump's strong suit.

Nonetheless, for all of Trump's antics, it is Dr Anthony Fauci—an immunologist who is the chief of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases—who has become the most trusted voice in the federal government (rumour has it that this is annoying the perennially thin-skinned Trump). In the absence of clear federal leadership, states are taking aggressive measures to mitigate the coronavirus disaster. Democratic governors are leading the way, but many Republican governors are not far behind.

The upshot is clear. As the global pandemic continues to wreak havoc, the public mind is getting focused on how science is the only way to understand, address and mitigate one of the biggest public health challenges we have witnessed in our lifetime.

We are finding out the hard way that when push comes to shove, there is no alternative to reason and facts. May this sober realisation endure.

Ashfaq Swapan is a contributing editor for Siliconer, a digital daily for South Asians in the United States.

QUOTABLE Quote

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE
(1844-1900)
German philosopher, cultural critic, poet and composer

There are two different types of people in the world, those who want to know, and those who want to believe.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Cavalry sword
- 6 Urban oasis
- 10 Want badly
- 11 Vigilant
- 13 Valentine's Day flowers
- 14 Cookout spot
- 15 French friend
- 16 Rink material
- 18 Powerful people
- 19 Resort city of California
- 22 - loss (confused)
- 23 Stubborn animal
- 24 Songs like Ella Fitzgerald
- 27 Velocity
- 28 Top-notch
- 29 Take in

DOWN

- 1 Tussle
- 2 Kitchen come-on
- 3 Pesto herb
- 4 Genesis woman
- 5 Stands up to
- 6 Origami need
- 7 Chicken - king

30 Cheer-leading stunts

35 Woods-man's tool

36 Sandwich meat

37 Objective

38 Fashionably dated

40 Martini garnish

42 Friend of Threepio

43 Work of fiction

44 Uses a needle

45 Wasn't thrifty

8 Following

9 Kris - (Santa)

12 Flung

17 Busy one in Apr.

20 Beat at chess

21 Louvre entrance designer

24 African expanse

25 Smooth-talking sorts

26 Bening of "Captain Marvel"

27 Church speeches

29 Relaxing retreat

31 Chases off

32 Ingenuous

33 Donated

34 Do refinery work

39 Join the crew

41 Cut off

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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

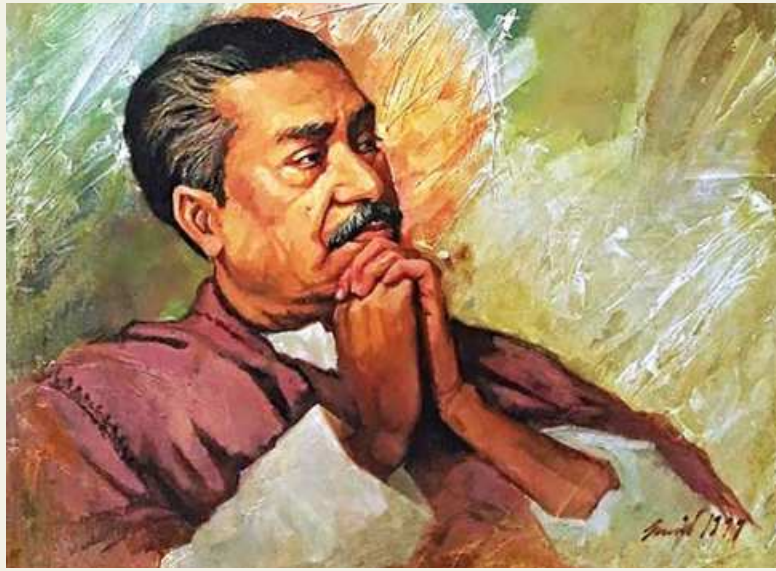
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POETRY

One Ardent Map of Bangladesh*

HASAN HAFIZUR RAHAMAN
(TRANSLATED BY KAJAL BANDYOPADHYAY)



Even one individual turns into
an incomparable symbol priceless.
We all then wave it like a map.

A map and not a high-priced sapphire
which will decorate every separate ring-finger
with heavenly glamour.
That is rather lonely, exactly like the sun—
exposed to all eyes.
This map is in touch with all of us,
but we couldn't touch.
Map similar to every personal horizon,
cruelly remote but so closely placed.

