

Bangladesh ready to work with UK on coronavirus

Writes PM to UK premier Johnson; expresses sadness over his coronavirus infection

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed sadness for her British counterpart Boris Johnson, who has been infected with coronavirus, and said that her government is ready to work closely with the United Kingdom (UK) government to overcome the challenge that has risen due to the outbreak of the lethal virus across the globe.

“Our government will always be prepared to work with the UK government in the spirit of existing cooperation in mutual efforts to overcome this challenge, and with determination to succeed,” she said in a letter to the UK prime minister.

The PM’s Assistant Press Secretary ABM Sarwer-E-Alom Sarker said that in the letter, Hasina wished Boris Johnson full recovery from Covid-19 as soon as possible.

“While we’re all fighting our own battles and challenges against the spread and loss of lives from the pandemic coronavirus, I have been closely following all your timely and dynamic leadership initiatives, including extreme lockdown, supporting laws and financial stimulus to protect the people of the United Kingdom from the devastation and deaths from coronavirus,” she said in the letter.

Elaborating her government’s measures to fend off the fatal virus, Hasina said that after understanding the grave concern over the global outbreak, the government acted very seriously from the very outset of this crisis.

“We started screening the suspects at the airport, along with the arrangement of dedicated quarantine zones for people arriving from the affected countries since January,” she said.

The premier said a high-powered national committee, including the task forces of different compositions, was formed to tackle the different dimensions of the spread of Covid-19 and its challenges.

“We prepared designated hospitals, and equipped our health professionals with necessary facilities. We shut down all educational institutions in the country, locked down infection-prone areas to prevent community transmission and advised the people to stay home,” she said.

Hasina said the government suspended all public gatherings related to the celebration of the long-cherished birth centenary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and cancelled all the state and private get-togethers.

“We closed down all government and private offices and activities, except emergency services, to curb the spread of the virus for 10 days since the 25th of this month. We are unceasingly conducting mass awareness both from the party and the government to protect our people from this lethal virus,” she said.

The prime minister said due to all these preemptive measures, the government has so far confirmed 48 cases with five unfortunate deaths, along with a minute success of 11 complete recoveries.

Fearful

FROM PAGE 1 and continue for more than an hour until police and the councillor rushed there and assured them of stopping the works.

A notice reading “The work has been stopped” was hung in front of the site.

Ali Hossain Khan, officer-in-charge of Tejaigon Police Station, said, “People thronged there to protest the move of setting up the hospital, fearing that the virus might spread in the locality.” “We have convinced them to return,” he added.

Shafi, also the president of Tejaigon Industrial Thana unit Awami League, said “I went there after hearing the incident. Setting up a hospital in this area won’t be a good decision,” he told The Daily Star.

An official of the Akij Group said they have almost evacuated the compound where some other works were going on.

A meeting was held yesterday following the protest and authorities would hold a press conference within a day or two in this regard, he said.

Ireland imposes coronavirus lockdown

AFP, Dublin

Ireland is to impose a lockdown in a bid to stem the spread of the coronavirus, Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said on Friday.

“Everybody must stay at home, in all circumstances,” he said of the new measures to come into force at midnight (0000 GMT) yesterday and last until 12 April.

Exceptions will be made for essential workers, medical appointments and the purchase of food.



The Mayor Hanif Flyover, where gridlocks are frequent, is almost devoid of vehicles yesterday as many users of it have either left the capital or have opted to stay home due to the coronavirus outbreak. The photo was taken near Jatrabari.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Many sick Bangladeshis stranded in India

FROM PAGE 1

number and some alleged that the replies of the commission were of no help.

Amid this 21-day-long lockdown, stranded Bangladeshis are going through a tough time with dwindling cash and a fear of getting infected by coronavirus abroad.

Dedarul Islam Shawon, who went to Chennai for treatment a couple of days ago, said, “More than 1,000 Bangladeshis are locked in Chennai and its neighbouring town Vellore. Most of us came here for treatment. Our treatment is over, but we have no means to return to Bangladesh.”

Like Chennai and Vellore, hundreds of Bangladeshis have fallen victim to the situation in Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Delhi -- the popular destinations for medical tourism.

