Your Right to Know

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## Know true extent, know it now

Public health experts once again raise alarm as country enters crucial fourth week; say authorities must scale up tests immediately

WASIM BIN HABIB and MOUDUD AHMMED SUJAN

As Bangladesh enters fourth week since it reported the first Covid-19 case, public health experts now call for expanding and speeding up the testing process immediately to understand the scale of the

Though the country didn't report any new cases for two consecutive days, the low count is the result of limited testing, and the situation could change quickly like it did in several countries, including Italy, Spain, France, Germany and the US, they

These badly affected countries had also reported a low number of cases in the initial weeks but saw a spike in the number of infections from fourth week, the experts mentioned.

Without widespread testing, it's not possible to gauge the spread of coronavirus in the country with a population of 16.5 crore. Widespread testing can give the authorities a clearer picture of the scale of virus transmission, they point out.

The country recorded its first coronavirus case on March 8. Three weeks later, the number stood at 48. So far, five people have died from the virus

The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) claimed to have carried out enough tests. It said there has been community transmission on a limited scale.

The World Health Organization has urged countries to test as many people as possible to curb the pandemic, but Bangladesh has one of the lowest testing rates compared to many other Asian countries that have been successful so far in containing the spread of the virus.

From January 21 till yesterday, Bangladesh tested 1,185 people for the virus, which is far below South Korea's daily testing capacity of around 20,000.

The IEDCR has been testing only those who have returned from the affected countries or come in contact with an infected person or shown symptoms after two weeks of quarantine. It, however, is now expanding the scope of testing.

Over the last two months, more than eight lakh people called the IEDCR hotlines for virus-related issues.

According to official records, 802,580 corona-related calls were made to the hotlines from January 21 till yesterday. Yesterday, 73,134 such calls were made on SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

TEST, TEST; People are tested at a community centre in Dearborn, Michigan. Right, a health worker conducts a swab test in Bronx, New York City; a German doctor takes a sample from a car driver in Halle, eastern Germany; medical professionals wait to administer a COVID-19 test in Daly City, California.

**GLOBAL** Tests in 24 hours

Infected in 24 hours 48 **Total cases** 

28 under treatment

109

**Total deaths** 

**Total recoveries** 

679,977 **Total Confirmed** 

31,734

**Total Deaths** 

145,696

**Total Recovered** 

PHOTO: **AFP** 

**IEDCR, DGHS:** SOURCE OF PHONE CALLS, TESTS

#### 'Don't worry, be prepared to face any situation'

PM urges people Bss, Dhaka

Prime yesterday



to worry about the Covid-19 and to be prepared to face any situation that may occur in the wake of the virus outbreak

She also said that it was necessary to ensure supply of food to the day-labourers and working class people

during the crisis period.
"I'll tell all that they shouldn't worry, rather they'll have to remain prepared for tackling any situation that may rise due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus," she said.

Sheikh Hasina added, "We've to take measures in such a way that we can protect every person of the country [from the deadly disease].

prime minister said this while receiving SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

## Four die with Covid-19-like symptoms

STAR REPORT

At least four people with coronavirus symptoms died in three districts yesterday while a patient with Covid-19 symptoms ran away from a hospital in Kishoreganj. In Barishal, two patients undergoing

treatment at the isolation unit of Shere-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) died yesterday morning. One of the patients, aged about 40, was

suffering from fever, cough and breathing issues, said Bakir Hossain, director of the He had received treatment at Patuakhali

Medical College Hospital for four days and was taken to SBMCH on Saturday, the doctor said. Another 45-year-old woman died at

the hospital with coronavirus symptoms, including fever, breathing difficulties and diarrhoea, said Bakir. Blood samples of the two deceased and

four other suspected patients, who are undergoing treatment at the hospital, will be sent to IEDCR, he added. Meanwhile, in Khulna, a 70-year-old man, who was receiving treatment at the

isolation unit of Khulna Medical College Hospital with flu-like symptoms since SEE PAGE 2 COL 3 CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

## Global toll 31,000

World braces for long-term lockdowns; patient-surge overwhelms the hospitals in the US, Europe

Spain yesterday reported a national daily record of 838 coronavirus deaths in a fresh warning to the world that long-term lockdowns may be needed to halt the deadly march of a disease that has claimed more than 31,000 lives.

A deluge of patients are overwhelming hospitals in Europe and the United States, now the focal points of a pandemic that is upending the global economy in

In the US, an about-face by President Donald Trump on quarantining New York highlighted the panic and confusion unfurling across many parts of the world trying to contain the virus.

In Spain, where the 24-hour death toll rose for the third consecutive day, lockdown measures have been tightened as officials cling to hope that slowing growth rates mean they are nearing the peak of the

COVID-19's relentless spread has infected nearly every sphere of life, from wiping out millions of jobs to postponing elections and putting a pause on the world's sporting scene.

It has also spurred a worldwide scramble

for medical gear as exhausted doctors and nurses in some of the world's wealthiest cities struggle to dole out limited stocks of face masks and life-saving respirators.

COVID-19 IN

BANGLADESH

1,076

73,134

8,02,580

coronavirus-related calls

received since January 21

tests done so far; 4.47% of

them coronavirus positive

calls on three different

hotlines in 24 hours

From snorkel masks to 3D-printed face shields, creative solutions have popped up around the globe in efforts to plug the gap as factories rush to keep up with international demand.

But frontline medical workers in places like Italy, Spain and New York, where the misleading information crisis is already-biting hard, don't have time and rumours regarding the

"Everybody is scared," said Diana Torres, a mother of three who works in a rehabilitation centre at New York's Mount Sinai hospital group, where a 48-yearold nurse manager recently died from

"I have nothing for my head, nothing for my shoes," she said, explaining how it took significant effort to acquire one face shield, one N-95 respirator mask and one gown -all of which she said she must reuse.

Cities around the world have fallen eerily quiet as a third of humanity adjusts to life confined within the walls of their

Some leaders warn the worst is yet SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

#### Six held for 'spreading rumours'

100 social media accounts under watch, 50 blocked

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and RAFIUL ISLAM

Police yesterday arrested six people for "spreading rumours" and claimed to have kept over 100 social media accounts under surveillance for their involvement in spreading coronavirus outbreak.

As a part of taking action, police have already blocked 50 other social media accounts and arrested around 12 people from different districts of the country, including Dhaka, in the last two weeks, a high official of police, involved with social media monitoring, told

The Daily Star yesterday. "We are keeping close contact with all police units across the country and have arrested six

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Hope battles despair on Dhaka streets

Wealthy people, community-based voluntary organisations stepping forward to support the needy

RASHIDUL HASAN and MUNTAKIM SAAD

Dhaka is eerie quiet, much like most capitals and countries around the world as they grapple with a common enemy -- the spread of the coronavirus. Bangladesh is currently in the midst of a country-wide shut down that has been in force from March 26 and will extend till April 4.

Daily income of rickshaw-puller Aminul, who operates in Farmgate, in normal times the capital's busiest area, has almost dwindled to nothing. Like millions who depend on their labour and the city being the vibrant one it was less than a month ago, anxiety has gripped him about how he will provide even the basic necessities to his family of four.

But a pleasant surprise was in store for him.

A passenger eventually came by, headed for Mohammadpur. After reaching the destination, the passenger gave him a bag full of groceries -- rice, lentils, oil, eggs, potato, biscuits, soap and washing powder -- that would support Aminul and his family for at least two days.

The despair on the streets and in homes seem to have bred an attitude that is breaking down barriers between classes and producing tales of fellowship and humanity. The effort has been undertaken at an individual level as well as from community-based voluntary organisation across the city and they have stepped forward to distribute daily needs to the poor.

Talking to this newspaper, the passenger, who is an employee of a private organisation, said he and his relatives have undertaken an initiative to support day labourers every day on their way to work.

"If you are going to office or if you come out for daily needs, at least help a day labourer with groceries," he said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

#### ICCB to be turned into Covid-19 hospital

Bashundhara offers govt amid outbreak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bashundhara Group has given the government the **International Convention** City Bashundhara (ICCB) in the city's Kuril area to be converted into a hospital to treat Covid-19 patients.

The group, one of the country's largest conglomerates, handed over a letter to PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus, who accepted it on behalf of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in this regard when its Managing Director Sayem Sobhan Anvir gave him a cheque of Tk 10 crore at the Prime Minister's Office to fight the spread of coronavirus

in the country. Mohammad Abu Tayeb, adviser (media) of the organisation, said Hasina joined the chequegiving ceremony via video conferencing from the

Gono Bhaban. Tayeb told The Daily Star that the PM accepted



Ignoring experts's advice for social distancing, people form a tight queue on Nabapur Road in Old Dhaka yesterday to collect relief materials a local business was offering there.

# 'Everything was good, then came coronavirus'

Low-income families in the city staring at bleak days

Tuhin Shubhra Adhikary and Rashidul Hasan

Mainul Islam was waiting by his rickshaw near an almost deserted Nakhalpara Rail Gate in the capital for over 20

The man, aged over 40, readily agreed when asked for a ride and did not even ask to know the fare.

"You are the first passenger I got after my lunch," he said

around 4:00pm yesterday. Only two weeks ago, he and his wife, a domestic staff, used to make enough to feed themselves and support his mother and two school-going sons in his village home in

Gaibandha sadar. "Everything was going fine. Then came something called corona and changed our lives," Mainul said.

He is among the thousands of people who are suddenly finding it difficult to make a living after the government began a 10-day shutdown to contain the spread of Thousands of people left Dhaka ahead of the shutdown

and most of those still in the city are barely leaving home. Many day-labourers and low-income people like Mainul did not leave the city fearing that they would not be able to find work in the village.

Mainul, who owns his rickshaw, used to earn Tk 600-700 a day and his wife Tk 7,000-8,000 a month.

"I am earning about a third of what I used to while my wife has become unemployed with only half-a-month's

"I have to pay Tk 3,000 to the landlord in a few days

## Everything was

while bearing daily expenditures is an uphill task now. I don't know how I'll pay rent," he said.

Munira Begum, a 45-year-old domestic staff in Jigatola, used to work for five families. Her employers fired her in the middle of the month.

"Of the five families I worked for, only two paid the entire month's salary of Tk 1,500. The three other families has not paid yet," she said.

"Two of my employers said they themselves faced economic hardship

due to coronavirus," said the widow. "I have to pay Tk 2,200 in rent. The landlord would not hear about my misfortune. How will I feed my three

children in the coming days?" Munira and three other domestic staffwere roaming about at Notun Rasta in Jigatola area yesterday asking people for food or alms.

Another rickshaw puller, Shafiq, said he left home with his rickshaw around 3:00pm as he heard that law enforcers harass people on the street in the morning.

"There is hardly anybody on the road now, I earned only Tk 100," he said around 11:00pm on Saturday.

"How will my family of four survive if the present situation persists?" he

Boatmen at Sadarghat Launch Terminal have been facing similar challenges. Over a couple of thousand

boatmen work on a daily basis

Ranjan Mia, a dinghy owner, said

"Nobody cares about us," he said. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation, an alliance of transport worker unions, demanded rationing programmes for food and other essentials for the

The federation's acting president Shajahan Khan and General Secretary Osman Ali in a statement on Friday said around 50 lakh transport workers were rendered unemployed after the government suspended operation of

Most of these workers live from hand to mouth and they need support, Osman Ali told this newspaper last

"So, we demand that the government launch a rationing system for transport workers. Each kg of rice for them should be Tk 10 and other essentials should also be cheaper for

They also demanded a stimulus

"We will place the demands before the road transport and bridges ministry tomorrow [today]."

Kamrul said Siddiqui's father is

also distributing meals among 100

Hashi Begum, a municipality

cleaner of Dhaka North City

Corporation, was walking near Saarc

fountain in Karwan Bazar with a co-

worker. A car arrived and the man

inside the car wanted to know what

Having gotten her details, he gave

"Now I have no worry for at least

two days as my family doesn't have to

starve," Hashi thanked the kind man

and said such initiative would be a

great help at this time for the people

have been barring their maids from

coming to work for fear of the spread

Azizur Rahman Faruk of Jhigatola,

however, thought otherwise. He

along with some other members of

his apartment building, were packing

130 bags of groceries in the garage to

"I am doing this as part of social

distribute those among the maids in

responsibility at this time of crisis.

Many wealthy people live in this city.

In front of Town Hall Bazar on

Saturday afternoon, 50 bags of

groceries were kept in front of a shop.

The grocery shop owner Parvez told

this correspondent that they got this

order from a customer to pack those

customers bought grocery bags from

my shop for distribution," he added.

"In the last three days, four such

On social media, people are posting

their initiatives how they have been

helping the community. Some people

who were not able to help financially,

came for another way to aware the

young girl Faima Rahman Jui along

with two of her acquaintances marked

spots with white color to stand in

distance while buying groceries at the

Only three people, we marked the

spots before every shop so that people

who came for shopping, can maintain

social distancing," she wrote on

donation for her relief and welfare

fund from various government and

private organisations through a

videoconference from her official

She said, "The Bangalee nation was

"We're a victorious nation and we

The premier mentioned that the

day-labourers, working class and lower

middle income people were passing

days in hardship as their sources of

income have almost stopped due to

She said that the government

sent food grains to the deputy

commissioners (DCs) through the

never defeated [in past] and will also

not be beaten [in future]. We'll have to

believe that we've the courage and

move with such self-confidence.

strength to face any disaster."

outbreak of the disease.

'Don't worry

residence the Gonobhaban.

"We had no money, no manpower.

At a kitchen market in Khulna, a

distributing among street people.

Many flat owners and tenants

day labourers every day.

they were doing.

of coronavirus.

the area yesterday.

too," he said.

community.

them two bags of groceries.

who live by hand to mouth.

## Hope battles despair

He said his cousin, Shamima Jeba, an expatriate living in Canada, initiated the programme through their social voluntary organisation "Prochesta", which has been working for marginalised people for several years with small projects involving health, hygiene and helping the poor towards self-sufficiency.

group was seen helping 50 rickshawpullers in the area on Thursday.

"In this period of crisis, we contains 3 kgs of rice, 1 kg potato, 1 paracetamol tablets and one mask,"

dwellers in Dhaka and Gaibandha.

The initiative was taken by Zoom Bangladesh, a small non-profit organisation which works for the

Several members of Dhaka Metropolitan Police distributed food among 100 needy people on Thursday

were provided food and other daily essentials in Dhanmondi, Hazaribagh and Russell Square areas, said Ramna

low-income people hardly have any income. So, this is just a little effort. Kafi said, adding that they bought these products with funds from an assistant police commissioner, several

The police officer called for the wealthy to help the people of low-

premises yesterday, "Shonge Achhi", a voluntary organisation distributed day-labourers, street people yesterday.

organisation. We raised funds from our few senior brothers and from a portion of our salary. We may not have much money like the rich people in the city. But we want to show how you can stand beside needy people even with small amounts of money," said Jashim Uddin Khan, a journalist and convener of the organisation, adding that the initiative will be running for the next 10 days.

Meanwhile, the 50 police stations of the DMP have started locally distributing food among 2500 street children and poor people every day from yesterday until April 4.

A driver behind the wheel of a car was seen in front of Bashundhara City Shopping Complex around 1:30pm yesterday, and there were 40 packets

businessman Abu Ahmed Siddiqui in Dhanmondi, told me to distribute these among the needy people on the street. I came out with the car and am looking for some people who really need food at this time," said Kamrul,

between Postagola to Babubazar bridge areas.

he used to earn Tk 500-700 a day. But he has been making at most Tk 150 over the last few days.

public transport on March 26.

them," he added.

package for the transport sector.

A Mirpur DOHS community-based

distributed packs of groceries among 50 rickshaw-pullers in the area. A bag litre oil, half kg lentil, half kg onion, half kg beaten rice, one soap, 10 said Syed Ashiqul Islam, a resident of

When most are concerned about their hygiene to fight the coronavirus outbreak, poor people can hardly afford measures to safeguard themselves against the virus.

"Free for the poor people. Don't take more than necessary,"read a bannerhung over a table where hygiene products like hand sanitiser, soap, tissue, gloves, saline and washing powder were kept for low-income This will help the quarantine process. people, street children and slum

unprivileged children.

night, from their own funds.

Some 110 low-income families police ADC Abdullah Hill Kafi.

Each package contained three kgs of rice, half kg of lentils, one kg potato, one kg onion, half litre oil and

"With everything shut down, the sub-inspectors and his own salary.

In Dhaka Reporter's Unity 150 bags of groceries among maids,

"We are a very small social

HOPE SPRINGS INDIVIDUALLY

Ministry of Relief and Disaster to of meals on his back seat. distribute those among the poor and "My employer, the wife of a distressed people. "We're taking measures to provide

foods and hand washing soaps for the people up to the union level ... the VGF and VGD programmes and other financial assistance that we provide to them will also continue," she said.