This individual can be called your childhood memory.
In sorrows of billions of nights, in rocks of billions of deaths,
you will find him an irreversibly white lily
made mite by mite of sharp streams
of seventy millions of vehement rivers of blood.

Now he is free, free like a map,
yet wave him, wave, wave him as much as you want.
And every time look at the crimson colour of your heart,
grow compact in the total greenery of your watery surroundings.

He is, with his whole body sprawling, an ardent map of Bengal, including all.
He is perhaps one voice with them till death.

*Published in the *Dainik Bangla* on 10th January, 1972

The translator, Kajal Bandyopadhyay is a Bangladeshi poet, writer and academician.

Oborodh Awake!

MITALI CHAKRAVARTY

The keepers of law
The keepers of borders

What borders?
Between nations
What law?
Between stations

Army men, Policemen —
Men who will protect women

Violate, watch and rape
A twenty-one-year-old
A seventeen-year-old
A fifteen-year-old and more...

Who do we trust?
Who will protect the society from lust?
Dust unto dust
Sans wine, sans song, sans singer,
Sans justice, sans ethics, sans morals

Products of Oborodh?

What will Chitragupta write in the final analysis?

In this life, when will we learn to fight?

To Protect what is right?

When will justice become unblind,
Dance the Tandava
Till evil is reduced to rubble?

When will the Oborodh-basini Rokeya-like rise?

Mitali Chakravarty's poetry has been published online and as part of anthologies. Some of her poetry has recently been translated into German and read in a PEN International symposium.



FICTION

The Reincarnation Song

ANIK KHAN

So, I was about to slip under my bedcovers to give my back some rest and close my eyes and savour the moment till I fell asleep. Just then, I heard this tune. I stopped in my tracks to listen carefully. It had this strange hypnotic lull to it. Slowly but surely, my consciousness and the melody became one but not before I managed to Shazam it.

I woke up in my bed to find myself lying at an odd angle. I never slept in that fashion. I blamed bad dreams without thinking too much. As I walked to the bathroom and took my brush out and put toothpaste on it, I started to hum a tune. I looked myself in the mirror and as realisation dawned on me, I saw my eyes growing big. It was the same tune that I heard last night! It had been so hypnotic that I didn't remember falling asleep to it. I rushed to my bed, the toothbrush dangling from my mouth, and grabbed my phone. I remembered as much that I had used Shazam and it had given me a definite result. For those of you don't know, Shazam is a mobile app that can tell you the name of an unknown song. I opened the app and after a time of loading, there it was! The first result of my many song queries. It said:

The Reincarnation Song by Unknown Artist.
Unknown artist, huh? Could it be a very old song? Maybe that's why the database doesn't have the name of the artist.

I freshened up quickly and felt like I was possessed by a crazed maniac who had to know more about the song. Breakfast be damned, I opened my laptop and searched "The Reincarnation Song." None of the results matched what I had in mind but I still clicked the first video that came up. As it started playing, I realised that it's not the tune I was



looking for. I clicked the next video on the search results but I was disappointed. I went as far as the fourth page of the results and still couldn't find what I was looking for. I pushed my computer away but I was far from giving up. Being unable to find the song only helped to increase my curiosity tenfold. I started to think.

How come Shazam identified the song but none of the music providers have that song. This kind of stuff is very unlikely to happen. Sometimes, Shazam can identify unreleased tracks because of their ID3 tags (unique song signature) but I don't

think anybody in my neighbourhood is related to music business. I would have known if any of them were making music close enough to me for me to be able to hear it from my bedroom.

Even though I could not find the tune on the internet I still had it seared in my memory. It was playing in my head as if in a loop. Over and over again. I gave in to the urge and started humming. I started getting flashbacks to the previous night and I realised that I was exactly in the same spot from hours ago when I heard the tune for the very first time. Something strange began to happen.

The sound of hard plastic crunching shook me out my reveries. I looked out the window to locate the source of the sound and found that the banana tree that is right outside and can be seen from my window, looked somewhat different. At first, I could not put my finger on exactly what was out of place but then it hit me. The blades of a particular leaf were torn open and scrunched up in such a way that it almost resembled the shape of a face.