Apoma went to Hyderabad with her mother and sister on March 13. She said, “Living cost in Hyderabad is very high. Moreover, most of the restaurants, kitchen markets, grocery shops are closed due to the lockdown. We are running out of money pretty fast, and therefore, we cannot stay here for 21 more days.”

Mehrab Hossain, who is trapped in this situation with his ailing mother in

Bengaluru, said, “My mother just went through cardiac surgery. We have been living in a hotel for over a month. Due to severe scarcity of food and funds, we are living on just rice and lentils. Shortage of food and extreme anxiety is making my mother sick again.”

Amid this backdrop, these Bangladeshis have been trying to communicate with the Bangladesh high commission desperately; however, they haven’t received any solution yet. Many of them even faced harassment.

Shawon said, “I was supposed to fly to Kolkata from Chennai at 10:00pm on March 24. However, my flight got cancelled due to the lockdown. Then, I called to Bangladesh High Commission at Delhi. When I told them about my situation, the high commission official asked me if I could speak Hindi. And, I had to describe the whole thing in Hindi again. Then I was told to call again tomorrow morning. I called but they didn’t receive.”

Again, I called the representative office of Bangladesh at Agartala. They told me that they had nothing to do and we have to obey Indian law as we are in India,” he said.

Finding no other way, Bangladeshis are sending messages to the social media accounts of Bangladesh High

Commission and sending emails. While many of them did not receive any reply, those who got, became even more anxious.

In reply to Apoma’s SOS (a signal which indicates that a person is in danger and need emergency help), the commission replied, “The High Commission is also under lockdown. We will try our level best to address your situation. Try to be in contact with other Bangladeshis. The high commission is with you; however, you have to wait until the government relaxes the lockdown.”

In another message the commission states, “We are really sorry to hear your condition. This is an absolutely unusual situation. As per the home country (India) directions, we are also locked down at our houses. We pray the situation will be normal and we will try to help you.”

Amit Kumar Bandya, who got stranded in Mumbai with his cancer patient father says, “One of the high commission officials said that if we can reach Kolkata on our own, the high commission will arrange our return from Kolkata. However, inter-state travel is banned now. We can’t travel more than 2000 kilometres to Kolkata from Mumbai by an ambulance. We appeal

police harassment.

On Friday, a reporter of this newspaper was trying to take his father to a private hospital for chemotherapy-related check-ups.

“We thought we would use Uber, but the government has stopped ridesharing apps along with all motorised transport services very suddenly.

“We also could not find any CNG-run auto-rickshaw or taxi. Car renting agencies are also closed. After the coronavirus outbreak, ambulances have doubled and even tripled their fares and are also extremely occupied,” said the reporter, Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan.

“I cannot quite understand how

to our government to arrange a special flight for our return.”

Mohammad Imran, High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India told this correspondent, “Our staffs are working round the clock to ensure the well-being and safe return of our citizens. We have established the hotline where all Bangladeshis can call and share their concerns.”

When asked what steps the high commission might take to ensure the well-being and safe return amidst inter-state travel ban, the high commissioner says, “We are communicating with the Dhaka office and the Indian government to fix what we can do for them.”

However, foreign minister AK Abdul Momen said chartered flights could be arranged to bring the stranded Bangladeshis back provided that they pay for the cost of the flights.

“Bangladeshis who want to come back should register with the high commission by providing required information. Then if they agree to pay for the flight, we shall arrange chartered flights,” said the foreign minister.

“Sending money to India or any other country from Bangladesh is now very easy. I hope they will take this opportunity,” the minister added.

could they ban all forms of transport services in a situation when there might be so many patients and they might need to be taken to the hospital for emergency treatment.”

Even as Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Md Shafiqul Islam has announced a revised guideline detailing on vehicular movement in a city in shutdown, there is no mention of regularising methods of transport.

Meanwhile, hospitals like Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital and Dhaka Medical College Hospital have set up dedicated flu corners to treat patients with seasonal influenza, which is quite common during this season.

“Ensure free passage for people and vehicles related to emergency services like medicine, daily essentials, food, electricity, banking and mobile phones.

“Be polite, patient and professional in dealing with citizens of the country...” reads the message.

RESTAURANTS, BAKERIES TO REMAIN OPEN: DMP

DMP Commissioner Shafiqul Islam said restaurants and bakeries should remain open and their employeeed should be allowed to travel.

Shops of essential commodities should remain open and their employees must be allowed to work, read his directives.