Bulldozers fill trucks with sand on the Someshwari river in Durgaur of Netrakona. Such mindless extraction is harming the river flow and ecology of the river. The photo was taken recently.

Someshwari is being butchered

During the rainy season, dredgers are brought close to the riverbank for sand lifting, threatening the adjacent areas with erosion, said a businessman of Teribazar area of Durgapur town.

With the aim of ending this illegal practice, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) filed a writ petition with a High Court bench in

In response, the HC on July 2015 issued a rule upon the government asking why the leasing out of balumahals in the river shall not be declared illegal.

The court also ruled why the government shall not be directed to declare Someshwari an ecologically critical area. In addition, it directed the local

administration to regulate and monitor sand lifting in the leased-out areas so that no damage occurs to the river and its ecology.

The HC also directed the local

administration to assess the impact of sand lifting on the river. The court directives are yet to be

implemented. The unregulated lifting of sand through shallow machines are posing a serious threat to the river, said locals and Bela officials. "Hundreds of trucks move in the area, while many shallow machines

are being continuously operated. These are clear evidence that the High Court order was not implemented," Bela Chief Executive Syeda Rizwana Hasan told The Daily Star last month. Spillage of burnt lubricant and oil

from shallow machines puts the river's traditional fishes like mohashol, kengra, bata, maitta, popa and baila,

On December 30 last year, Bela organised a coordination meeting with locals at Birisiri auditorium in Durgapur to chalk out a plan to protect the river and the environment.

In the meeting, locals expressed their anger and said they had been organising different protest programmes -- including forming human chains and submission memorandums to the local administration -- for the past couple of years to stop indiscriminate sand lifting from the river.

But no action has so far been taken, they said. As a direct result, environmental

pollution in Durgapur municipal area has reached a severe stage. Hundreds of sand trucks ply this

area at all times, which both damages the road and cause large clouds of dust in the air. This correspondent while visiting

the area last month was told by locals that more than 600 trucks ply Mymensingh-Durgapur road daily, each truck carrying more than 30

Mamun Mia, a young truck driver from the adjacent Purbadhala upazila, said the sand business is lucrative in Durgapur.

For every truck, we have to pay Tk 9,500 for both sand and tolls. It is sold at Tk 20,000 in Dhaka and the rate increases with the distance.'

Didarul Alam Tarafder, executive engineer of the Roads and Highways Department in Netrokona, said overloaded trucks were causing serious problems to the Mymensingh-

"The road has maximum capacity for vehicles loaded with 16 tonnes but truckers are carrying 30 to 40 tonnes of sand," he said.

"We have repeatedly informed the matter to the district administration and police. But no action has yet been taken against overloading," lamented the engineer.

A leaseholder, Anjon Sarker Liton, said, "We are collecting sand following the government instructions. He denied violating rules.

Assistant Commissioner Land) of Durgapur Ruel Sangma said the local administration has already stopped illegal sand and stone extraction from local canals and other water bodies.

He also warned of taking action against rule violators.

Contacted over phone, Netrokona's Deputy Commissioner Moinul Islam said he was not aware whether extracting sand after dusk was prohibited.

Asked about the High Court directives to assess the impact of sand lifting on the river, the DC said he did not know updated information on this. Mohammad Akhtaruzzaman, executive engineer of the Water Development Board (WDB) in Netrokona, said sand lifting would

The WDB official also claimed that more sand lifting will generate higher

not change the course of the river.

revenues for the government.

An official of the Department of Environment in Netrakona, preferring not to be named, termed sand lifting 'absolute nonsense" and harmful to the river ecology, running a serious risk of erosion.

### Four die with

I think, they should stress their hands | FROM |

Friday, died yesterday morning, said Shoilendra Nath Biswas, in-charge of

"Although he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, he was kept under isolation as part of our precautionary measures. We have informed IEDCR about the death. But they [IEDCR officials told us that there was no need to collect samples of this patient," he

In Manikganj, a woman died with Corona symptoms at Munnu Medical College Hospital in Sadar upazila, SM Moniruzzaman, director of the hospital.

The victim's mother-in-law died with similar symptoms around a week ago and many people, including the woman, gathered at her funeral, he

The district's deputy commissioner SM Ferdous said family members and home quarantine after the death.

In Kishoreganj, a Saudi returnee, who was suspected to be infected with Coronavirus, fled from Shaheed Syed Nazrul Islam Medical College Hospital yesterday morning.

Three doctors and four staffs, who came in contact with the patient, were asked to remain in isolation. Kamal Hossain, 40, hailing from

a village under Hossainpur upazila, returned from Saudi Arabia a month ago, said Mohammad Helal Uddin, deputy director of the hospital.

He came to the hospital with fever and cough around 11:00am and when the duty doctor asked him to have some tests to check if he was infected with coronavirus, the patient suddenly started running and left the hospital compound in the blink of an eye, Helal said.

Contacted, civil surgeon of the

neighbours of the victim were kept in district Mujibur Rahman said he had asked authorities concerned to trace In Noakhali, four houses in Purbo

> Charbata area of Subarnachar upazila were put under lockdown by the local administration after a person was tested positive with Covid-19. In Rangpur, a patient, who was

admitted to the isolation ward of Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH) along with his four other family members on Saturday night, alleged that they were not getting proper medical services. Faridul Islam Chowdhury, director

of RMCH, however, told The Daily Star over the phone that an expert team was "providing treatment to them.'

Our correspondents from Barishal Khulna, Manikgani, Mymensingh, Noakhali and Dinajpur contributed

#### Know true extent

corona tests.

Yesterday, 73,134 such calls were made on three hotlines, but the IEDCR tested only 109 individuals for coronavirus infection Abul Kalam Azad, director general

of the Directorate General of Health

Services (DGHS), said the large

number of phone calls does not mean that all wanted to undergo coronavirus tests. "People called to know about coronavirus, health problems and many other things. Yesterday, we analysed the sources of the calls and

found that the calls were made from all the 64 districts. So, it is a positive side that people are aware of the He, however, could not say how many calls were made to request for

A large number of people with virus-like symptoms are struggling to get tested. Besides, there have been reports of deaths of several people who had virus-like symptoms. In the last one week, this newspaper found at least seven such cases in Bogura, Sylhet, Mymensingh and Rajshahi. At a press briefing through video

conference yesterday, Health Minister Zahid Maleque dismissed the necessity of carrying out widespread testing and a survey to know the scale of virus transmission. Experts, however, disagreed, and

said community transmission is going

"If the situation was like what the IEDCR is saying, it would be very good news for us. However, the [IEDCR's] claim is based on a very small number of tests and it [the claim] is unscientific," said Prof Nazrul Islam, a virologist and former Vice Chancellor Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University. The system has not really been

revved up to what we need right now. To break the chain of virus transmission, the government should increase its capacity to test and detect cases without delay, he noted.

"It [limited testing] gives a false sense of security. It seems the whole mechanism is working on a very limited scale." If the data provided by the

IEDCR turns out to be incorrect, the

transmission in communities will go on, the virologist said, adding, "We will see a sudden rise in cases and we will be at a loss about what to do.' He said the government is not providing correct information about the number of test kits it has at

"If we had run tests on most of the returnees and found only a few positive cases, then it could be a reason for optimism. But that didn't happen; there are not enough kits for

Seeking anonymity, an expert said, "As an epidemiologist, I would say

virus transmission is there, and it is going on.'

We need to analyse the deaths in hospitals and communities, run tests at the community level and expand the scope of testing to understand the real situation."

"We are not searching for the

cases the way we should have been. That's why we are not getting the real Though the authorities have taken some measures to expand testing

facilities, it is already late, the expert mentioned. In the US, the number of confirmed cases was 53 around 40 days after the first case was reported on Jan 21. After

that, it saw big jumps in the number every day. As of March 27, the US recorded 103,321 cases. Spain also is facing a similar crisis

"delayed" response from the authorities. The country reported its first case on February 1, and the number of cases went up to 45 within 31 days.

And then it saw 1,000 cases in just 10

days. As of March 28, the total number

of confirmed cases crossed 64,000. On the other hand, South Korea is a glaring example of how a country can contain the spread of the virus through widespread testing. Nearly 20,000 people were tested for coronavirus a day, more people per capita than anywhere else in the world.

#### Global

to come as governments roll out new containment measures and rescue packages aimed a staunching the bloodletting of economies everywhere.

In Britain, deaths have now topped 1,000 as Prime Minister Boris Johnson -- who tested positive for the virus last week -- warned that dark days were on the horizon.

"We know things will get worse before they get better," Johnson, who said he has only mild symptoms, wrote in a leaflet sent to all UK households explaining how to help limit the spread.

While Johnson initially said the shutdown would last three weeks, a leading expert warned it could be in place until June.

"We're going to have to keep these measures in place, in my view, for a significant period of time -- probably until the end of May, maybe even early June," Professor Neil Ferguson of Imperial College London, one of the epidemiologists advising the government, told the Sunday Times.

The carnage in worst-hit Italy and Spain suggests quarantine measures are unlikely to be lifted anytime soon, despite their devastating impacts on

On the Italian island of Sicily, police with batons and guns moved to protect supermarkets after reports of looting by locals who could no longer afford food.

"We have no money to pay, we have to eat," someone reportedly shouted at the cashiers in a Palermo supermarket, according to La

Repubblica newspaper. Spain has toughened an already ight nationwide lockdown by halting all non-essential activities.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said the country must prepare to adjust to "the new way of life" for a long time, after 123 more deaths were

In the ground zero-city of Wuhan, however, life is creeping back to normal. Officials say the biggest threat to public health is now imported cases. Beijing, which is revising its role in

the coronavirus saga by coming to the

aid of countries now on the frontlines,

claims success in suppressing the virus at home. Official figures now routinely showing no new domestic infections but dozens of imported cases each day, shifting the country's prevention

effort to the external threat. With the pandemic sweeping westward, the United States is home to the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 infections globally with more than 124,000 cases, according

to a Johns Hopkins University tally. As states impose a patchwork of measures, President Trump sowed confusion over the weekend by backpeddling on a proposal to impose a broad lockdown on New York and its

neighbours.

"A quarantine will not be necessary," Trump tweeted eight hours after he stunned the New York metropolitan region -- the epicentre of the US outbreak -- with a proposal to place it under quarantine. Trump's reversal came on the same

day the US death toll topped 2,100, more than doubling in just three days More than a quarter of the fatalities were in New York City. In Chicago, a less than one-year-old

infant succumbed to the respiratory disease on Saturday, an extremely rare case of juvenile death. Around the world more than 667,090 cases of the novel coronavirus have been officially declared since

the outbreak began late last year,

according to an AFP tally. Variations in testing regimes -- and delays in some countries -- mean the

true number is likely far higher. As even rich countries struggle, aid groups warn the toll could be in the millions in low-income countries and war zones such as Syria and Yemen, where healthcare systems are in tatters

the offer. He added that at least 5,000 beds could be set up in the ICCB and a business centre there for emergency use.

According to him, the group will hand over the ICCB and the business centre to the army to convert those into a hospital immediately.

Tayeb said Bashundhara Group

would provide necessary help to the government in setting up the makeshift hospital. The ICCB is the only integrated and mega facility in the country that was built with a view to redefine the scope

and standard of domestic service

industry. It came into operation on January 1, 2015. Tayeb said his organisation was also distributing relief materials, including rice, flour, oil, and lentil, to the lowincome people and it would continue

#### until the crisis was over. Virus crisis boosts Germany's centreright

AFP, Berlin

Angela Merkel's long-struggling conservatives have rebounded in the polls thanks to the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis and widespread faith in the outgoing German chancellor's ability to manage the upheaval.

Shaking off years of record-low popularity, Merkel's centre-right CDU/ CSU bloc is now enjoying approval ratings of around 32 to 35 percent, some six to seven points higher than just a few weeks ago.

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

## Red Junglefowl

The chicken is the most ubiquitous bird in the world. There are over 23 billion chickens in the world, providing nutrition to humanity. How did it come to be? It was domesticated from a wild bird, the Red Junglefowl, over five thousand years ago.

The Red Junglefowl, known in Bangla as *Bon Morog*, was a part of my childhood. It was found in rural areas all over Bangladesh. For example, it was common in a bamboo grove and adjoining jungles behind our house in Sylhet. It was often hunted or caught in nets and, on occasion, graced our dinner table as an exotic addition.

The bird belongs to a family of birds that also includes pheasants, peacocks, grouses, partridges, quails, francolins. This family, Phasianidae, is spread all over the globe and comprises of 187 species. Many of these varieties once roamed the forests and fields of Bangladesh. Today we can still see some pheasants, quails and francolins. These include the Kalij Pheasant (*Mothura*), and Black Francolins (*Kalo Titir*). But they are rare and extremely wary of people.

The Red Junglefowl is relatively easier to find. I have encountered it many times, usually spotting it in border areas of the forest. For example, it can be reliably seen at the edges of rice paddies abutting the jungles of Rema Kalenga forest Our tea gardens also host this bird. If you go to Sundarban, you are virtually guaranteed to see it when it comes out of the forest to the edge of water, picking for food on

Called Gallus gallus in Latin, the Red Junglefowl is divided into five subspecies (that is, races.) The one found in our subcontinent is called Gallus gallus murghi.

Foraging for food on the ground, the bird eats mainly grains, seeds, fruits, shoots of grass as well as insects. Like the domestic chicken, it rakes fallen leaves and



A Pair of Red Junglefowls.

grass looking for morsels of food. It builds its nest on the ground, covered by dense undergrowth. It likes bathing in the sand and will fly short distances to climb a tree, display for mating, or escape danger. The male's crowing is loud and distinct. It is heard early morning or late afternoon and resembles the call of a domestic rooster.

The male Red Junglefowl is longer than our domestic chicken. It is colourful, sporting orangered and golden yellow feathers on its back. The long black tail is curled like a sickle. There is a red comb above its bill. The female is

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

brown and yellow, with a stockier body than the male. It lacks the tail feathers of the male and more closely resembles the domestic chicken.

Photographing the Red Junglefowl in a good pose is difficult because it constantly moves around on the ground. The best moment to catch it is when it spreads its wings. It reveals some fantastic colourful patterns then. Since it flies slowly, you can also try to photograph it in flight.

facebook.com/ikabirphotographs or follow ihtishamkabir on Instagram.

#### Jack Ma gives 3 lakh masks to Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jack Ma, one of the richest persons in Asia and founder of Alibaba, yesterday sent 3 lakh masks to Bangladesh.

A special flight carrying the items landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) at 2:55pm from China, said SN Wahidur Rahman, deputy director of HSIA, told The Daily Star.

Yan Hualong, deputy chief of mission at the Chinese Embassy in Dhaka, among others, was present to hand over the masks to Bangladesh government officials.

On March 26, China donated medical supplies, including 10,000 testing kits, 10,000 PPE and 1,000 infrared thermometers to help Bangladesh fight the coronavirus outbreak.

The next day, Jack Ma donated 30,000 testing kits to Bangladesh. Jack Ma on March 21 announced that his firm, through the Alibaba Foundation, would donate emergency supplies to 10 Asian countries.

The firm will donate 1.8 million masks, 210,000 testing kits, 36,000 protective suits, ventilators and thermometers to Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

In his twitter account, Jack Ma wrote: "Go Asia! We will donate emergency supplies (1.8M masks, 210K test kits, 36K protective suits, plus ventilators & thermometers) to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan & Sri Lanka. Delivering fast is not easy, but we'll get it

## **DNCC** distributes food among 1,000 families in Mirpur slums, Tolarbagh

Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) yesterday distributed necessary food items among 1,000 poor families in the capital's Tolarbagh and its adjoining slums in Mirpur.

DNCC mayor-elect Atiqul Islam and panel mayor Jamal Mostofa distributed the food packets that included 5kg rice, 2kg potatoes, 1kg lentil, 1kg onion and 1 litre soybean oil.

Atiqul said they are distributing food among poor people in DNCC areas and all 54 wards will come under the distribution.

He said they are giving priority to Tolarbagh as the area was locked down by authorities due to coronavirus, and people were in fear of going there to distribute food.

He also said he has taken a personal initiative to distribute food among 25,000 poor people in DNCC areas. "We will start the distribution from

Tuesday, and initially we will distribute 4,000 packets. The rest will be distributed gradually," he added. Jamal Mostofa Mayor-in-charge

said they are providing 500 packets to each ward councillor, to distribute among underprivileged families of their respective wards.

"Women councillors from reserved seats will get 100 packets additionally,"

Local administration have kept 672 families of 40 buildings under a "lockdown" in Tolarbagh, a day after an elderly resident of the area died from coronavirus infection on March 21.

Meanwhile, some residents Bhashantek slum yesterday complained that their local councillor distributed food packets only among his own circle.

About the allegation, ward-15 councillor Saleque Mollah said he distributed the packets through lists which were provided by leaders of different slums, and he did not make any lists himself.