I totally freaked out when that face started to speak, "People don't usually pay attention to the Reincarnation Song. They are too busy to care what happens in nature. But, you my dear, you heard it. Your humming left no doubt."

I said, "What is going on? How can you speak like that? You are just a tree."

"Little man, you have yet to see many wonders of this world. For someone like you, I bet the world is just waiting to open up. I would be patient if I were you."

If I expected a tree to ever speak, I would have imagined it having an ancient voice but that tree spoke with the voice of someone who is evergreen, literally. I had so many questions. I still could not believe what I was witnessing. Words seemed to pour out of me, "What is the meaning of the song and what's it got to do with you?"

"It's the tune we play when a new offshoot is growing. It's like being reincarnated. A song for such an occasion is aptly named, won't you agree?"

"I suppose, yeah. Its super catchy too. Oh, and one more thing, do you guys use internet? I mean Apple Music doesn't have your song but Shazam can identify it. Is it

because you use a secret version of the web like the Dark Web or something?"

The banana tree laughed as if amused. It was almost quite an echo of the Reincarnation Song. "We don't use technology like you. But I can guess what made Shazam to recognise the song. Maybe another human made friends with another banana tree and instead of recording the song and putting it on the web, they just tagged a phantom song with the same beat, a song that doesn't exist, and called it "The Reincarnation Song." Maybe you should find that person. Because, you know, people like you who can listen to our song are very rare. It could be the union of a lifetime."

None of it made any sense. I started to speak again, "But Mr. Banana Tree..."

The tree was reverting back to its old shape, "It was nice knowing you, little human. Sadly, it's time for my photosynthesis. Perhaps, we will meet again."

The shape of the face was gone from the leaf blade. I had so many things left to ask. I desperately heaved a long sigh. At the end of the day, I wrote down this bizarre account of events related to the Reincarnation Song, lest I should forget it or call it a fluke of imagination.

And you, you who is reading this at this very moment, if you ever talked to a banana tree or heard the Reincarnation Song, I really need to speak to you. You can find my name and details on this page.

Anik Khan is currently a student of English literature at Khulna University. He writes poetry and short stories and also does translations of contemporary literature.

Nationalism, Patriotism, Cosmopolitanism: Tagore's Ambiguities and Paradoxes (Part I)

MOHAMMAD A. QUAYUM

The American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines." Certainly, Tagore was above this puerile mindset. He was never concerned about perceived inconsistencies in his work, as his mind was large and dynamic and given to multiple viewpoints. It was also free to evolve with time, an important consideration for Tagore as freedom of thought was vital to him in his search for truth. In his interview with the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*, he stated, "Opinions are constantly changed and rechanged only through the free circulation of intellectual forces and moral persuasion." This freedom and the possibility of mutation of existing ideas led to occasional disparities and incongruities in his views. In a letter to his friend Pramatha Chaudhuri in January 1885, Tagore acknowledges the presence in his mind of a constant tension between "two opposing forces [that were] constantly in action" and which worked like the "swing of the pendulum." Isaiah Berlin saw this push and pull tendency in Tagore's imagination – of not giving in to one side of the argument but considering both and trying to tread "the difficult middle path" – as "the rarest form of heroism."

Given this polarity and the subsequent incongruity and ambiguity in Tagore's imagination, it is not surprising that his critics have interpreted him in various and often contrary ways. For instance, while Tagore was appreciated as a religious and spiritual poet by his Western contemporaries, in India some have labelled him an apostate. Some critics hold the view that "Tagore was intolerant, bigoted and anti-Muslim in his consciousness," yet conversely, I have argued that he was a champion of Hindu-Muslim unity, and that his critical gaze focused primarily on the Hindu Brahmins. As prominent historian Ramachandra Guha observes, "He had been accused of being anti-Western by some, of being a colonial agent by others, seen as too much of a patriot for the foreigner and as not patriotic enough by the Indian." In 1916, Tagore was the subject of an assassination plot in the US by the Ghadr Party for his lukewarm support of India's freedom struggle, but in 1917, when he wanted to dedicate his book *Nationalism* to US President Woodrow Wilson, it was not allowed as Tagore was suspected of "being involved in anti-British plots hatched by Indian revolutionaries (Ghadrites) in America."