However, customers should be recommended takeaways, it added.

Individual movement in any form should be allowed with health advice and Police should take special care for people like health care personnel, technicians, city corporation officials, security guards, etc, it added.

Man dies after showing Covid-19-like symptoms

8 others in isolation at hospitals

STAR REPORT

A man died of coronavirus-like symptoms in Bogura and 19 people were kept home-quarantined in different districts in the last two days as they showed similar symptoms.

Patients and their families alleged that they did not get proper treatment and medicare, reports our district correspondents.

In Bogura, a 45-year-old-man died at his home in Shibganj upazila on Friday night. His wife said he had been suffering from breathing problems, cold, cough and high fever for three days.

Bogura Deputy Civil Surgeon Mostafizur Rahman Tuhin claimed that the man was not infected with coronavirus.

“This [yesterday] morning, I talked to IEDCR Director Dr Meerjady Sabrina Flora over the phone. I informed her about the patient’s symptoms. She told me that a coronavirus patient does not show symptoms of common cold.

“However, she suggested collecting samples from the patient’s body and send those to Dhaka for tests. We will act as per her suggestions,” said the deputy civil surgeon.

Meanwhile, Shibganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Alamgir Kabir yesterday afternoon declared lockdown of 10 houses adjacent to that of the deceased.

Speaking to The Daily Star, wife of the deceased said her husband lives in Gazipur for business purpose. He returned home on Tuesday and fell ill the following day.

“We called the hotline number of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research time and again, but nobody answered the phone,” she alleged.

The deceased was buried in the village yesterday afternoon.

In Pabna, a suspected coronavirus patient was put into isolation at the isolation unit of Bera upazila health complex and 16 of his family members were sent home in the upazila on Friday afternoon to quarantine themselves.

The 25-year-old patient, who used to sell products on trains, came to his father-in-law’s house in the upazila’s Nagarbari area on Thursday.

He was suffering from fever and a sore throat. Panicked, villagers informed the local administration and the health department about his condition, said Bera UNO Asif Anam Siddiquee.

Doctors and officials of the local administration visited the patient’s in-law’s house on Friday and sent him into isolation at the Upazila Parishad Dakbanglow. Yesterday, he was shifted to the health complex.

Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer Dr Milon Mahmud said he informed the IEDCR about the patient’s illness. The IEDCR asked for his blood sample and the health officials were preparing for sending the sample.

In Sylhet, two people, including an 80-year-old woman, were admitted to the corona isolation centre at Sylhet Saheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital yesterday after she showed coronavirus-like symptoms.

Sushanta Kumar Mahapatro, resident medical officer at the hospital, said the other patient, a university student, came to the hospital on Friday night with some coronavirus-like symptoms and was admitted.

He came in contact with some Europe-returns recently, said Sushanta.

Samples of both the patients will be collected and sent to IEDCR today, he said.

In Thakurgoan, five members of a family from the district’s Sadar upazila were sent to the corona isolation unit of Rangpur Medical College Hospital yesterday as they were showing coronavirus-like symptoms.

Besides, three members of another family were showing coronavirus-like symptoms in a village in Thakurgoan Sadar upazila. They were kept quarantined at their homes.

Talking to The Daily Star over the phone, one of the patients alleged that he returned home from Dhaka on Friday with fever.

Since then, his condition had been deteriorating and he was suffering from cough, breathing problems, and soar throat.

Later, two of his family members started showing similar symptoms.

Contacted, Thakurgoan Civil Surgeon Dr Mahfuzur Rahman said health workers already visited the patients and gave directives to them.

Our correspondents in Bogura, Pabna, Sylhet, and Thakurgoan contributed to this report.

significantly increase testing.

Smaller Belgium and Luxembourg also saw a steep climb in deaths, with 353 recorded in the former yesterday -- up from 289 the day before -- and 15 in the grand duchy, up from nine.

In Britain, the death toll from coronavirus outbreak has risen to 1,019 up from 759 the day before, according to government figures released yesterday.

The World Health Organization’s regional director for Africa warned the continent faced a “dramatic evolution” of the pandemic, as South Africa also began life under lockdown and reported its first virus death.

YOUNGER PATIENTS

In the United States, known infections jumped past 1,04,000, the world’s highest figure, with 1,711 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University.