#### DISINFECTION DRIVE GOES ON

DNCC yesterday also sprayed 1.10 lakh litres of antiseptic through eight water bowsers at different areas of DNCC, said an official.

The areas include Mirpur sections 10, 13, 14 and adjoining areas, Kafrul, Ibrahimpur and adjoining areas, Technical crossing, Sony Cinema Hall, Rainkhola, Zoo Road, Commerce College and adjoining areas, Mohammadpur Town Hall, Rayerbazar, Madhubagh, Moghbazar, Khilgaon, College Gate, Tejgaon, Natunbazar, 100 feet Bhatara Road and adjoining areas.

Apart from these, DNCC also sprayed antiseptic through hand sprays at different lanes, he said.



DNCC mayor-elect Atiqul Islam hands over a package of necessary food items to a resident of a slum in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Police, public admin <sup>3</sup> of a family hand out assistance to families in need

Civil administration and police in different districts have started distributing assistance to poor and underprivileged people who are facing severe hardship during the countrywide shutdown.

They are distributing rice, other food items, cash, soap and various daily essentials, report our correspondents.

In Sylhet, the district administration has allocated two tonnes of rice and Tk 80,000 for underprivileged and poor people. "We understand that allocation is insufficient. But we have started the programme. We have already requested higher authorities concerned for a bigger allocation," said Md Nurun Nabi Mazumdar.

Contacted, Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) Mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury said, "I along with many councillors of the city corporation have decided to help the poor people from our remuneration.'

He also informed that SCC authorities are planning to waive taxes and other utility bills for the poor.

Meanwhile, Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) is selling sugar, lentil and soybean oil.

In Bagerhat, the district administration has allocated 100 tonnes of rice and Tk 10 lakh for poor people in the district and started distributing daily essentials from door

The district's deputy commissioner (DC) inaugurated the initiative at Sugondhi village under Sadar upazila

Under this programme, each poor family will get 10kg rice, 2kg potato, 1kg each of lentil, salt, onion, 1 litre oil and 1 piece of soap.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## sustain burns in Bhasantek

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three members of a family sustained burn injuries after a fire broke out at their tin-shed house in the capital's Bhasantek area on Saturday night.

The injured were identified as Jakir Hossain (45), his wife Rina Begum 40), and their son Riad

They were taken to the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.

Jakir sustained 58 percent burns, Rani 32 percent and Riad 38 percent, according to

Lima Khanam, duty officer at the fire service, said on information, a firefighting unit went to the spot but locals doused the blaze before they reached.

Munshi Sabbir Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Bhasantek Police Station, said they primarily suspect that the fire originated from an electric shortcircuit.

## From cooks to crooks Locked in a blaze Shaheen Mollah and Rafill Islam

Six held for committing robbery in guise of cooks

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

They were cooks by profession and had a reputation for cooking quite well.

But that wasn't their only identity. They were part of a robber gang who often raided homes to loot valuables. They used local weapons -- machete, cleaver and kitchen knife -- and if needed, crude bombs to disperse crowd.

The group members were careful too. They never disclosed details of their identities even to other members, so that law enforcers would not be able to trace them if one got arrested.

Police learned about the techniques of this "gang of cooks", following the arrest of its six members and a jewellery shop owner, who used to buy looted ornaments from them.

All the seven arrestees already gave confessional statement (under section 164) before a court. Officials of Turag Police Station of Dhaka

Metropolitan Police arrested the gang on March 10 while investigating a robbery case filed with the police station on January 18.

According to case details, seven to eight masked men attacked the house of one Sazzadur Rahman and looted four-tola gold and money. They also blasted crude bombs while leaving the house to create panic, read the case details.

The arrestees are: Sohrab Hossain Kamal, a leader of the gang; Hannan Sardar; Fazle Sardar; Md Khairul; Masud alias Bhola Masud and Md Mamun.

Police first arrested Sohrab from Turag area and five others from Jatrabari, Bhatara, Agargaon, and Mohamamdpur in the capital, and Bhola, Sheikh Mofizul Islam, inspector (operation) of Turag

Police Station, told The Daily Star yesterday. Mamun is the owner of "Ma Jewelry Shop" at Mohammadpur and he used to buy looted ornaments from the gang, said Mofizul, also the case's investigation officer.

Of the arrestees, Fazle, Hannan and Khairul gave confessional statements on March 11; Masud and Mamun on March 12 and Sohrab on March 15.

Interrogating the arrestees, police also traced another member -- Sohel Jamaddar -- who was arrested by Manikganj police on March 22 in another robbery case. Later, Sohel was shown arrested in this case and

gave confessional statement on March 24, said the inspector. From the confessional statements, police came to know that they were also involved with two other robberies at Pallabi and Turag on January 25.

The IO said the gang has been involved with robbery for last four years and used to target two residences per week. "We have come to know that the gang has

committed robbery in Jhenidah, Jashore, Madaripur, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Gazipur, and Manikganj. Several cases were filed against them, he added.

Police said the arrestees also knew several other robbery gangs across the country.

While conducting robbery or selecting an area, they first communicated with someone who knew the area well, said investigators.

"Then they used a local member to collect information. Afterwards, they took contract to cook food at an event in the area. The gang members completed recce of the targeted house while SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and RAFIUL ISLAM

Every night before Jannatul used to lock the room of the house they lived in.

For the fifthgrader, this had become a part of her daily routine, which she did



diligently to prevent her mother, Kalpana, an epilepsy patient with other complexities, from going out in the dead of the night.

She probably had done the same on Saturday night when a fire originated from a mosquito coil around 3am and burnt to ashes their room along with two other rooms of the house in Baunia Badh area of

Inhabitants of the other rooms, which included a shop, could run to safety but Jannatul, her mother and younger brother Kawser (8) couldn't as their room was locked.

"When we broke open the door, we found their bodies next to it... Maybe they rushed to the door but could not open it on time, said Forhad Hossain, who lived next room.

He along with others extinguished the fire. Forhad said he could manage to get out before the fire spread. "Had the door not been locked, the family would have been

able to go to safety," he lamented. Visiting the spot yesterday, this newspaper saw 70-year-old Aleya Begum SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



At least seven people cram on a rickshaw-van, travelling to Keraniganj through Buriganga bridge-2. Transportation in the city has been sparse during a citywide shutdown, making commutes especially difficult for working-class people. The photo was taken on Saturday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

lectures for secondary school students yesterday, guardians proposed that authorities address loud background music and unclear whiteboard. They also proposed the government should air these lectures through Bangladesh Television and if possible through some other private TV channels.

After the first day of televised classroom

Televised Lectures for Students

First day draws

mixed reactions

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

We have started test transmission. We will continue it for about one week, Parliament Secretariat Broadcasting and Information Technology Wing Director General Ashok Kumar Debnath, who oversees Sangsad Television, told this

Asked about the background music and unclear board issues, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) director general Prof Syed Md Golam Faruk said they would address the issues.

DSHE named the televised lessons "My school at my home", that began at 9am with the national anthem. It also aired awareness videos regarding coronavirus at intervals of the classes.

## Take steps in measleshit areas of CHT now'

Rights bodies urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Authorities must look into the measles outbreak in Chattogram Hill Tracts and take steps to contain it, two organisations said yesterday.

A joint statement by Kapaeeng Foundation and Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum expressed concern over the outbreak in Rangamati's Baghaichari upazila and Bandarban's Lama upazila, where at least eight children have died and around 300 were infected by measles in the last one month, the statement said, claiming that measles cases were also reported in Ruma upazila of Bandarban.

It said while public-private initiatives in the fight against coronavirus is in everyone's focus, authorities must take note of this measles outbreak.

"We think that such an outbreak would not have occurred if the government had reached peoples' home with immunisation programmes and healthcare," the statement read. It put forward four points to contain the outbreak: uninterrupted and adequate medicare in the affected areas by forming a medical board; emergency humanitarian assistance in measlesinfected areas; free care to affected patients; and proper investigation of

the incident and adequate compensation to affected families. The statement alleged that no vaccination was provided to children in the affected areas. Some patients' conditions were so critical that they were

flown to Chattogram by helicopter by Bangladesh Army. Contacted, Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum said, "We really appreciate Bangladesh Army for taking critically affected children to Chattogram."

Meanwhile, 10-year-old Dhonika Tripura died in Dighinala of Khagrachhari on Saturday of measles, said upazila health officer Dr Tonoy SEE PAGE 4 COL 2 Tripura, adding that they found 20 more children infected in the area.

## Rangpur, M'singh to begin Seven-month-old tests testing for Covid-19 soon

last 24 hours.

Rangpur Medical College has started installing polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machine, a required component for Covid-19 diagnosis. However, the kits required for testing have not arrived yet.

After everything is set up, individuals residing in eight northern districts of Rangpur division will be able to get tested.

The device, which arrived in Rangpur on Thursday from Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) , is being installed at the microbiology department of RMC. Public Works Department is overseeing the installation.

RMC Principal Dr Nurunnabi Lyzu said the machine will be ready to work in a couple of days. "We hope to start testing from April 1 or 2," he said.

About test kits, the principal said they are yet to receive them, but kits will be sent from Dhaka within a few days.

Meanwhile, IEDCR members collected samples from six more patients of Rangpur Medical College Hospital yesterday.

Dr Amin Ahmed, health director in Rangpur, said three of the individuals returned from abroad, while others were being tested because they came in contact with them. They are showing Covid-19-like symptoms, but nothing can be definitively

said until test results come back, he said. A total of 53 people were put in home isolation in the eight districts during the

Besides, seven people entered the country from India, and nine others were admitted to different hospitals in the last 24 hours, the director said.

Mymensingh Medical College (MMC) has installed their PCR machine on Saturday, said its Principal Prof Chitta Ranjan Debnath.

Necessary work to ready the laboratory for testing is ongoing. Testing will start from Tuesday, the principal hoped.

A team of experts from IEDCR visited the lab and installed the machine, he said. Necessary test-kits and equipment, including personal protective equipment, were also handed over to MMC authorities, said the principal.

The laboratory, at MMC's microbiology department, will be supervised by IEDCR. Necessary staff, including doctors and technicians, were trained by the institute.

'We'll be able to deliver test reports within two to three hours after getting samples," Prof Chitta said.

The lab will serve residents of the whole division, said Dr Laxmi Naravan Maiumder. deputy director of Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

# coronavirus negative

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A seven-month-old baby, who was put in an isolation ward at Kushtia General Hospital on suspicion of coronavirus infection, tested negative according to a test report by

Kushtia General Hospital received a letter from IEDCR yesterday afternoon reporting the result, Tapas Kumar Sarkar, residential medical officer (RMO) of the hospital

The baby, affected by fever, cold, and cough -- all symptoms of Covid-19, was brought to the hospital on

Initially admitted to the pediatric ward for treatment, the baby's condition deteriorated and by Thursday had to be administered treatment for pneumonia-like symptoms.

The RMO said on-duty doctors and nurses repeatedly asked family members whether any of their relatives had returned to the country recently, but family members denied. On March 26, they finally admitted that the baby's father was an expatriate who returned to Bangladesh from Singapore on March 9 and had been living with the family ever since, the RMO said.

Hearing this, the hospital authority immediately took the baby to an isolation unit and sent nasal and throat swab to IEDCR on the same day.

Following this, everyone other than baby's mother fled hospital premises, including the father.

Kushtia district administration proceeded to lockdown the family's house on the same day.

Now that the baby has tested coronavirus negative, "We are giving the baby treatment as per disease," the RMO

## passes away

CITY DESK

Roushan Begum passed away yesterday morning at her home of old-age complications, says a press release. She was 87.

Roushan Begum was mother of The Daily Star columnist Prof Dr Rubaiul Murshed, also editor of Sasthoshoily and founder chairman of Shomman Foundation.

She was the wife of renowned surgeon Late Prof Dr Nawab Ali Ahmad, who wrote the first book on healthcare in Bangla in 1952. That same year, he also treated language martyr Abul Barakat in Dhaka Medical College Hospital, as a young surgeon.

Roushan Begum was laid to rest yesterday at the Mirpur Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard, following a namaz-ejanaza.

The bereaved family sought prayers from all well-wishers for her eternal salvation.

#### Roushan Begum | Police, public admin

"This will benefit my family greatly as I have not been able to work in the past few days," said Rajab Ali, a rickshaw puller of the area.

Meanwhile, army and officials of district administration in Bagerhat are conducting awareness campaign through loudspeaker.

In Jashore, police distributed food items and daily essentials among poor people in the district town.

The district's Superintendent of Police Muhammad Ashraf Hossain yesterday visited different slums at Nazir Shankarpur, Ishaq road, Railgate and its adjacent areas in the town and distributed the items among 250 poor families. Each family got 10 kg rice, 5 kg lentil, 2 litre oil

In Cox's Bazar, the district's deputy commissioner Md Kamal Hossain has started visiting different streets in the town and distributing food items to destitute and poor people. "Besides, the district administration has already started distributing rice to poor families. Initially, we are giving 20 kg rice to each family," said the DC.

Our correspondents from Sylhet, Bagerhat, Benapole and Cox's Bazar contributed to the story.

#### From cooks to crooks

preparing food for the function," said the police official. After the robbery was done, they used to leave the district

For example, police said, Sohrab worked as an informer for robberies in Turag, as he had been living in the area for last 15 years. He did not take part in the robbery but used other members, said police.

"We also got names of some others gang members and are conducting drives to arrest them," added Mofizul.

#### Locked in

FROM PAGE 3 wailing beside the ravaged rooms

"We told our granddaughter [Jannatul] to lock the door as my daughter [Kalpana] used to go out in the middle of the night without telling anyone...," she said in a chocked voice. Some were trying to console her, but to no avail

A pall of gloom descended on the area after the incident. Neighbours said Kalpana had been looking after her two children by herself after her husband left them since she became ill. He remarried a few years back and stayed separately.

"Despite all odds, my daughter loved and looked after her children.. She used to sell toys on footpaths to provide for her family," said Aleya, who lived close by with her son.

They were buried at Kalshi graveyard, she added.

#### First day draws

FROM PAGE 3

Sonia Khan, in her lecture on sixth-grade science, used photos and video clips.

Later, Abdul Hasan gave a lecture on Bangladesh and Global Studies for the sixth grade; he was followed by Masud Hasan who gave a lesson on ICT to students of class

Shahanara Begum Poly, who watched the broadcast on a live session from the Facebook page of Access to Information, alleged in a comment that lecture audio was poor, while background music was loud. It was difficult to understand what was written on the whiteboard, she added.

"Camera focus should be on the board rather than teacher most of the time," said Mostafizur Rahman Joseem, who also followed the page.

Ziaul Kabir Dulu, president of Dhaka-based association of school-goers' parents Abhibhabak Oikya Forum, welcomed the move, but said beside Sangsad TV government can consider airing the lecture through Bangladesh Television and some other private TV channels.

Prof Shahedul Khabir Chowdhury, director (college and administration) of DSHE, told The Daily Star teachers will give homework to the students during the lectures, which students will need to submit after their schools reopen.

Today, eight more lectures -- two each for sixth to ninth grade, will be aired from 9am to 12 noon, and repeated from 2pm to 5pm.

The government on March 16 closed down all schools till March 31 and on Tuesday extended the closure till April 9. Several DSHE officials said with the Covid-19 situation evolving every day, this closure might be prolonged.



Incepta pharmaceuticals Ltd donated 3,00,000 hydroxychloroquine tablets, 1,000 units of TYVAC Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), 2,000 pieces of protective gloves, 2,000 pieces of masks and 200 pieces of goggles to the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA).

#### United Hospital sets up telemedicine service

CITY DESK

Amidst the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, United Hospital has set up a telemedicine service for those those with urgent medical needs or those needing routine follow-up.

Through this service, patients can avail video consultation by connecting to the hospital's consultants through Skype from the comfort and convenience of their

To avail the service, appointments can be booked by calling hotlines at 10666 or 02-9852466, after which patients can connect to their preferred consultants via Skype from their device of choice. Patients can take pictures and share their patient records with the consultants via Skype or email prior to a session.

Consultants of Internal Medicine, Cardiology, Nephrology, General Laparoscopic Surgery, Paediatrics Neonatology, Obs. & Gynaecology Gynaecology, ENT, Respiratory Medicine, Orthopaedics, Endocrinology, Neuroscience, Oncology and Ophthalmology will be available through the telemedicine service.

Currently, United Hospital operates Telemedicine services for patients in Chattogram and Sylhet through local Information Centres.

## Made for poor, eco-friendly too

imagine how much plastic we will generate?" asks Mamunur.

Ella's face masks are made at a low cost from textile scraps and can be reused after washing, he said.

When asked about the mask design, Mamunur said, researched different sources [on the internet] such as WHO [the World Health Organization] and CDC [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States].