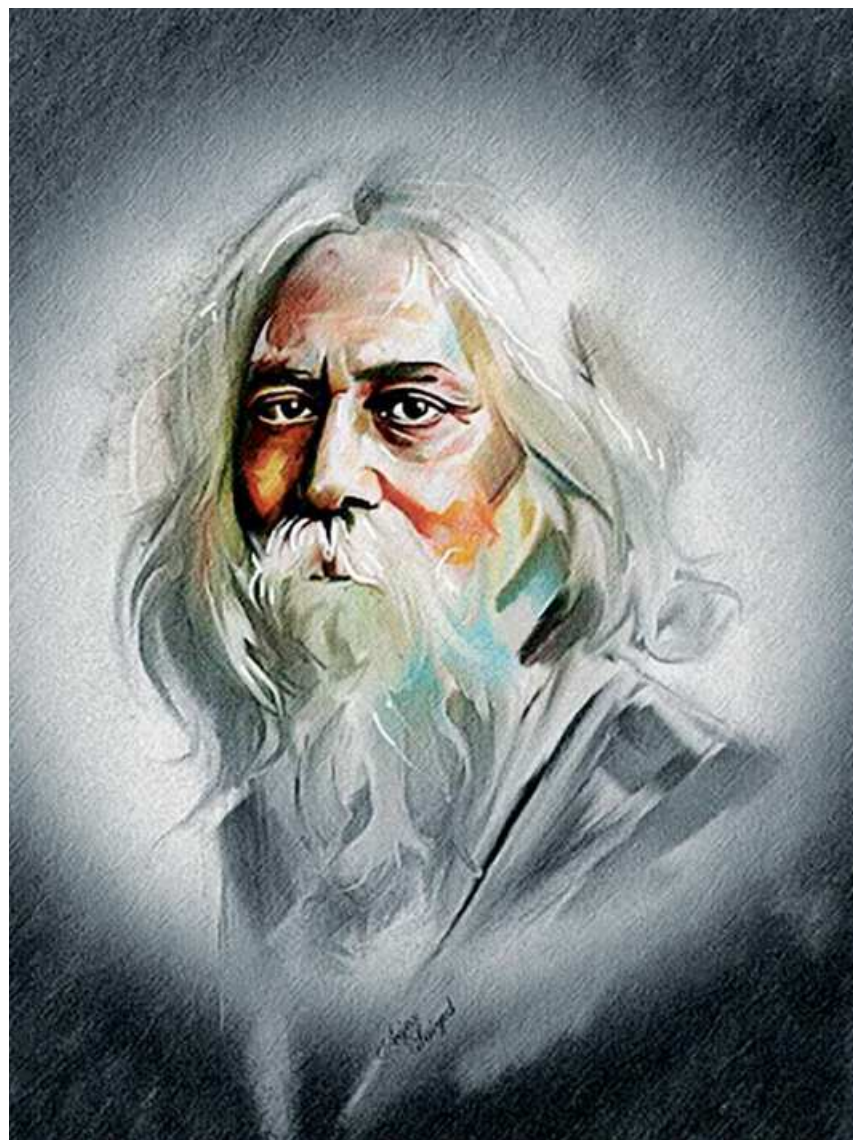
Tagore, as we know, was an avowed critic of nationalism. He lambasted nationalism in many of his works, most visibly in his book *Nationalism*, but also in various of his poems, novels, short stories, plays, letters, lectures, essays and articles. Critics generally

agree that Tagore was firmly opposed to nationalism as defined in the Western sense, and favoured a cosmopolitan worldview instead. For example, in a letter to Aurobindo Mohan Bose, dated 19 November 1908, Tagore wrote, "I took a few steps down that road [of nationalism] and stopped: for when I cannot retain my faith in universal man standing over and above my country, when patriotic prejudices overshadow my God, I feel inwardly starved."