"We tried to understand how the masks should be made to cover the basics [face parts], just like the mask they have made. There are videos about these on YouTube.'

coordinator alliance expressed willingness to share the design with tailors across the country and provide them with processed textile scraps, if deputy commissioners of districts and upazila nirbahi officers help them

of Tejgaon Industrial Police Station,

said the construction of the proposed

Earlier on Saturday night, Home

Permission is needed to build

reportedly said the hospital would

be built at the previously fixed place.

Asaduzzaman Khan

hospital was resumed yesterday.

with the liaison.

If everyone wears it, can you to be part of the good cause and have distribution. been producing the masks alongside their regular work.

"When I heard that these will be distributed for free among the poor, I felt very happy to make the masks. I have been making 150-200 masks a day for the past four days," Rina Begum, a 26-year-old worker at the Radisson Casual Wear Ltd in Dhamrai, told this correspondent on March 26.

Till Wednesday, the alliance has produced and handed over around 25,000 masks to the BIDA.

Beximco Textiles, one of the 10 alliance members, has provided a lion's share of the masks, while Radisson Casual Wear Ltd supplied around 3000 masks.

According to Khalid Shahrior, general manager of Beximco Textiles, till March 25, they have already produced and distributed 30,000 eco-friendly masks to their

Talking to this newspaper,

Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder

Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury yesterday

said, "It cannot be an issue. The

hospital will provide treatment for

care units (ICUs), 30 isolation

completed soon, he told a Bangla Health Organization standard, and which is about Tk 20 crore, he said.

coronavirus [patients]."

Construction of Covid-19

a hospital and the process will be facilities in line with the World

"The masks made of plastic are Meanwhile, the workers of the Prime Minister's Office and about has a training programme titled not washable and biodegradable. Ella alliance factories are also happy 22,000 to the BIDA for countrywide

> "If we don't have to shut down our factories, we are hoping to produce 25,000 to 50,000 masks a day, alongside our regular work. Initially, we planned to provide 10 lakh free masks. But if needed, we will produce another 10 lakh," he

> Beximco Textiles has involved its seven factories to produce face

Syed Fardeen Hashemi, director of Radisson Casual Wear Ltd, said, initially, they promised to produce 25,000 face masks but due to massive absenteeism among the workers in fear of the coronavirus outbreak, they have produced 3,000 masks as of March 25.

"If everything goes well, we are hoping to fulfill our target and we are trying to involve other businessmen to do this," said Fardeen.

The BIDA will distribute the

250 general beds, he said, adding it

would have the capacity to examine

accept patients within two weeks if

the government extends its support

and will remain open round the

estimated budget for the hospital

Akij Group will provide the

The hospital would be able to

around 1,000 patients a day.

employees, 1,500 masks to the masks in all 64 districts as it "Entrepreneurship Creation and Skill Development" in every district.

The programme has a ninemember committee headed by the district's deputy commissioner, who will decide how to distribute the masks to those who need it, said Mohammad Hafizullah Khan, project director of BIDA's Entrepreneurship Creation and Skill Development programme.

"I received around 28,000 masks from the Beximco Textiles, Radisson Casual Wear Ltd and my personal connections," he added.

"Already, I have distributed around 3500 masks to BIDA employees, the Prime Minister's Office and the Dhaka Reporters' Unity," added Hafizullah, also the assistant secretary at Prime Minister's

As of Saturday, 2,000 masks were sent to Rangpur and Sirajganj, 1000 to Pabna and another 1,000 to Bogura, said the BIDA official.

Locals said the protesters

attempted to vandalise the existing

building where Akij Group, in

association with Gonoshasthaya

Kendra, is planning to set up the

of local ward councillor Shafiullah

Shafi, also prevented two trucks

carrying beds and other equipment

from entering the compound.

The demonstrators, followers

hospital.

## Time to teach values

The educationist said as there is plenty of time, parents can help their children with kids to read and write more during this time.

Renowned curriculum expert Siddiqur said although it is not widely practiced, online schooling or distance schooling is the other option, which many countries have adopted.

"There are many online lessons available on the internet, which parents can choose for their children," he said.

Most importantly, parents need to make sure their children are not bored.

"There should be room for fun and subjects . Some parents can encourage their games. Kids can also learn through fun and games. He made the comments against the

backdrop that test transmission of recorded classes for secondary students of Class VI to X through Sangsad Bangladesh Television that started yesterday morning, aiming to minimise academic session loss as all educational institutions are now closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Earnings of Bede dry

community in Domshar union, said, "We have been isolated for the last 10 days without any help from the government or anyone else."

marginalised people. If we do not get assistance, we will not survive." He said he contacted the Domshar Union Parishad seeking help, but the

"We are extremely vulnerable and

authorities did not respond. Ziaul Haque, sardar of another Bede community in Angaria union, said, "We

did not receive any assistance either." "All our income sources are off and if the government does not help us during the pandemic, there is no chance for us to

Contacted, Chan Mia Madbor, chairman of Domshar Union Parishad, said they helped 55 families with 10 kg rice each but

He promised that the Bede people would get assistance as soon as the government allocates further financial aid.

Asked, Anowar Hossain Howladar, chairman of Angaria Union Parishad, echoed Madbor's statement.

Mahabur Rahman Sheikh, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Shariatpur Sadar, said, "We are making a list of 150 families of extreme vulnerable and underprivileged people including the Bede families for help. We hope we can help them soon."

Kazi Abu Taher, deputy commissioner of Shariatpur, said they helped 3,900 families in Shariatpur with 10 kg rice each and some essential products worth Tk 200.

"But this help is insufficient."

He also said that some HM Rasel Howladar, an expatriate in Spain, donated Tk 2 lakh for helping underprivileged people and the district administration was trying to make right uses of the money.

## Bangabandhu calls for mass education

The hospital will have 20 intensive clock, Zafrullah added.

FROM PAGE 12

Minister

education system has so long failed to produce men. The existing education system can only produce bureaucrats, he regrets.

Speaking on the need to carry the light of education to the masses, Bangabandhu says that teachers and students should spend some time in villages every year and work for to spread education among the rural people.

#### FORM OF GOVERNMENT WILL BE PARLIAMENTARY: CONSTITUTION

The Constitution of Bangladesh will provide the country a parliamentary form of government, enshrining all the basic principles of democracy, socialism, nationalism and secularism, the Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs Dr Kamal Hussain says today. He adds that the draft constitution will adequately include all the ramifications of democracy and guarantee the fundamental rights and privileges of the

the Constitution, which is under the process of finalization, will be placed for approval before the session of the Constituent Assembly when it meets on April 10.

#### CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY TO HONOUR BANGABANDHU

The Calcutta University Senate has decided to confer an honorary D Litt. degree on Bangabandhu. Justice Ramaprasad Mukherjee raised the proposal in the Senate's meeting and

#### **85 PERCENT INDUSTRIES UNDER** NATIONALISATION

it was unanimously adopted.

The nationalisation programme launched by the government will cover over 85 percent of the total capital and fixed assets in the whole of the country's industrial sector, says the Planning Commission. Explaining the working of the

people irrespective of cast and religion. The organisational structure for the nationalised Law Minister informs that the working draft of industries, the Planning Commission source industries, the Planning Commission source says that there will be one corporation for each of the industries such as jute, sugar and cotton. Each industrial unit will again have its own management board or board of directors to plan and execute its production and other programmes. The boards will consist of representatives of workers, financing institutions and members with management experience.

#### BANGLADESH NOT 'PURBA PAKISTAN'

The director of public instruction, West Bengal has requested all heads of institutions in West Bengal to instruct teachers and students to henceforth read Bangladesh and Pakistan in place of Purba Pakistan and Paschim Pakistan in

SOURCES: March 31, 1972 issues of Ittefaq, The Bangladesh Observer, Azad, Morning News, Dainik Bangla and Purbodesh.

#### গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলীর কার্যালয়, সওজ সড়ক বিভাগ, ময়মনসিংহ ফোনঃ ০৯১-৬৭৬৭৭, ফ্যাক্সঃ ০৯১-৬৭৬৭৭

E-mail: eemym@rhd.gov.bd

স্মারক নং-৬২৫/(১৫)

could not help the Bede yet.

#### খুরশীদ মহল সেতুর টোল কোটেশনের সংশোধনী বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, অত্র দপ্তর স্মারক নং-৩৮৯ তারিখঃ ২৭/০২/২০২০ মাধ্যমে আহ্বানকৃত ইজারা কোটেশন নং-০২/কোটেশন/ইই/এমআরডি/২০১৯-২০২০ (৩য় আহ্বান) অনিবার্য কারণবশতঃ নিম্নোজ সংশোধনী প্রদান করা হলঃ

ক্ৰঃ নং	আহ্বানকৃত কোটেশন নোটিশ	সংশোধিত কোটেশন নোটিশ
०१	ইজারা কোটেশন বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়ঃ	ইজারা কোটেশন বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়ঃ
	২৯/০৩/২০২০ খ্রিষ্টাব্দ বিকাল ৫.০০ পর্যন্ত।	১৫/০৪/২০২০ খ্রিষ্টাব্দ বিকাল ৫.০০ পর্যন্ত।
οb	মুখবন্ধ অবছায় ইজারা কোটেশন গ্রহণের শেষ তারিখ ও	মুখবন্ধ অবস্থায় ইজারা কোটেশন গ্রহণের শেষ তারিখ
	সময়ঃ ৩০/০৩/২০২০ খ্রিষ্টাব্দ দুপুর ১২.৩০ পর্যন্ত।	ও সময়ঃ ১৬/০৪/২০২০ খ্রিষ্টাব্দ দুপুর ১২.৩০ পর্যন্ত।
১২	ইজারা কোটেশন খোলার স্থান, তারিখ ও সময়ঃ	ইজারা কোটেশন খোলার স্থান, তারিখ ও সময়ঃ
	৩০/০৩/২০২০ খ্রিষ্টাব্দ বিকাল ২.০০ ঘটিকা।	১৬/০৪/২০২০ খ্রিষ্টাব্দ বিকাল ২.০০ ঘটিকা।

এছাড়া কোটেশনের অন্যান্য শর্তাবলী অপরিবর্তীত থাকবে। এই সংশোধনী ইজারা কোটেশনের অবিচেছদ্য অংশ হিসাবে গণ্য

মোহাম্মদ ওয়াহিদুজ্জামান পরিচিতি নং-৬০১৯৭৬ নিৰ্বাহী প্ৰকৌশলী, সওজ

সডক বিভাগ, ময়মনসিংহ

তারিখঃ ২৪/০৩/২০২০ খ্রিষ্টাব্দ

জিডি-৭০৭

## Privacy rights may become next victim

AFP, Washington

Digital surveillance and smartphone technology may prove helpful in containing the coronavirus pandemic -but some activists fear this could mean lasting harm to privacy and digital rights.

From China to Singapore to Israel, governments have ordered electronic monitoring of their citizens' movements in an effort to limit contagion. In Europe and the United States, technology firms have begun sharing "anonymized" smartphone data to better track the outbreak.

These moves have prompted soul-searching by privacy activists who acknowledge the need for technology to save lives while fretting over the potential for abuse.

"Governments around the world are demanding

extraordinary new surveillance powers intended to contain the virus' spread," the Electronic Frontier Foundation said in an online post.

"Many would invade our privacy, deter our free speech, and disparately burden vulnerable groups of people. Governments must show that such powers would actually be effective, science-based, necessary, and proportionate."

The measures vary from place to place. Hong Kong ordered people arriving from overseas to wear tracking bracelets, and Singapore has a team of dedicated digital detectives monitoring those living under quarantine.

Israel's security agency Shin Bet has begun using advanced technology and telecom data to track civilians. In perhaps the strictest move, China gave people smartphone codes displayed in green, yellow, and red,

determining where citizens can and cannot go China is also among the countries enhancing censorship about the crisis, human rights watchdog Freedom House said, while others are blocking websites or shutting off

"We have observed a number of concerning signs that authoritarian regimes are using COVID-19 as a pretext to suppress independent speech, increase surveillance, and otherwise restrict fundamental rights, going beyond what is justified by public health needs," said Michael

Abramowitz, president of the group. Some activists cite the precedent of the September 11, 2001 attacks, which opened up the door to more invasive surveillance in the name of national security.

"There is a risk these tools will become normalized and continue even after the pandemic slows," said Darrell West, who heads the Brookings Institution's Center for Technology Innovation.

But even some digital privacy defenders say it may be prudent to use some of the available data to help control the outbreak.

"I'm not against fighting this epidemic with data or tech," said Ryan Calo, a University of Washington researcher affiliated with Stanford's Center for Internet and Society. "The problem with implementing surveillance in an emergency is that it might acclimate people to that."

**North Korea fires two** 

short-range missiles

North Korea fired what appeared to be two

short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast

yesterday, the fourth such launch this month as

the world battles the coronavirus outbreak. The

string of weapons drills come as a prolonged

hiatus in disarmament talks with the United

States drags on, and despite recent overtures

from Washington offering help to contain the

pandemic. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said

the North fired the two projectiles, presumed to

be ballistic missiles, from the port city of Wonsan

Sea. Tokyo's defence ministry said the projectiles

North has conducted 3 more launches this month.

fell short of Japanese waters and the country's

exclusive economic zone. The nuclear-armed

Taliban says no to

Afghan negotiators

The Taliban on Saturday rejected an Afghan

government negotiation team set up to hold

talks with the insurgent group in a bid to end

a 21-member team -- including five women

-- to take part in the upcoming talks, a crucial

step in bringing the warring parties to the table

and getting a floundering, US-led peace process

back on track. But the Taliban in a statement said

the government had failed to put forward an

"inclusive" team. Under a deal signed by the US

and the Taliban last month, the insurgents agreed

to resume talks with the Afghan government and

discuss a possible ceasefire. In return, the US and

foreign partner forces agreed to withdraw from

Saudi intercepts missiles

Saudi air defences intercepted ballistic missiles

Afghanistan over the next 14 months.

fired from Yemen

the country's 18-year-old conflict. After months

of delays, the government on Friday announced

into the Sea of Japan, also known as the East

## PM apologises to India's poor

Says lockdown the only option to prevent epidemic; states told to seal borders

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked the nation's poor for forgiveness yesterday, as the economic and human toll from his 21-day nationwide lockdown deepens and criticism mounts about a lack of adequate planning ahead of the

Modi on Tuesday announced a three week-lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus. But, the decision has particularly stung millions of India's poor, leaving many hungry and forcing tens of thousands of jobless migrant labourers to walk hundreds of kilometres from cities to their native villages.

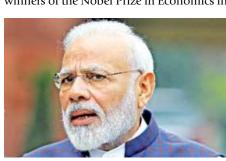
"I would firstly like to seek forgiveness from all my countrymen," Modi said in a nationwide radio address.

The poor "would definitely be thinking what kind of prime minister is this, who has put us into so much trouble," he said, urging people to understand there was no ther option.

"Steps taken so far... will give India rictory over corona," he added. Modi, whose government on Thursday

announced a \$22.6 billion economic western state of Maharashtra. stimulus plan to provide direct cash transfers and food handouts to India's poor, however, did not offer any clarity on

In an op-ed published on Sunday, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo - two of the three winners of the Nobel Prize in Economics in



2019 - warned that even more aid for the poor is needed.

"Without that, the demand crisis will snowball into an economic avalanche, and people will have no choice but to defy orders," they wrote in the Indian Express.

Police said four migrants were killed on Saturday when a truck ran into them in the

On Saturday, a migrant collapsed and died in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh while on a 270 kilometres (168 miles) walk home, according to a police official.

"We will die of walking and starving before getting killed by corona," said migrant worker Madhav Raj, 28, as he walked by the road in Uttar Pradesh.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in India rose to 979 yesterday, including 25 deaths.

Meanwhile, New Delhi yesterday told states to seal their borders and encourage migrant labourers to stay where they are by providing food and shelter.

The terminuses and the packed buses where people even sat on the roof - went against the government's efforts to ensure social distancing, the only way to slow down the progress of the highly infectious coronavirus.

The states have been asked to stop incoming buses at the border and place the occupants on a mandatory 14-day quarantine. Food and other essentials should be made available to the people during this period, the order said.

#### **CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC**

#### **LATEST UPDATES**

**DEATH TOLL PASSES 31,000** 

At least 31,412 people have died worldwide from the coronavirus -- some 22,260 of those in Europe -- since the epidemic started in China in December, according to an AFP tally compiled at 1000 GMT Saturday based on official sources. With 10,023 deaths, Italy alone accounts for almost a third of the world death toll. The next countries with the highest official deaths are Spain (6,528), mainland China (3,295), Iran (2,640) and France (2,314).

**RECORD DEATHS IN SPAIN** 

Spain tightens measures, ordering a halt to all non-essential activities and telling workers to stay home for two weeks. The country has the world's second-highest toll and confirmed another 838 deaths in the last 24 hours, a new daily record. The number of confirmed cases reached 78,797 on

Sunday, a one-day increase of 9.1 percent. TRUMP BACK-FLIPS ON NY LOCKDOWN

Some eight hours after stunning the New York metropolitan region with a proposal to place it under quarantine, US President Donald Trump decides against imposing a broad lockdown. His reversal comes on the same day as the US death toll tops 2,100, more than doubling in just three days. The US has the most confirmed cases in

#### **FOOD COUPONS IN ITALY**

Italy announces it will send food vouchers to those who cannot afford groceries. The novel coronavirus has claimed more than 10,000 lives across the Mediterranean country, about a third of the world's total, creating the worst emergency Italians have known since World War II.

#### **UK SITUATION TO 'GET WORSE'**

In a leaflet being sent to more than 30 million households in the UK, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson warns "things will get worse before they get better". The government says the lockdown could last a "significant" time, as infection rates spiral and the death toll passes 1,000. Russia, which has not imposed a full lockdown, will close its borders on Monday and next week will be a week off from work.

#### **AUSTRALIA LIMITS GATHERINGS**

Gatherings will be restricted to just two people in Australia from today-- down from the current limit of 10 -- and playgrounds, outdoor gyms and skateparks will be closed across the country. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said all over-70s as well as indigenous people over 50, who are more susceptible to diseases, are now being strongly advised to self-isolate at home. Australia has recorded almost 4,000 cases of COVID-19, with the death toll reaching 16 yesterday. Meanwhile New Zealand reported its first novel coronavirus death.

#### TRUDEAU'S WIFE RECOVERS

Sophie Gregoire-Trudeau, the wife of Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, has recovered from the novel coronavirus, she said Saturday. "I am feeling so much better and have received the all clear from my physician and Ottawa Public Health," she wrote on her Facebook page. She had tested positive for the virus on March 12 after returning from Britain.

SOURCE: AFP



Migrant workers travel on crowded buses as they return to their villages, during a 21-day nationwide lockdown to limit the spreading of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Ghaziabad, on the outskirts of New Delhi, yesterday.

# Chaos emerging amid lockdowns

Anger grows out of uncertainty around the world 'amid new way of life'

AGENCIES

As countries began enforcing strict lockdowns to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, the uncertainty over future, specially among the poor, is beginning to spark anger and chaos.

Unprecedented measures by governments to tackle the coronavirus pandemic has forced more than 3 billion people to remain home. But without clarification and a timeframe when the situation will improve, some of the most vulnerable groups have already began to express dissent.

President Hassan Rouhani yesterday warned that "the new way of life" in Iran was likely to be prolonged, as its declared death toll from the novel coronavirus rose to 2,640.

"We must prepare to live with this virus until a treatment or vaccine is discovered, which has not yet happened to date," President Hassan

In Sicily, police with batons and guns have moved in to protect supermarkets on the Italian island of Sicily after reports of looting by locals who could no longer afford food.

The novel coronavirus has claimed more than 10,000 lives across the Mediterranean country, about a third of the world's total, creating the worst emergency Italians have known since World War II.

Simultaneously, it has eroded the economy, which had been the thirdlargest in the European Union before the new illness reached Italian shores from China last month.

A lockdown designed to curb contagion has shut almost everything across the country since March 12, depriving millions of steady incomes.

The building sense of desperation reportedly boiled over on Thursday

developed regions.

According to La Repubblica daily, a group of locals ran out of one of Palermo's supermarkets without

"We have no money to pay, we have to eat," someone reportedly shouted at the cashiers.

In other Sicilian towns, small shops owners that are still allowed to stay open have been pressured by the locals to give them free food, Il Corriere della

The paper wrote of a ticking "social time bomb" in the region.

"I am afraid that concerns shared by much of the population -- about health, income, the future -- will turn into anger and hatred if this crisis continues," Giuseppe Provenzano, Italy's minister overseeing southern regions, told La Repubblica.

In Thailand, dozens of prisoners broke furniture and smashed windows during a riot in a Thai jail yesterday sparked by fears of a coronavirus outbreak in the facility. During the violence some convicts escaped from the Buriram prison where 2,000 are held, the justice ministry said. Seven have been arrested.

Justice Minister Somsak Thepsutin confirmed that a group of inmates sentenced to life had started "agitating" other prisoners with rumours of a virus outbreak

In India's cities, too, anger was rising. "We have no food or drink. I am sat down thinking how to feed my family," said Amirbee Shaikh Yusuf, 50, in Mumbai's sprawling Dharavi

"There is nothing good about this lockdown. People are angry, no one is caring for us."

## Ctg admin

materials, including rice, lentil, salt, and other grocery items, among poor and low-income people in the city's Muhuripara

"In Muhuripara area, around 280 families were given a packet of 10kg rice, one kg lentil, one kg salt, one litre edible oil, and half kg noodles, maintaining social distance," he added.

Masudur said distributing the food items, DC Elias went to Khulshi area to see the present situation of some foreign returnees, who are now quarantined at home.

According to the DC office, 70 foreign returnees are now kept in home quarantine in Khulshi area. Some 947 foreign returnees are in home quarantine in the port city and different upazilas of the district.

Meanwhile, the CMP's north zone also distributed food times among the poor yesterday.

Ashikur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner (admin) of the north zone, told The Daily Star that wearing Personal Protective Equipment, police distributed food items to 200 families who live from hand to mouth in the city's GEC, Prabartak, Khulshi, and its adjacent areas

He added that they would provide the relief aid to another 250 such families.

Apart from that, different persons and organisations are helping the poor across the

#### **US** diplomats

"Those leaving for the US want to be with their families. Many are choosing to stay here," the diplomat said.

The US embassy will remain

fight Covid-19, the officials said the US on March 11 announced that it would provide a \$2.5 million grant for Bangladesh. The Centre for Disease

Control and Prevention of the US is providing technical expertise to Bangladesh to tackle the virus, he added.

## Six held for spreading rumours

people last week for spreading rumours regarding covid-19," Najmul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of social media monitoring and cyber security crime division, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are only arresting those who are spreading rumours on social media," he said.

As a part of the arrest, police are also providing counselling for those who are unintentionally getting involved with spreading rumours about the virus.

"We have detained five people two days ago for spreading rumours and they were released after proper counselling so that they do not get involved again," said ADC Najmul.

Najmul further said that they are also blocking some pages and groups on social media after it found spreading rumours regarding the virus. "We have a special 20-member team, who is monitoring social media to take action against those who are spreading rumours," he added.

According to officials, they have different professionals' involvement in spreading rumours, including a doctor, followers of pir and private university students.

On March 25, the secondary and higher education divisions suspended two government college teachers, posts over the shortage of PPE for doctors.

The suspended teachers are Kazi Zakia, an assistant professor of Gafargaon Government College Mymensingh, and Shahadat Ullah Kayser, a lecturer at Barishal Government Women's College.

doctor was arrested in Chattogram and a Jamaat-e-Islami leader in Chandpur for spreading rumours recently, said police.

Police also arrested six people from different areas in Dhaka on Saturday on charges of spreading rumours and misleading information on the coronavirus outbreak.

They are Awkad Hossain, 53, Ferdous Hasan Titu, 25, Tawhidul Islam, 25, Muslim Uddin, 23, Mofizul Islam, 20, and Farid Hossain, 20. Police also recovered a large

quantity of leaflets containing misleading and false information and seized a pick-up van from their possessions. Shamim,

commissioner (Ramna Zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said a police team first arrested Awkad while he was distributing leaflets in front of Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Saturday evening.

Based on his information, five others were arrested from Dhaka's

following their "critical" Facebook Mouchak area, said Shamim.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees admitted that different groups on 32 pick-up vans are distributing such leaflets in the city and they are all followers of "Rajarbagi Pir", added the officer.

The arrestees claimed that the Rajarbagi Pir gave the money to them but police are trying to find more information about the funding, added the official.

The other teams went into hiding after their arrests. We informed the Motijheel Division police to take steps against the Pir," Shamim said.

The cyber police bureau of the

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is also working closely with other police units to deal with the spread of rumours on Covid-19. Shah Alam, deputy inspector

general of CID's cyber police bureau, told The Daily Star yesterday that they are on high alert and are monitoring every activity on social media. Meanwhile, Mohammad Javed

Patwary, inspector general of police, warns of taking strict action against anyone found spreading misleading information and rumours on social media about coronavirus.

The police chief said law enforcers are regularly monitoring social media platforms, including Facebook.

The IGP came up with the remark

while addressing reporters at the end of a handover programme of personal protective equipment (PPE), waxes, hand gloves and sanitizers in the police headquarters yesterday.

Overseas Chinese Association of Bangladesh (OCAIB) handed over the equipment to Bangladesh Police to prevent the spread of coronavirus. OCIAB president Zhuang Lifeng, vice president Feng Xiaorong, executive director Chen Qihua were also present in the programme among

The IGP further urged all to stay at home following the governmentdirected hygiene measures to prevent the spread of the infection.

The police chief said no one would leave the house without urgent or special reasons. "If you need to get out of the house when there is an urgent need, you must follow the hygiene protocols. The IGP further said police

members have been instructed to treat the people professionally, tolerantly and humanely.

He added that all police units has been working together to prevent the transmission of coronavirus. Police personnel who attended the funeral processions and burials of those who were coronavirus positive were provided with special PPE and other protective equipment, he added.

## FROM PAGE 12

open and the officials will have a tele-work arrangement. Asked how the US and Bangladesh can cooperate to

#### over Riyadh and a city on the Yemen border late Saturday, leaving at least two civilians wounded in the capital that is under curfew in a bid to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Multiple explosions shook Riyadh in the attack, which the Saudi-led military coalition blamed on Yemen's

Iran-aligned Huthi rebels who have previously targeted Saudi cities with missiles, rockets and drones. It was the first major assault on Saudi Arabia since the Huthis offered last September to halt attacks on the kingdom after devastating twin strikes on Saudi oil installations. Missiles interception sent shrapnel raining on residential neighbourhoods in the cities, leaving two civilians injured in Riyadh, a civil defence

spokesman said in a separate statement released SOURCE: AFP

DHAKA MONDAY MARCH 30, 2020, CHAITRA 16, 1426 BS o starbusiness@thedailystar.net



### **TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE**

# Mobile users puzzled by govt SMS to gather health-related info

Mobile operators are receiving a barrage of questions from users after sending them text messages seeking information on their health condition as part of a government plan to draw a digital map to track coronavirus cases and detect potential risk

Instead of acting upon the instructions given in the messages, many rang the operators' call centres to know the purpose of collecting the information.

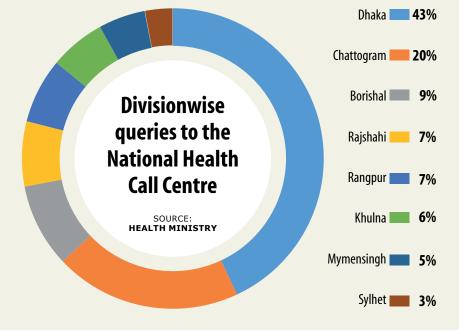
"Our call centre executives have been rushed off their feet dealing with the numerous calls," said a senior official of a mobile operator asking not to be

As per plan, the operators were supposed to share the information with the National Telecom Monitoring Centre (NTMC).

The NTMC along with the Access to Information (a2i) programme under the government's ICT Division would then draw a digital map using the data and artificial intelligence to help the government take stock of the situation.

If the government gets authentic

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information, it will be able to install quick quarantine facilities, ventilators and ICU

> beds before the patients become severely ill, said officials working closely with the plan.

"Most people infected with coronavirus start to show symptoms within five days and their condition begins to deteriorate in the next few days. So, the government wants to know in advance," said a top

After getting a directive from the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission on Saturday, the mobile operators began sending the messages to their customers from yesterday asking them to call \*3332# free of charge if they have cough or fever.

During the 90-second interactive voice response, users are asked to reply to five questions: what their age is; whether they have breathing problems; if they have fever or cough; whether they have come in contact with anyone who has returned from abroad recently; and if they have come close to any coronavirus-infected people.

98.12 11.69

Users might have taken the SMSs for the run-of-the-mill messages they receive every day, said the official of another mobile operator. "That's why a huge number of them didn't bother to respond," he added.

The operators would need at least a couple of days to complete sending the SMSs to all the 16.62 crore active users in Bangladesh.

The customers' health information is being collected under a self-reporting method to identify the areas where the virus has spread so that the government can come up with a contingency plan and location-based response.

People can also share their health information via http://corona.gov.bd or some mobile applications like bKash, GP, Robi, Banglalink and Uber.

However, as the telecom division has raised questions about customers' data security, the NTMC will have to get the go-ahead from the government to take the rocess forward, said a government official.

The government already has a huge volume of user data in its hand as about three lakh calls are generated every day in three different platforms: the government's popular helpline of 333, the national health call centre at 16263, and the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control & Research.

The health ministry said their call centre has received 842,480 calls until Thursday, of which 632.177 were related to coronavirus. and the call volume has been growing since

## Logistics for stimulus package allocation to be finalised by next week

REIAUL KARIM BYRON

The government has started work on devising a method to allocate its Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package for the exportoriented sectors announced by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on March 25.

Now, the finance ministry will form a committee -where the business leaders would also be included - to work out the logistics.

The committee would scrutinise the claims made by the affected export-oriented sectors. The funds would be disbursed after their need assessment, said an official of the finance ministry.

Already, finance ministry officials have held meetings with a number of trade bodies.

A method is likely to be finalised within a week, he said. Bangladesh's export sectors had been reeling from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic even before the virus's presence was established in the country as economic activities in its major export destinations such as the EU, the US and the UK have almost ground to a halt in recent

Garment comprised 84.21 per cent of Bangladesh's total exports worth \$40.5 billion in fiscal 2018-19 and the sector employs more than 4.1 million workers.



coronavirus pandemic in the Western world has led to many of the brands shutting down their stores, forcing them to cancel orders or delay shipments.

As of yesterday, \$2.80 billion worth of garment orders were cancelled by international retailers, according to data compiled by the Garment Bangladesh

Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Some 1,016 garment factories reported a loss of 862 million units of work orders. The cancellation will affect 2.05 million workers. But the domestic market-based industries and

the services sector have now been affected too as the government enforced a ten-day shutdown to prevent the spread of lethal, pneumonia-like virus. Many workers in the informal sector have completely

lost their incomes and they do not have any coping

At the moment, the government's top most priority is to take steps to ensure food for 100 per cent of the population, vesterday

"Once the crisis is over, we will take whatever steps we need to take so that the affected businesses and businesses can return to their pre-crisis level. No sector would be left out. The Prime Minister's Office and the finance ministry are working on it," he said.

The government needs to quickly devise a method to disburse the Tk 5,000 crore assistance to support payroll in the export-oriented industries, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

"Since the size of the assistance is less than their monthly wage bill, a formula is needed to determine who gets how

much," he said. The BGMEA though has sought three months' wages for

its workers One simple formula would be to allocate based on the

number of workers in each enterprise as a proportion of total employment in the sector. The assistance should be limited to blue-collar workers, all of whom could be paid an equal amount. The veracity of data on the number of blue-collar

workers provided by the industries can be checked against data existing in the Directorate of Inspection of Factories and Establishment.

If it does not have the data, the government could randomly check the payroll registers of the factories

"To make sure the blue-collar workers actually get the money, the disbursement could be made conditional on submission of payment receipts signed by the workers. This will require the factories to pay first and then claim reimbursement."

There should be cash support initiatives to cover all the affected workers -- wage employed and self-employed -- in all sectors until the economy gets back to its normal gear, Financing is a serious constraint on the government

budget. As in previous episodes of livelihood crisis, the rest of the society must share part of the burden, Hussain "I think they will if they could find some trustworthy

intermediary who will make sure the money reaches the intended target. We have many well reputed nongovernmental organisations who could be used for this purpose," he added. The government is looking to secure \$750 million from

the International Monetary Fund and \$200 million from the World Bank to tackle the health crisis and tide over the The Asian Development Bank has approved \$300,000

in emergency grant. The Manila-based lender may provide \$500 million in budget support to Bangladesh. In the meantime, the finance ministry is working to

devise immediate and mid-term strategies. The exportoriented industries would be supported under the immediate plan while the rest under the mid-term plan within the current budget. The ministry is now looking to restructure budgetary

allocation as many projects are on pause owing to the

The non-export-oriented sectors would be supported from the funds to be freed up through the restructuring of the budgetary allocations and from the funds promised by the development partners, the finance ministry official said.

# Foreign exchange reserves heading towards choppy waters

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The country's foreign exchange regime is cruising towards headwinds due to the dwindling exports and remittances thanks to the global economic slowdown brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. "Banks have already started to feel the

pinch," said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank. Many lenders had faced foreign exchange

shortage just before the central bank asked banks to shutter their major operations for The problem will come back with

vengeance once normal service resumes, he

The balance of payment has not faced a crisis in recent period due to the upward trend of remittance, which increased 20.05 per cent year-on-year to \$12.49 billion in the first eight months of fiscal 2019-20.