Tagore's tirades against nationalism were so pronounced and strident that one would think that it would be almost impossible to sell him as a nationalist. Yet, in spite of all that he had to say denouncing nationalism, paradoxically a number of his critics and admirers have come to think of him as a nationalist, even a forerunner of Indian nationalism, who helped shape India's nationalist perspective. Foremost among them is Nehru, who in his book *The Discovery of India*, comments, "More than any other Indian... [Tagore] has helped to bring into harmony the ideas of the East and the West, and broadened the bases of Indian nationalism." Likewise, Guha argues that despite Tagore's strong anti-nationalist stance, his writings created formative influences on the nationalist thinking of both Gandhi and Nehru, forcing both of them to embrace a kind of nationalism that was inclusive, not exclusive, and "that sought not just political freedom for the Nation but equal rights for all its citizens."

In 2016, Trinamool Congress MP Sugata Bose had the following to say in Parliament: "I sometimes fear that those who are defining nationalism so narrowly will end up one day describing Rabindranath Tagore as anti-national if they read some of the sentences in his book on nationalism." All these indicate that in spite of Tagore's vociferous condemnation of nationalism, there is an increasing tendency, especially in India, to affiliate him with nationalism and nationalist politics, either to obtain leverage from his genius or to ensure his virtuosity cannot be used against the establishment.

Part of the enigma, of course, arises from Tagore's incongruity as a writer and his ambivalent imagination. He was an anti-nationalist who nevertheless loved and supported his country perhaps more than anyone else at his time. He always had the well-being of his country at heart, although never to the exclusion of other countries or ahead of his own moral sensibility. In other words, he was an anti-nationalist who was not necessarily opposed to the idea of "nation" for his country but to the ways in which its identity and future was being defined and charted. In *The Home and the World*, Tagore's protagonist and doppelganger Nikhil says, "I am willing to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater



than country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it." This willingness to serve the country while shunning the concept of revering Nation as Deity, undoubtedly makes his readers wonder how to arrive at a fair assessment of Tagore and his vision of nationalism; how to locate him in the context of his country vis-a-vis the ideology he opposed.

Tagore was an anti-nationalist who, paradoxically, as Pound wrote in a letter to Harriet Monroe, "[had] sung Bengal into a nation." Pound made that statement in 1912, long after Tagore had renounced nationalist ideology in his letter to Aurobindo Mohan Ghose cited above. Moreover, bewildering though it may seem, Tagore is the only person in history who has been associated with four national anthems: he wrote and composed "Jana Gana Mana," the national anthem of India; did not write but composed "Bande Mataram"; did not write but composed the national anthem of Sri Lanka; and wrote and also set to music the national anthem of Bangladesh.

This is extraordinary for someone who was an avowed anti-nationalist and saw nationalism, to quote from

his different works, as "an epidemic of evil," "a source of war and violence," a thing of "moral perversion" and "the greatest menace to man." Tagore first sang "Bande Mataram" at the 1896 session of the Indian National Congress, and it became hugely popular during the *Swadeshi* movement and later the *Swaraj* movement. It was adopted as the Congress Party's national anthem and sung by its Working Committee Members at all their gatherings. For the entire duration of India's independence movement, "Bande Mataram" remained a source of untold inspiration and sometimes even an incitement to violence for nationalist "troopers." The song attained a cultish status, especially in Hindu political circles, and was described by Aurobindo Ghosh in 1907 "as a 'mantra,' or motivating chant. "The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism," he stated.

Thus, ironically, although Tagore did not actively support Gandhi's *Swaraj* movement, the song he composed and first sang at a Congress gathering continued to play its magic role, as thousands of people marched in

demonstrations and went to jail for singing this song. Interestingly, when Tagore was asked by Rothenstein and Yeats to sing "Bande Mataram" at the dinner organised in his honour by Yeats in 1912, he refused to sing it but hummed the tune instead. It is unlikely that Tagore actually could not remember the lyrics of the song; it is more plausible that he chose not to perform a ritual of nationalism for this group from which he had continued to distance himself since 1907, when he decided to withdraw from the *Swadeshi* movement.