The 2 per cent cash subsidy for remitters from this fiscal year has been the main driver behind the spike.

But the subsidy is not working at the moment as the global economy is now

facing a recession, which has forced many Bangladeshi expatriates to return home, Rahman said.

The inflow of remittance has almost stopped and a severe crisis will be created if the lockdown in the migrant workers' host countries continues for long, said M Kamal Hossain, managing director of Southeast

"We are now unable to give prediction as to how long the crisis will prolong," said Faruq Mainuddin Ahmed, managing director of Trust Bank. If it prolongs, the state of affairs of the

external sector will get worse, Rahman said, while urging both the central bank and the government to take prompt measures to tackle the impending crisis.

The country's foreign exchange reserve stood at \$32.56 billion on March 24, up 2.83 per cent from a year earlier.

The reserve is sufficient to settle import payments for at least five months, which is better than the global standard of three

already cancelled their work orders, which

foreign exchange reserves, said Emranul Huq, managing director of Dhaka Bank.

The balance of payment is not facing any problem right now as import has already declined significantly in recent months, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

Between the months of July last year and February this year, trade deficit, which occurs when imports outweigh exports, stood at \$9.4 billion, down 2.32 per cent

In the first seven months of the fiscal year, imports decreased 4.43 per cent yearon-year to \$32 billion.

"Imports will go down more in the days ahead as demand will reduce because of the ongoing fallout," said Mansur, also a former official of the International Monetary Fund.

The foreign exchange crisis will be felt when the economy gets back to normal post coronavirus.

He suggested the central bank to But a good number of buyers have depreciate the local currency against the the downward trend of remittances, said a dollar in the interest of the exporters as BB official.

is set to have a negative impact on the many peer countries have already done

"Remittance is the main tool to avoid the foreign exchange crisis. Along with Europe and North America, the Middle East is also facing recession because of a sharp decline in petroleum price," he said.

The country's majority of migrant worker are based in the Gulf nations, he Saleuddin Ahmed, a former governor of

the central bank, echoed the same. The interbank exchange rate stood at Tk

84.95 per dollar on March 25, up from Tk 84.25 a year earlier, according to the central "Both the remitters and exporters will

get support if the taka depreciated," Ahmed Meanwhile, the central bank bought

greenbacks worth \$305 million from banks in the second week of this month after a gap of about three years.

But the central bank was forced to sell \$40 million to banks on March 25 due to

## Container congestion feared at Ctg port amid limited delivery

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Loading and unloading of bulk cargoes and containers to and from the vessels are going on as normal at the Chattogram port, which handles 93 per cent of the country's consignments, with the view to keeping the supply chain smooth amidst the ongoing countrywide movement restrictions.

only the delivery of However, commodity, emergency medicine and service-related materials are being allowed as the Chattogram Customs House operates on a limited scale.

Officers from different departments like Traffic, Accounts and Marine have been tasked with assessment of the selected goods for release, according to Md Omar Faruq, secretary of the Chattogram Port Authority (CPA).

However, the curtailed delivery poses to create another problem of container congestion

Around 5,000 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of import containers were delivered in 24 hours until 8am on March 26 before the holiday began. The number came down at 1,200 TEUs

Congestion has already been created at Dhaka as importers are not taking delivery exceeded its capacity.

CPA Member Mohammad Zafar Alam of containers were lying at the Dhaka ICD, the Kamalapur inland container depot in confirmed it, saying the ICD has already



Containers are piling up at the Kamalapur Inland Container Depot in Dhaka as importers are unable to take delivery amid the movement control order from the government.

SHEIKH ENAMUL HAQ

Until yesterday afternoon, 4,700 TEUs which has the capacity to store at best 4.000 TEUs.

Finding no space, they even kept around 120 TEUs import containers at the space designated for export containers, said Ahmedul Karim Chowhdury, head of Kamalapur ICD.

Though the situation at the port is under control as it still has enough space, it can change because of the poor delivery, said Alam, adding that if they cannot send the Dhaka ICD-bound containers they would occupy space in the port.

Transport of import-laden containers from Chattogram Port to Dhaka ICD through railway was suspended from Saturday afternoon to Sunday evening.

After the last cargo train left Chattogram port for Dhaka ICD on Saturday afternoon, two trains loaded with import-laden containers were stuck at the Chattogram Goods Port Yard.

One of the trains was due to start for Dhaka last night, Shadequr Rahman, divisional railway manager in Chattogram, told The Daily Star.

## TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

# Are the policy and community responses adequate?



The government and the Bangladesh Bank have come up with several initiatives in response to the evolving public health and economic crisis.

Several of the initiatives pertain to flattening the spread curve of coronavirus while the others attempt to flatten the fattening of the economic costs curve due to social distancing

How does the overall response package look like, taken together, and how adequate and well defined are the responses?

Flattening the curve

The measures introduced to flatten the spread curve include public holiday announced from March 26 to April 4, school closures, deployment of armed forces to enforce social distancing, closure of the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission and the bourses in line with the closure of public offices.

The decision on whether to keep factories open or running has been delegated to the respective industry associations.

The general feeling is that these measures came a little late, though better than never.

The measures lacked internal consistency -- with some factories closed and some open, when the conventional wisdom is such middle grounds are self-defeating -- and they failed to anticipate the callous behavioural

The economically affected are spread all over the country. How will they be identified and reached? How will the delivery mechanism ensure that social distancing is not traded off in the process? How many will these assistance cover?

to travel in crowded transports and went on vacation to tourism spots, thus exacerbating the transmission risk.

The deployment of the armed forces could be a lifesaver assuming they themselves have enough personal protection equipment. FISCAL RESPONSE

The National Board of Revenue withdrew all duties and taxes on imports of medical supplies related to COVID-19 such as protective equipment and test kits.

The scarcity of isopropyl alcohol or ethanol has hindered the supply of enough hand borne by the owners and perhaps the buyers. More support is already being demanded by the industry leaders.

No support is available for deemed export, domestic market-oriented industries and those in services, who too are facing cash flow disruption due to the sudden stoppage of the wheels of the economy.

There is a lack of clarity in the support announced for the at-risk population dependent on the informal sector.

Facing the choice between death due to starvation and coronavirus infection leading

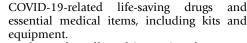
and the monthly salary bills will have to be bank financial institutions (NBFIs) beyond those needed to meet the statutory liquidity requirement.

This will help counteract the disruption in recoveries due to a virtual moratorium on loan repayments to the banks and the NBFIs until

The banks that have rescheduled loans according to the new rescheduling policy will be allowed to keep 50 per cent of the provision

The BB also increased the repayment tenure of loans given out from the Export Development Fund (EDF) from three to six

There is a lack of clarity in the support announced for the at-risk population dependent on the informal sector.



The BB has allowed increasing the usance period for industrial raw materials up to 360 days from 180 days and the usance period for life-saving drugs to up to 180 days from 90

All these will make trade financing easier and more flexible.

WHERE DO WE STAND?

Overall, both the fiscal and monetary responses described above are in the right direction, but not even remotely adequate.

They also lack clarity on the implementation modalities. The devil could be in these details. The fiscal response will not see the light of the day without working out the details. Time is of the essence here.

Many governments have introduced support packages equivalent to 8-10 per cent of GDP. Indian fiscal package constitutes 0.8 per cent of GDP.

Ours is hard to estimate because of the lack of clarity on the amount allocated for food, medicine and housing-based assistance. However, it is unlikely to be even close to that

for support to deal with a crisis as ferocious and devious as the coronavirus, which has brought the entire global economy close to

It is not fair to look only to government

The financial and non-financial corporates have to come forward as well using their corporate social responsibility funds.

The established industries who are virtually living on profits should be willing to dig into their accumulated reserves to maintain their workforce. After all, social distancing has only

artificially stopped the wheels of the economy. While it may cause some permanent damage if it has to be continued too long, once the economy gets moving with relaxation of social distancing measures, the unleashing of boom and thus help replenish the depleted

The well-off individuals should come forward with voluntary contributions to support the incomes of the workers and the self-employed in the informal sector.

The non-governmental organisations and the other social organisations need to deploy their institutional capacity in identifying and reaching the adversely impacted groups with social assistance.

Unfortunately, other than perhaps the cricketers, we are yet to see a significant community response comparable to what we have seen historically in times of floods, cyclones and food price shocks.

The government has to lead the effort and the rest of the society must chip in with cash, kind, skills and organising support to contain the spread of lethal virus, deal with the COVID-19 infected cases and cope with the economic fallout of social distancing.



sanitisers. The high duty on rectified spirits continues, thus discouraging its use for producing hand sanitisers and symbolising another policy inconsistency.

The recent announced fiscal response is in the right direction, though far from adequate.

ne most significant in terms of the amount of financial resources is the Tk 5,000 crore -which is equivalent to 0.2 per cent of fiscal 2018-19's GDP -- wage support to workers in the export-oriented industries.

the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association claims that it pays Tk 4,000 crore in wages every month.

The Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers

and Exporters Association probably pays an amount very similar. Then there are the others: leather, footwear,

furniture, ceramics and so on. Most are demanding more than a months'

How the announced amount will be

rationed among all the different claimants in the export sector is not clear. But rationing is inevitable since the total is

well short of the wage bill in the exports sector. It could be done on the basis of the number of workers in each export-oriented factory as a proportion of the total workers in the sector.

possibly to death, they prefer the latter. This demonstrates once again that there is nothing more lethal than an empty stomach.

To them the risk of contracting coronavirus pales compared with the pain from starvation.

The government has indicated providing 6 applied for person-to-person transfer. months' free food, free shelter, free medicine for poor people without defining eligibility transactions of Tk 15,000 daily and Tk 100,000 criteria, the financial allocations and the distribution mechanism.

Rice will be sold at a discounted price. The ministry of disaster management and relief has reportedly received more than 24,000 tonnes of food for distribution to the needy. But where and how -- are unclear.

The economically affected are spread all over the country. How will they be identified and reached? How will the delivery mechanism ensure that social distancing is not traded off in the process? How many will these assistance cover? As done in India, why not make cash transfers to the target groups through mobile financial services? MONETARY RESPONSE

The BB has reduced the repo rate from 6 per cent to 5.75 percent and the cash reserve ratio from 5.5 per cent to 5 per cent. The latter is estimated to inject about Tk 6,500 crore liquidity into the banking system.

It has also committed to purchase treasury The difference between the public support bills and bonds from the banks and the non-

months. This will relieve pressure on cash outflows of the beneficiaries of EDF.

The monthly transaction limit using mobile financial services (MFS) has been increased to Tk 200,000 from Tk 75,000. No charge can be

monthly while selling medicines and other essential goods if they use debit or credit cards Transaction limit using contactless debit

Merchants cannot be charged for settling

and credit cards has been increased from Tk 3,000 to Tk 5,000 per day. All these will facilitate the functioning of

payments when restriction on movements outside home require limiting the number of transactions needed to make a payment. The BB instructed banks to extend the

to six months. Importers now have more time to make import payments with extension of the tenure

tenure of realising export proceeds from four

of Letters of Credit to six months from the existing four months. The period of back to back letters of credit

opened under suppliers and buyers' credit has been extended up to a year from six months. Banks are allowed to accept advance

payments of up to \$500,000 from typically \$10,000 from businesses seeking to import The author is an economist

# H&M comes to its garment suppliers' rescue

Refayet Ullah Mirdha

Swedish retail giant H&M yesterday assured its garment suppliers of taking shipment of goods that have already been manufactured, much to the relief of some Bangladeshi exporters.

at a time when apparel suppliers across the world, including those from Bangladesh, are being slammed by work order cancellations and delayed shipments.

"We will stand by our commitments to our garment manufacturing suppliers by taking delivery

of the already produced garments as Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers well as goods in production," said H&M in a media message.

any particular country.

H&M sources garment and textile items worth nearly \$4 billion from more than 230 Bangladeshi factories annually, according to industry insiders.

"We will, of course, pay for these suppliers." goods and we will do it under agreed payment terms. In addition, we will not negotiate prices on already placed orders," H&M said.

At this point, it is necessary to

temporarily pause new orders as

H&M came up with the message well as evaluate potential changes on recently placed orders. "We will start placing orders again as soon as the

situation allows," H&M Meanwhile, as of 5pm yesterday, 1,025 factories reported cancellation of

864.17 million units of work orders worth \$2.81 billion, according to the and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

H&M says it is well aware that The Swedish company did not the suppliers, and their employees, mention any particular supplier from are extremely vulnerable in this

"Given the constantly changing situation and the uncertainty that we, the industry and the whole world are facing, we want to be clear and transparent towards our garment COVID-19 patients need level 3/4.

The entire fashion industry now faces its biggest challenge ever, according to the Swedish company. "And we utilise all our networks

contribute in the best possible way." Companies such as H&M play a key role in many developing countries, as well as global trade. The textile industry contributes to economic growth, employment and stability in

and contacts to find solutions that can

textile producing countries. "We are at this instance intensively investigating how we can support countries, societies and individuals from a health and financial perspective. In this first urgent phase, we will focus our efforts on countries that are highly dependent on the textile industry," the

retailer added. Meanwhile, the BGMEA plans to make at least 20,000 personal protective equipment (PPE), which ill be donated.

"What we are making is a substitute of Level-1 PPE," it said in a WhatsApp

Doctors and staff treating

Customers at Sonali Bank's local office in capital's Motijheel take counter services yesterday while maintaining a social distance when queuing up. Banks will remain open for two hours from 10am during the ten-day public holiday announced from March 26 to April 4 to contain the spread of coronavirus. Staff manning the counters have been given personal protective equipment for their safety.



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FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY MARCH 30, 2020, CHAITRA 16, 1426 BS

# Withdrawing the Barguna OC not enough

Those responsible for custodial death should be tried after proper investigation

E are outraged at the death of Shanu Hawlader, a 55-year-old farmer, in police custody in Barguna. The hanging body of the man was found in Amtali Police Station of the zilla on March 26, three days after he was arrested. His family members alleged that police demanded Tk 3 lakh from them for releasing him, and as they could not arrange the money, the OC of the thana along with other police officers tortured Shanu to death.

The increasing number of custodial deaths in the country and the lack of measures from the police and the government to investigate the incidents and hold those accountable for these deaths make us wonder about the existence of rule of law in the country. According to rights body Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), 10 people died in jail custody across the country from January, 2020 to February, 2020. ASK statistics show that at least 14 people died in custody last year, of them, six died after torture.

Sadly, such incidents are never investigated properly and as we know, no police official has ever been punished according to the law of the country for torturing someone to death while in their custody. The only steps that are usually taken against the accused police officials include withdrawing them from their respective police stations and suspending them for a short period. And this is what has been done in the Barguna case also. At first, two police officers of the thana were suspended and later the OC was withdrawn and attached to Barguna Police lines. We would like to ask, what does this withdrawal mean? Why has he not been suspended until the investigation is complete? And what about punishing the OC and other responsible police officials for what can only be described as murder?

We have heard that two probe committees have been formed to investigate the incident. We demand a proper and impartial investigation from them and hope that action will be taken against the officials according to the law.

# Implement shutdown with empathy

Essential movement shouldn't be stopped

HE countrywide shutdown was a timely step by the administration. It was a necessary inconvenience to stem the spread of COVID-19 and ward off the likelihood of the kind of situation that was and is being faced in many countries. More than 200 countries have been afflicted by the virus, in varying degree, and most of them have ordered people to go on self-isolation. However, while such orders do oblige people not to venture out from homes, essential movements outside is allowed. After all people need to buy necessities like food stuff and of course the sick need to get to the hospital or treatment centres.

Unfortunately, media reports show that the police and other members of the administration have been rather draconian in their attitude while implementing the lockdown orders in our case. There have been instances of public outrage at police excesses, as reported, in their bid to ensure social distancing and shutdown. The enforcing agencies shouldn't administer corporal punishment, and that too to elderly people as happened in one instance, or prevent people taking patients to the hospital while enforcing the lockdown. In fact, in one instance as reported in this paper yesterday, a person had to bribe his way out of the situation. We are happy to note the IG's instruction following these incidents, urging compassion from his forces. This should have been the attitude of the police from the very start.

But apart from the police, what has created a serious problem is the complete shutdown of public transport of every denomination since the lockdown was announced. And it is the less affluent and the poor who are the hardest hit. We suggest that the administration in conjunction with the two city corporations arrange for pool of transport in various parts of the city which people can avail easily in time of their need, particularly for going to the hospital. That would lessen the pains of shutdown considerably.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

## Please maintain safety measures

Yesterday, I got out of my house after staying indoors for five days to buy some medicine. When I got out of the building and a walked a little further, I was shocked to see several groups of people. There was a group of young boys smoking in a corner. On the other side there were two men talking to each other without wearing any face mask. Some teenagers were playing on the road.

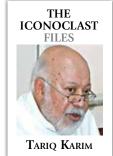
To be honest, I was quite angry to see the carelessness of people when it came to protecting themselves and others. It is as if they are immune to the virus and all the warnings seem to be falling on deaf ears!

On one hand, we are complaining that the authorities are not taking enough measures to curb the crisis, and on the other, we ourselves are not abiding by the most basic safety requirements. To stop the spread of the virus we must all be more careful

Md Habib, Dhaka

## Preparing for a post COVID-19 world

A regional architecture of cooperative mechanisms for addressing non-traditional security threats is needed



HREE days ago, on March 25, listening to a briefing on the then available latest global statistics about the COVID-19, I learnt that the global total of recorded cases was then a little over 400,000,

spread across over 169 countries. Of these, the first 100,000 cases had taken 67 days, the second 100,000 about 11 days, the third 100,000 about 4 days, and the last 100,000 less than 4 days. We were told in no uncertain terms that this was the first great pandemic, of truly global proportions in a hundred years, after the so-called "Spanish flu" of 1918-20, (which had afflicted over 500 million people or a quarter of the world's population at that time, and inflicted a death toll of between 17-50 million). The entire world today is in a dire economic situation, a global recession worse than the recession of 2009 is inevitable, only this time it would be somewhat different in nature: there would be a very big hit on the services sector, in which there are typically no rebounds; supply chains are standing fractured or not available any longer; there would be a very likely rise in food prices because of severe disruptions to the logistical or other chains on which assured availability of food depends; social safety measures would prove woefully inadequate; and domestic and external shocks would reinforce each other, perhaps exponentially.

Three days later, on March 28, 2020, the number of globally recorded cases was nearly 600,000 with the numbers increasing steadily by the hour. In other words, the number jumped from 400,000 to 600,000 in about 3 days. Of these, currently infected patients number over 436,000, of whom over 23,000 are in serious or critical condition. The United States has now surpassed Italy (and China) with the highest number of cases (over 104,000). Mr Trump can now boast of presiding over the new epicentre of this pandemic. I am willing to bet that by the time this article is published all the numbers will be higher.

This situation will get worse, given the now well-established trajectory globally. While experts everywhere, from different nationalities and different disciplines in science, are near unanimous in agreeing that the crisis will become worse, much worse, and all countries (including the United States), are either woefully inadequately prepared or ill equipped, or both. Chinese President Xi Jinping has reportedly reached out to President Trump and offered help in sharing knowledge (gleaned from its own experience) and equipment to tackle the critical situation. However, because of stonewalling and sheer cussedness on the part of some, the G-20 virtual summit ended in a fiasco. Mr Trump kept insisting on publicly labelling this disease as the "Chinese virus/Wuhan virus", to which the Chinese objected with injured ego. Mr Trump would do well to delve into some history of his own country, and recall that the so-called "Spanish flu" of 1918 is now thought by many as actually having originated in an obscure farming community in Haskell county in Kansas, USA where a farm worker caught the infection from a pig, and then carried it to Spain where it ballooned among an unsuspecting population from where it travelled to the World War-I theatre (in which Spain, ironically, was not a protagonist), and then travelled back to the United States, in two successive waves, from Summer, to Fall and then Winter. The Spanish flu should therefore be correctly renamed today as the American flu of 1918. Perhaps this will satisfy the respective egocentricism of the respective world leadership today, who should instead buckle down to addressing the crisis and putting in place institutional arrangement to deal with the current pandemic, and its resultant fallouts on food and employment security and ensure that more such pandemics do not

We should assume that more such unexpected pandemics will very likely occur, because there are countless strains of coronavirus among other animals, birds and reptilian species than we know of, and with spaces of separation between species and homo sapiens ever shrinking (or basic principles of ecological equilibrium having been ignored and shattered), the intervals between such pandemics could well also dwindle, alarmingly. Pandemics jump over time and space, across peoples, countries and cultures, ballooning exponentially. Despite all indications to the contrary, people worldwide took the onset of the current pandemic complacently, almost smugly, holidaying on beaches when governments advised them to go into social distancing and self-isolation. When Saudi Arabia and some Gulf states advised their nationals that they should abjure from going to mosques and instead remember God and offer their prayers in the isolation of their respective homes, we have had examples of people in some of the most densely populated Muslim countries (including in Bangladesh and Indonesia) congregating in very large numbers for congregational prayers or "waz mahfil" sessions (in which there could have

already been some infected people, but quite unaware of their being so). In Malaysia, one such event resulted in notable community transmission of the disease. In Bangladesh, the officially announced total number of cases today is 48, with 5 fatalities. The official statistics does not necessarily reflect the accurate statistics, because of the very tiny number of the population having been tested, even among the several thousand returnees from China, Europe or elsewhere who were allowed to go home on condition of "selfisolation" which was merrily (and most irresponsibly) largely not observed. The Bangladesh Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) announced its detection two days ago of the first community transmission of the disease. I await with considerable trepidation to what the figures will exponentially translate into in, 7 days, 14 days or 21 days from today.

In my last missive on the subject published in this newspaper a week ago ("Implications of coronavirus for regional and global cooperation", *The Daily Star*, March 22, 2020) I had advocated that we needed to shift our focus away from viewing our security within the traditional paradigm only, but consider our overall security as contextually nested in what I describe as ecological security that includes a host of non-traditional causes all of which would at some stage, sooner or later, translate into a traditional security threat as understood conventionally.

Ecological and non-traditional security may be defined as maintaining a dynamic equilibrium not only among human societies (friction among whom used to be the traditional source of conflict) but equally, if not far more importantly, between humans and nature, humans and other species and humans and pathogens. Any disruption to this dynamic equilibrium between any two

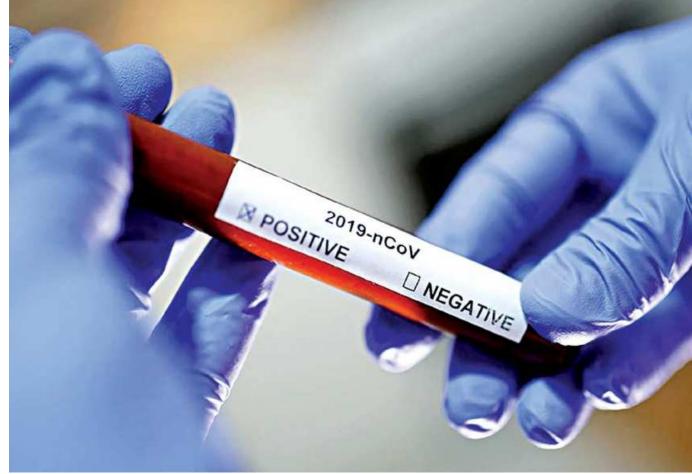
some natural cataclysm like another great tsunami, or a mega volcanic eruption or a mega earthquake is not likely to occur anytime soon? I for one, would wish governments and peoples to be prepared for such unpredictable scenarios, however unlikely they might appear to be at cursory glance now.

Such an organisation would be an authoritative umbrella body (rather than a toothless association or "club") with the mandate and authority to enforce adherence to its collective decisions. It should be headed by a ministeriallevel Governing Council, that should meet periodically, at least once a year, by rotation in each member-country's capital. Decisions should be arrived at by a simple-majority consensus. Decisions once taken, are mandatorily binding on every member state. Its decisions are like laws passed by the national parliaments, but where the decisions are in conflict with national laws, they over-ride the latter. The body will derive its funding through mandatory contributions from each of its member states, the amount proportional to its population but weighted by its GDP. Where necessary, it may dictate levying of taxes on income according to income slabs to meet sudden emergencies. For wildcard events, (like the current COVID-19 pandemic) it will maintain an emergency fund of a predetermined amount raised through taxes as well as central funding. Money for this fund is to be raised through levying taxes on specific/related activities, like travel, entertainment, retail sales, etc. While the amount of the levy would be relatively very small, since it is collected on a daily basis from a wide swath of the population across the entire region, cumulatively it would translate into a considerable amount which would be sufficient to cope with an extraordinary emergency in its immediate aftermath.

This umbrella body will have at least six sectoral cells to deal with food

protective gear for medical personnel and patients, testing kit and life support equipment. Certain industries may be designated and tasked with being geared to produce such kits/equipment/gear on an emergency basis to cater to national and regional emergencies, as well as to replenish stock. It will also monitor animal diseases linked to poultry and livestock on a similar basis and will exercise the authority to impose very strict quarantine regulations in order to forestall spread of man or animal borne diseases across borders.

**Ensuring food security** The authority will require each member state to maintain a minimum reserve of food grains stock (rice, wheat or maize, etc.) sufficient to meet consumption requirements of its nationals for four months, at any given time. This is to meet national emergencies within its own domestic jurisdiction. The cost of this buffer stock is met from the domestic national budget of each member state. Additionally, a pre-determined quantum of food grains, pulses, powdered milk, bottled water, salt and sugar is also stored along centrally designated locations, (close to airports/railway stations/ports) and along the borders with adjacent countries for fast movement to disaster areas in times of extraordinary transboundary emergencies. Both categories of the above reserve stocks will have specifically designated shelf lives. These items will be put on the market at least two months before expiry of such shelf life but also be replenished simultaneously with new stock with new shelf lives. The cost of these emergency buffer stocks will be raised through a system of food security tax/levy raised monthly at a rate not less than a minimum percentage of an individual's regular income (say a monetary unit per person irrespective of par value of that unit vis-à-vis the strongest unit in the



We should assume that more such unexpected pandemics will very likely occur.

PHOTO: **REUTERS** 

or more component sets of actors or factors integral to this equilibrium would translate into a disturbing, risk-fraught disequilibrium endangering all. Man, as the dominant species with a steadily burgeoning population, has a greater ability today than ever earlier to affect how this equilibrium is maintained. Changes in the complex intertwined relationship between man, nature and other species can be destabilised by changes in nature or in human behaviour.

As resources needed by man for his sustenance and development steadily dwindle, fierce competition has already increased among peoples for control over decreasing resources that sustain human societies. In this struggle for control, nonstate actors have increasingly emerged as posing by far the greater threat to societal security than conventional military threats by other state actors. Maintaining ecological equilibrium in any given geo-space has, therefore, emerged as increasingly integral to not only ensuring the overall wellbeing of the peoples who inhabit that space, but to ensuring their continuing security, traditional and non-traditional. But this requires exponentially increased cooperation and collaboration between states.

Most of the NTS threats need a well-thought out systemic and institutionalised response, in a pan-Westphalian context. I have earlier advocated for establishment of a regional Authority called South Asian Regional Ecological and Environmental Authority (SAREESA), which would have several sectoral bodies under it to address different NTS threats, one of which would be addressing pandemics.

Now that we are wading ever deeper into, and increasingly floundering in, a pandemic and we are assured by experts that more such pandemics are very likely to afflict us unless we think in anticipatory mode, and not just to address pandemics—who is to say that

security, water security, energy security, employment security, health security, and environmental security, respectively. For the moment, let me present only three of these sectoral cells: wildcard events, health security and food security—these are the specific areas where I foresee immediate problems likely to confront us all in the wake of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

pandemic.

At the first signs of an event occurring (like current pandemic, or a major tsunami, flood, drought, earthquake or volcanic eruption), it would trigger off a regional warning system that keeps vulnerable populations informed and evacuates endangered populations where deemed necessary. It also activates across the region emergency related services to go into standby mode to cope with health and food security.

Ensuring health security
With global and regional movements of people and all sorts of goods, including flora and fauna, and particularly microbial or viral passengers having become easier with the communication revolution and induction of super jumbo aircraft, ensuring regional health has become a greater challenge than ever.

The contemplated authority's mandate would include regional health management issues linked particularly to communicable diseases (cholera or other diarrheal diseases, typhoid, etc.) that may escalate into epidemics or pandemics. For the purpose, it maintains a central information system of networking that links all national/or designated hospitals to a regional information centre. It monitors the instances of communicable diseases that are known to spread easily, and tracks movements of such diseases if they occur. The centre also maintains a regional health registry, where it stores and updates on a continuing basis, data from its network of hospitals across the region, information on supplies of

region). This principle of compulsory contribution will instil a sense of value and participatory ownership that raises the importance of this scheme in the public perception.

public perception.

In case of a disaster outside the region (another region located near or far away, in the same or another continent), individual countries will be required to contribute in aid to the afflicted outsider region from its own domestic reserve, provided it has the capability or a viable plan for replenishment of its own stock in a timely manner. Similar contribution may be made from the regional reserves mentioned above also, provided replenishment is lined up within a reasonable timeframe.

The regional authority should be able to requisition multi-modal transportation vehicles (marine, air, riverine or road) from any or all of its member-states' civil and military resources. For this purpose, it can maintain a database of all such available transportation, listing what is available and where at any given time. And for this, the national civil and military bureaucracies will be required to update a centralised database on a regular, continuous and real-time basis.

While most ideally, we need to have a regional body for such an unprecedented emergency, (and I had hoped in my last article that this crisis would have impelled us to move towards such a dynamics), if that does not happen, Bangladesh should take the lead in instituting measures envisaged above on a national basis and set an example of good governance that might nudge others to emulate. As Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore famously exhorted: "if no one heeds your call, walk alone". Sooner or later, others will be compelled to join, inspired by the example you set.

Tariq Karim is a retired ambassador and currently Senior Fellow at the Independent University.



pandemic COVID-19 has created havoc in the world throwing millions out of jobs and means of livelihoods. Countries rich or poor are struggling to cope and survive as infections and death rates soar.

It has created disruptions as never witnessed after the Second World War. Rich countries such as UK, US and the EU have allocated millions, billions and even trillions of dollars to offset the catastrophe suffered by businesses, joblessness and other major disruption to people's lives.

Bangladesh is no exception, although our rate of infection and death is low compared to many countries, the impact on the lives of people specially from low income groups is evident with schools, business houses, restaurants and shops closed, leaving thousands without any means of earning. The garment industry which hires about 5 million workers, mostly women, have been given a lifeline to offset massive cancellation of orders. Special incentive package has also been offered for the rural poor and massive relief operation such as distribution of food has started. The government is keen to see that the pandemic does not have an adverse impact on the poorest.

However, it is the workers in the informal sector who are left more vulnerable than others and merits our attention. The Labour Law of 2006 is a comprehensive one which was further refined in 2010, 2013 and 2018 providing detailed guidelines for the workers-employers relations and benefits. However, the informal sector workers are not included. The Bangladesh Worker Welfare Foundation Act 2006 defines informal sector as those "private bodies where the terms and conditions of employment of workers and other relevant issues are not determined or guided by the provisions of the existing Labour Act, Rules or Policy, promulgated thereunder, and where there is very limited



The informal sector accounts for almost 89 percent of total national employment which is about 64 million people.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

scope for the workers to be unionised". This Foundation was created specifically to come to the aid of all workers, whether formal or informal in case of emergencies for them and their dependents. Although the National Labour Policy 2006 mentions workers of the informal sector as a huge working force whose skills need to be developed, quote: "One of the important duties of the Government is to ensure the rights and welfare of the Labourers. The Government, focusing on this target, shall take initiatives to enact necessary laws to upgrade the living standards of the huge number of people, working in the informal sector." However, this law is yet to be enacted as workers in the informal sector continue to be out of the purview of the Labour Law.

The present situation and especially

the lockdown (which was necessary) has put workers in the informal sector in a precarious situation. The informal sector accounts for 51.4 percent of total national employment which is about 64 million people. They are the rickshaw pullers, agriculture workers, construction workers, hawkers, rag pickers, transport workers, part time domestic workers, etc. (source: BBS). Child workers are included numbering around 4.8 million or 12.6 percent aged from 5 to 14. 83 percent are employed in rural and 17 percent in urban areas, they mostly work in the transport sector, as hawkers, rag pickers, in biri and welding factories, etc.

With schools and offices shut rickshaw pullers have no passengers, construction work has come to a halt therefore day labourers are sitting idle. Self-employed workers and

hawkers, both men and women who earn a living by selling food and other daily use items have no buyers. The disruption is total and widespread. While the well to do people are either working from home and spending time reading, exercising or meditating, the poor are waiting desperately for the situation to improve.