Apart from "Bande Mataram," which Aurobindo once described as the "National Anthem of Bengal" and which generally enjoys the status of India's "national song" (although it has no constitutional status), Tagore is also the author and composer of two national anthems, those of India and Bangladesh, and composer of the Sri Lankan national anthem. Obviously, these songs have been igniting nationalist sentiment in the hearts of millions of people every year in these countries. They encourage the people to embrace and extol an ideology that the author himself had so vociferously condemned and was so deeply opposed to, and they will continue to do so for who knows how long. That is where the major irony and dichotomy of Tagore's imagination lies; he who spurned and castigated nationalism, or "idolatry of the nation," was to become a source of fetishisation of the nation through two of his songs. Though a fervent critic of Gandhi's *Swaraj* that led to "unproductive hatred of the foreigner," his songs now symbolise nationalism in at least two countries.

Moreover, Tagore believed in freedom of the individual, which is to say that the individual should have absolute freedom to accept or reject an idea or practice – but so far as his two national anthems are concerned, the citizens of these countries have little choice in the matter, as it is their "sacred obligation" to stand up every time the national anthem is played. In a supreme court ruling in India in 2016, it was made "mandatory for movie halls to play Jana Gana Mana and for people to stand up as part of their 'sacred obligation' to the national anthem." In Bangladesh, too, as Farooq writes in *Banglapedia*, "There are approved rules of showing respect to the national anthem by civilians and persons in uniform, and there are rules regarding singing the national anthem at educational institutions and all other public places. For armed forces, there

Mohammad A. Quayum is the author of *Beyond Boundaries: Critical Essays on Rabindranath Tagore (Bangla Academy, 2014)* and editor of *The Poet and His World (Orient Longman, 2011)* and Tagore, *Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism (Routledge, 2020)*.



FICTION

A Pale Blue Star

ABDULLAH RAYHAN

Listening to summer breeze, smelling the raw pages of an old book my mind went wandering into the sea of nonexistent dreams. I drifted there like a lost sailor. And I hunted for a thousand-year old pale blue star.

I swiftly drifted on the soft surface of clouds. A flock of books was flying in the distant, I could see them in the light of a large moon, larger than the size of a palm. The pages of the book fluttered. I could hear the sound clearly.

The star I searched for was a thousand years old and it was pale blue. I had to find it quickly. If I didn't, the star would die.

I didn't want it to die. This was the star I prayed to when I was a child. All my prayers were granted. I got to smell all the colors, I got a new sense to understand words of a falling leaf or of a foggy ripple in the wind. It gave me a blob of cloud in a blue jar, it stands beside my bed. Its touch is like stardust with the smell of a full moon. At night, the cloud glows within the jar, it swirls around and twinkles like a herd of fireflies. It floods my room with a faded yellow spectrum and with the lights leaks the smell of damped earth.

How could I ignore the poor condition of the star after all it had given me!
To save the star I had to reach it and write

a little poem all over its body. The star would rise again when I sing it aloud. Then it will be fit again like our sun.

But where was my star? Where should I go? Which path should I follow?

I suddenly remembered something my father used to say. "Books are your true friends. They will always guide you to the right path."

I trusted my father's advice and followed the flying books.

They flew and flew and I walked and swam leaving disturbed clouds behind. A long trail of my movement curved the sky. Light glowed through it as if it was an eye of a child in the sunshine.

I fixed my gaze on the books, didn't move my eyes from them. They had my full attention and that was a mistake. I crashed into a big object. It was rectangular in size and was a bit tick. Light glowed from its surface. The light blinded my vision. The prettiest part of the poem fell out of my heart. I lost those words, and I myself was lost. I couldn't find my way around the object for quite a while.

My vision didn't help me so I took the help of my instinct. I pushed on the obstacle before me. I kept pushing it like a blind man



pushes a cart into an empty compartment, unsure of its mobility. I tried to go under it but failed. I tried to go over it but couldn't reach the top. So I kept pushing whatever was

before me and walked by my side. After a bit, I was able to pass it. I overcame my obstacle properly.

But another problem emerged before me. The flying flocks of books were out of my sight, they were gone.

I felt a tremble within me. Desperation shook my senses and my consciousness danced within like a madman. I have to find out a way to reach my star. I had to and I don't have much time.

Without thinking anything I ran toward where I never went. I ran over the soft clouds. Fireflies hit against my face, some even got stuck on my shirt. But I didn't notice them since I was in a great hurry.

The fireflies stuck and glowed against my black dress. And I ran. It was as if I was a sprinting night sky myself. Like a summer day my body started to warm up, breeze left my nostrils, sweat leaked through my skin. But I kept running. I had to keep running because I would save my star no matter what.

Finally, I reached my star, dimmed and old. There was not enough time. The sun would rise on my side of the earth soon and I would be moved to my ordinary position in existence.

I weakly knelt before my star. I touched

its pale blue body and rubbed my hands on its wrinkled skin. I could feel the curves on it under my palm. The touches were soft and smelled like pages of books.

I didn't waste any more time and set to writing on the star,

"All the breath that reached my heart For thousands of years apart, Let them merge into a single life, Let them form a single art."

I curved the lines onto the wrinkly body of my star and recited the sentences cheerfully. But my star didn't glow. I sang again but nothing happened. I sang again and again and again but my star remained true in its silence and wrinkles.

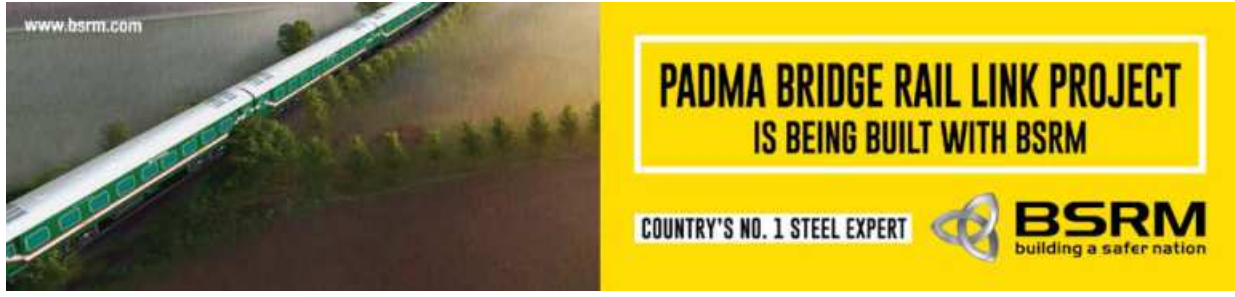
But I didn't stop, but I was starting to fade away, but I kept reciting.

It was morning. I returned back to my bed. I wept. I couldn't save my star, it died like a million others I didn't care about.

The next day when I looked across the evening sky through the veils of my window, I saw the star glowing at me.

It flew on to my finger as a firefly. It stayed there for a few moments before disappearing.

Abdullah Rayhan is a student of the Department of English at Jahangirnagar University.



PADMA BRIDGE RAIL LINK PROJECT IS BEING BUILT WITH BSRM

COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT **BSRM** building a safer nation



A fish trader sitting idle at Karwan Bazar kitchen market as there is no buyer turning up. Dhaka turned into a ghost city on the second day of a 10-day general holiday yesterday, with the streets almost deserted as people shut themselves in their homes. The government declared the holiday to slow down the spread of novel coronavirus.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Govt falters in its promise

Failed to publish fresh razakars' list by 50th Independence Day

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The government has failed to keep the promise to publish a fresh list of razakars by the 50th Independence and National Day.

Amid nationwide outrage and angry protests, the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs on December 18 last year suspended the flawed list of razakars three days after its publication.

After huge criticism, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq said they would publish a fresh list by this Independence Day after proper scrutiny.

"We first thought we could publish the list by March 26, but we could not," he told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

"Later, we decided that we would publish the new list by April after the election to the Central Command Council of Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad. Newly elected leaders of the organisation and renowned local people like physicians and educationists will review and prepare the new list," Mozammel said.

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FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

Constituent assembly meeting summoned



Padmaja Naidu, Chairman of the Indian Red Cross Society, calls on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at his official residence on March 28, 1972.

MARCH 28, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO MEET ON APRIL 10

The president of Bangladesh summons the first session of the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh to meet at 10:00am on April 10 at the Assembly Building in Tejgaon, Dhaka. This will be the first meeting of the members of the Constituent Assembly of the newborn state.

BANGABANDHU ASSURES REHABILITATION OF DISPLACED WOMEN
Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman says today that all efforts are being made to rehabilitate the displaced women

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

UK PM tests positive

Global death toll crosses 25,000; US tops world in virus cases as Xi offers help to Trump; IMF chief says world is in recession

AFP, Madrid

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson became the first major world leader to test positive for the coronavirus yesterday as the death toll from the pandemic crossed 25,000.

In a grim milestone, the United States overtook China as the country with the most coronavirus cases, while seeing an unprecedented amount of newly unemployed amid fears of a global economic meltdown.

On the economic front, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva yesterday said the pandemic has driven the global economy into a downturn that will require massive funding to help developing nations.

"It is clear that we have entered a recession" that will be worse than in 2009 following the global financial crisis, she said in an online press briefing.

And Africa's economic powerhouse South Africa yesterday became the latest nation on the continent to start life under lockdown as it reported its first COVID-19 deaths.

Johnson, whose country has seen more than 11,600 declared coronavirus cases and 578 deaths, said he had developed mild symptoms over the previous 24 hours and was self-isolating after testing positive. His Health Secretary Matt Hancock also tested positive for the virus.

Spain reported that its death toll had



hit 4,858 after 769 people died in 24 hours, a record one-day figure for fatalities and far higher than in Italy, which counted 662 deaths in its last daily update on Thursday night.

Europe has suffered the brunt of the coronavirus crisis in recent weeks, with millions across the continent on lockdown and the streets of Paris, Rome and Madrid eerily empty.

Prime Minister Edouard Philippe warned that France -- reeling from the deaths of more than 1,600 people including a 16-year-old girl -- was facing difficult days ahead.

"We find ourselves in a crisis that will last, in a health situation that will not improve any time soon," Philippe said.

But focus is turning from Europe to the United States, where the number of known infections reached almost 86,000 on Friday, higher than both China and hard-hit Italy.

US President Donald Trump, who has been accused of downplaying the enormous scale of the crisis, spoke by telephone with China's Xi Jinping who said the two countries needed to "unite to fight" the pandemic.

"China has been through much & has developed a strong understanding of the Virus. We are working closely together. Much respect!" Trump tweeted after the call.

The warm words were in contrast to

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

OC withdrawn over custodial death of man in Barguna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The officer-in-charge of Amtali Police Station in Barguna was withdrawn yesterday following the death of a 55-year-old man at the police station on Thursday.

Abul Bashar, the OC, was withdrawn and attached to Barguna Police lines in an order signed by the superintendent of police in the district, our Patuakhali correspondent reports quoting Tofayel Ahmed, additional superintendent of police.

The hanging body of Shanu Hawlader, 55, a farmer, was found at the police station on Thursday morning, three days after he was arrested.

Two police officers

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



PRAYER TIMING MARCH 28

Fajr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4-45 12-45 4-45 6-20 7-45
JAMAAT 5-20 1-15 5-00 6-25 8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



সবাই মাইনা চললে
করোনা
থাকবে যে দূরে...



হাতটা কিন্তু নিয়মিত
ধুয়ে রাখা চাই



হাঁচি-কাশির সময় মুখটা
ঢাকবেন বোন আর ভাই



যাব না যেখানে আছে
লোকের সমাগম



করোনার লক্ষণ দেখলে
সরকারি হটলাইনে
দেব ফোন

আপনজনের ভালোর কথা ভেবে নিয়ম মেনে চলুন।

নিজে সচেতন হন, অন্যকে জানান।

করোনাভাইরাস প্রতিরোধে, আছি বাংলাদেশের পাশে।

জ্বর বা কাশির সঙ্গে শ্বাসকষ্ট অথবা করোনা আক্রান্ত স্থানে
ভ্রমণ অথবা সম্ভাব্য রোগীর সংস্পর্শে আসার ইতিহাস থাকলে

৩৪ দিন নিয়ম অনুসারে ঘরে থাকুন এবং
নিচের নম্বরগুলোতে যোগাযোগ করুন:

স্বাস্থ্য অধিদপ্তর: ৩৩৩ স্বাস্থ্য বাতায়ন: ১৬২৬৩ আইইডিসিআর: ১০৬৫৫

সহায়তায়: অস্ট্রেলিয়া সরকার Australian Aid