As we all know, women and children face a disproportionate brunt of any crisis be it war, social unrest or a pandemic like the present one. Women in the informal sector not only earn a living to support their families but also have to take care of their children. Given the closure of every means of livelihood, there is no alternative back up for them. Women headed households are in special jeopardy. Street and working children, boys and girls whose lives are already precarious

find themselves bereft of the little social support they had. Shelters, drop-in centres and other facilities have closed down. Their meagre earning is now nil. They have to go back to their families who have no means to support them. Adolescent girls and boys are particularly vulnerable and may fall prey to anti-social groups who will exploit them

Government relief initiatives are laudable, however, concern remains about coverage. What about the specially marginalised groups such as persons with disability, sex workers, minority population, people living in hard to reach areas and of course children? We know of the challenges surrounding proper targeting of the social safety net programmes. In this situation strategies to address different segments of the vulnerable population and a proper database is required. However, it should be noted people need more than just rice, dal and cooking oil to survive. They need cash to face the uncertain future such as sickness, accidents, etc.

Just as workers in the formal sector, informal sector workers need to be paid. Employers are urged not to deduct their salary during the present lockdown. The Workers Welfare Foundation mandated to respond to emergencies should transfer to them cash equivalent of two month's salary. City corporations and local authorities can issue ration cards for three months. Social safety net programmes should cover informal workers also. Collaboration with the NGO sector, many already in the field, will assist government to accelerate relief efforts. The Social Welfare Department is especially urged to take responsibility for working and street children. All initiatives have to be undertaken on an emergency basis as seven days of lockdown has passed compromising food intake and health status of millions.

It is the workers in the informal sector who keep our domestic economy moving. Just think what would happen if all such workers stopped working for a day. In this time of crisis, they deserve our special attention.

Shaheen Anam is Executive Director, Manusher Jonno

## Free flow of information in the time of COVID-19

FARUQ FAISEL

**¬**ODAY the whole world is struggling to manage the global crisis of COVID-19 and Bangladesh has been listed as one of the 25 high risk countries.

In light of the growing disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the monitors for freedom of expression and freedom of the media for the United Nations, the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe issued a joint

The statement says: "Human health depends not only on readily accessible health care. It also depends on access to accurate information about the nature of the threats and the means to protect oneself, one's family, and one's community. The right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, through any media, applies to everyone, everywhere, and may only be subject to narrow restrictions.

In this connection, they pointed out that it is essential that governments provide truthful information about the nature of the threat posed by the coronavirus. Governments everywhere are obligated under human rights law to provide reliable information in accessible formats to all. The statement clarified that the right of access to information means that governments must be making exceptional efforts to protect the work of journalists.

Independent journalism, citizen reporting, open public discourse and the free flow of information are indispensable in the global effort to counter COVID-19. Governments must develop policies and responses to the outbreak that embrace freedom of expression. The media and social media companies must also contribute to the fight against misinformation related to the COVID-19 crisis. Journalists should report accurately and without bias, investigate propaganda campaigns and official discrimination, and make sure there is the right of correction and

Alongside other fundamental human

rights, the right to freedom of expression and information should provide the legal foundation for tackling the COVID-19 outbreak. During a public health crisis such as the COVID-19 outbreak, the free flow of information is critical. Viral epidemics and pandemics are by their nature diffuse events, impacting populations on a regional, national or global scale. State authorities cannot comprehensively monitor the spread of a virus and the emergence of new hotspots in real time. Instead, effective public health

the actions of policymakers. During the COVID-19 outbreak, public fears and frustrations have at times manifested in criticisms—both founded and unfounded of state officials and critiques of government policies. State action to stifle criticism of public authorities is inconsistent with the right to freedom of expression.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has emphasised that information accessibility is a key component of the right to health. When states restrict



responses to epidemics and pandemics rely on monitoring and reporting by the general public. Journalists, researchers and public health professionals also play essential roles in tracing the spread of a virus. At the same time, individuals, doctors and epidemiologists cannot effectively protect themselves and others without access to accurate and up-to-date information from authorities. Official denials and withholding of information fuel viral epidemics.

Public health crises such as viral epidemics or pandemics often place a spotlight on

speech relating to health issues or block access to health-related information and do not publish health information proactively, populations suffer adverse health impacts and cannot fully enjoy the right to health.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has specifically warned against censoring health-related information or taking other steps to prevent public participation in public health conversations and initiatives. COVID-19, stifling public reporting of an outbreak hampers monitoring and response efforts. Conversely, protecting

freedom of expression ensures that vital information collected by the public, journalists and local health officials reaches policymakers and other key stakeholders. The Special Rapporteur on the right to health has also emphasised the need for transparency in public health policy and the importance of information in holding policymakers accountable and empowering individuals to protect their own health. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has likewise condemned the deliberate withholding or misrepresentation of information vital to health protection or

Misinformation represents a serious challenge in addressing a viral epidemic or other public health crisis. During the COVID-19 outbreak, individuals around the world have struggled to decipher fact from fiction. Some have embraced beliefs or practices that deepen, rather than mitigate, health risks. Governments are right to take the threat of misinformation seriously. They should develop policies to effectively halt the spread of myths and to counter deliberate disinformation campaigns. Misinformation not only disrupts public health efforts; it can lead to the violation of other human rights. Despite the threat posed by misinformation, any restrictions on the dissemination of supposedly false information must comply with the requirements of legality, legitimacy and necessity and proportionality.

Unfortunately, beyond merely embracing responses to misinformation that violate international human rights law, some states have also spread disinformation and propaganda themselves. During a public health crisis, government programmes and policies are closely scrutinised, and states often have an incentive to control narratives and shape perceptions of the performance of public authorities. Some states have been accused of covering up the spread of the virus or promoting falsehoods for political gain. State-sponsored misinformation is especially dangerous. It both erodes trust in state authorities and promotes misguided responses by the public and health officials. Nevertheless, government, politicians and ordinary citizens use the term to condemn opinions with which they disagree and to call

A free and independent media is especially important during a public health crisis such as the COVID-19 outbreak. The media plays a central role in providing information to people most likely to be affected. A free and independent media can monitor national and international responses to an outbreak and promote transparency and accountability in the delivery of necessary public health measures. The media can also serve to relay back key messages from those affected to policymakers and other important stakeholders. However, journalists have also at times failed to uphold the highest professional standards, reporting inaccurately or contributing to discriminatory narratives.

for restrictions on certain types of expression.

Social media platforms play an increasingly dominant role in facilitating communications, disseminating information and sharing opinions. Possibilities have been evident in the use of social media during the COVID-19 outbreak. Governments, health workers, communities and individuals have regularly turned to social media platforms to get essential information concerning the virus. However, they have also been confounded by the diverse and conflicting information found online.

Governments undermine their own ability

to respond to COVID-19 when they attack

journalists.

At this time of crisis, government should use freedom of information legislation to facilitate access to public information, including by mandating disclosure of certain types of information and establishing a system for individuals and groups to request information from public bodies.

It is important that the public authorities ensure that they do not spread misinformation, and governments should abandon intentional propaganda or disinformation campaigns.

Governments should ensure strong protections for whistleblowers. Moreover, the authorities need to protect those raising concerns about government misconduct or policy failures relating to COVID-19.

Faruq Faisel is the South Asia Regional Director of the UK

## QUOTABLE Quote



**ANATOLE FRANCE** (1844-1924) French writer.

An education isn't how much you have committed to memory, or even how much you know. It's being able to differentiate between what you know and what you don't.

#### **CROSSWORD** BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS** 1 News summary 6 Rigging support 10 Last Greek letter 11 Sportscast feature 12 Uncovered 13 Diamond covers 14 Wallet bills 15 Goose group 16 Bar bill 17 Cocoa serving 18 "Sure thing!" 19 Party decoration 22 Sunrise site 23 Tightfitting 26 Runner in the

29 Unruly crowd

32 Go bad

33 Fish eggs

34 Dumbstruck 36 Cell feature 37 Is furious 38 Pale brown 39 Mating game 40 Red Square

name 41 Sentry's command 42 Pick up the tab

DOWN 1 Mechanical men 3 Brain parts

2 Radiate 4 Gets older 5 Spot to jot 6 Metal waste 7 Bess's love 8 Plentiful

9 Derby prize

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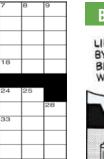
11 Play site 15 Tooth surround-17 You can sleep

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS RECAP G ONES GAGG M U G |A|M|E| Т TREA ROT AMAZED BA R 38 Diner sandwich A G Е S ВЕ G CHES Ν



TARPS

## **BEETLE BAILEY**

LIFE IS NOT MEASURED THEN HOW WILL MY LIFE BE MEASURED, BY THE YEARS WE LIVE BUT WHAT WE DO WITH THOSE YEARS

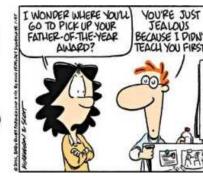


#### **BABY BLUES**

by Kirkman & Scott

by Mort Walker





# Constructionsectorstaringatanuncertain future due to coronavirus pandemic

#### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's construction sector is set to face challenging times because of the coronavirus pandemic as it would slow down the economy, disrupt development activities and put workers out of jobs.

"The impact could be far-reaching if the crisis prolongs," said SM Khorshed Alam, president of the Bangladesh Association of Construction Industry (BACI).

"We don't know when it will come to an end. So, we can't say immediately what impacts it would have on the sector"

Alamgir Shamsul Alamin, president of the Real Estate & Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB), echoed the sentiments of the BACI chief.

"Undoubtedly, the pandemic would take a huge toll on the construction and the real estate sectors," Alamgir

"But we are now in a situation where we are not thinking about the sector any longer. Now our focus is how the people will survive in this situation. If people are alive, businesses will stay afloat, including the real estate

Their comments came as Bangladesh became the latest victim of the novel

On March 8, the government reported the maiden cases of the coronavirus,

"This is the time to support the governmentandstandbythem.ltisnot thetimetodemandsomethingfrom the government. The rewill be plenty of time to persuade the government to meet demands of the sector once the country successfully tackles the coronavirus."

which originated in China in December last year and has since spread to 172 countries. Since then, at least 44 people have been infected and five have died as of March 26, according to the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

Globally, it has infected 474,204 people and killed more than 21,000 people, data from the Johns Hopkins University showed on Thursday.

The outbreak has compelled Bangladesh to enforce general closure across



Construction of the elevated expressway in progress at Airport Road.

the country from Thursday (March 26), shutting public and private offices and educational institutions, limiting banking activities and transport movement.

"Construction activities have already halved as the implementation of projects, small or large, has slowed," Khorshed Alam said.

The construction sector is a labour-intensive sector but workers are fearful in the current situation. Many construction workers are operating in environments where social distancing is impossible.

Respiratory problems are very common among construction workers because of dust.

"The other day, one of the 10 workers in my construction site coughed and the rest of the workers declined to continue working. I had to convince them to return to work."

As a result, it is taking more time to finish a project compared to normal period, he said.

As a construction site is usually vast and a lot of people remain involved, precautionary measures usually don't work. "You either keep the activities up and running or stop them," Khorshed said.

The pandemic would have a chain effect on the whole real estate sector, said Alamgir Shamsul Alamin.

"Customers may not get delivery of projects on time. Banks may not get back their loans on time. Realtors will have problems with landlords."

He said real estate is one such sector that can't run without political, social and economic stability. Construction workers have already started to leave the city for villages.

"We don't know whether they would be able to come back very soon."

Tapan Sengupta, deputy managing director of BSRM, one of the top steel-makers in Bangladesh, said: "The whole country is now facing a crisis and it is affecting the entire economy, trade and commerce. Definitely, it has had an impact on the construction sector."

He said if the situation doesn't come under control and if the country faces a situation similar to that of Italy, the ensuing scenario would be beyond one's imagination.

So far, the supply of raw materials has remained largely unaffected as the main raw material, scrap, comes from Europe, the US, Australia and Japan. "But the shipment has slowed down."

"If the country is locked down and people limit their movement, the implementation of construction projects and other construction activities would slow down," he said.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Md Alamgir Kabir, president of the Bangladesh Cement Manufacturers Association (BCMA), said most of the raw materials used in the cement sector come from the remote areas of the southern Arab nations as well as Indonesia and Vietnam.

Clinkers and other main raw materials of cement are limestone-based and are sourced from the remote areas of the countries where population density is very low. So, there is little scope for the virus to spread from these areas.

However, the virus may spread through the crew who work in the ships used to transport the raw materials. But there is hope since there has been no news of the crew being infected with the virus since its outbreak.

"So, I think the import of the raw materials in the cement sector is safer compared to import in other sectors," Kabir said.

However, according to Kabir, the coronavirus has already affected the local industries largely in two ways. First, there are many foreign companies in Bangladesh. Most of their engineers are absent which has adversely impacted development work. Second, private sector development has slowed to some extent.

For example, the earnings from wage earners have gone down. The momentum to set up new industries has slowed down, said Kabir, also the vice-chairman of Crown Cement Group.

The entrepreneur also said that there might be long-term impacts of the coronavirus. The countries that are home to Bangladesh's overseas labour market and are an important source of foreign currency for us have been affected by the virus.

Besides, the buyers of garments, the country's major player in export earnings, are mostly from the West. The high prevalence of the virus in developed countries may lead to a big impact on this crucial sector.

"So, our garment exports may fall and this may cause a major hit for the economy."

The surge of the COVID-19 has already slowed down the implementation pace of some key projects such as the Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project, Padma Bridge Rail Link, Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway, Joydebpur-Ishwardi Dual-Gauge Railway Line, and Multi-lane Road Tunnel under the Karnaphuli River.

This coupled with the slow pace in other foreign-aided projects may affect the implementation of the overall annual development programme (ADP) in the current fiscal year, said the Centre for Policy Dialogue in a paper on March 21.

Supply-chain disruptions due to the coronavirus are likely to increase the cost of business for manufacturing and construction companies, said Elise Gould, an economist for the Economic Policy Institute, a progressive thinktank based in Washington, according to a report on the MarketWatch.

The situation calls for sensible behaviour from all parties involved – realtors, customers, banks and landowners – said REHAB's Shamsul Alamin.

He lauded the measures the government has taken so far to slow the spread of the deadly virus.

"This is the time to support the government and stand by them. It is not the time to demand something from the government. There will be plenty of time to persuade the government to meet demands of the sector once the country successfully tackles the coronavirus."

"Our wholehearted focus should be on how to contain the virus. We are ready to help the government."



## THE EXPORT LEADER

Crown Cement has achieved National Export Trophy thrice for its outstanding performance in cement export. Demand for Crown Cement is gradually increasing at home and abroad for its quality. With the export of Crown Cement, Bangladeshi products are also getting the fame. In addition, Crown Cement is contributing to the national development through foreign currency earning. It's a pride for Bangladesh.







# 'Save Bangladesh; let's fight together'

STAR SPORT DESK



Shakib Foundation, an initiative of Bangladesh's ace all-rounder, united with Mission Save Bangladesh -- a joint initiative of The Daily Star, Sheba.xyz,

and Samakal and now Shakib's foundation -- on Saturday to aid in the fight against

Mission Save Bangladesh is the first initiative with which The Shakib Al Hasan Foundation has joined forces

The Shakib Al Hasan Foundation is dedicated to improving the livelihood of Bangladeshis and make their lives better and

far, Mission Save Bangladesh has received donations amounting to 38,64,679 from different private organisations and NGOs, with which the initiative will be supporting more than 2,500 underprivileged families.

Shakib announced his decision in a post on his official Facebook page on Saturday afternoon. The post read: "The Shakib Al Hasan Foundation has taken steps to raise funds from individuals and organizations around the country and around the world to

> "Let's all fight together, live together because human beings are there for each other."



Mission Save Bangladesh

help the underprivileged people affected by

"This is going to be the first initiative in which The Shakib Al Hasan Foundation will provide support.

'Mission Save Bangladesh is an initiative of The Daily Star, Sheba.xyz and Samakal. The purpose of this project is to provide support to low-income and underprivileged people affected by Coronavirus. So far this project has helped over 2000 underprivileged families and efforts are underway to increase

"Keep an eye on the Facebook page of

Shakib Al Hasan

'Mission Save Bangladesh' to be updated with the activities - https://www.facebook. com/missionsavebangladesh/

"Let's all fight together, live together because human beings are there for each

Besides providing the families with groceries, Mission Save Bangladesh has also been carrying out community-based activities like disinfecting public places.

The partner brands and the initiators of Mission Save Bangladesh are looking forward to receiving support from The Shakib Al Hasan Foundation.

## No opportunity before May: Hassan

SPORTS REPORTER



Sport worldwide has grinded to a halt following the outbreak of the coronavirus, with events postponed in order to stop the spread of the virus.

In Bangladesh, State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel on March 16 informed that all sporting activities would be postponed till March 31.

Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan took it a step further, telling The Daily Star yesterday that there was no opportunity to consider starting sports before May.

Caution was on the BCB president's mind after several footballers already contracted the disease.

"We are going to maintain the highest level of caution. We don't know where, when or how it will end. I think after April there may be a chance to talk but before that I don't think that there is an opportunity to talk about sports," he said.

The Dhaka Premier League's (DPL) second round was postponed on March 16 and the BCB was mulling the completion of the tournament when normal services

"After April, if it appears that the situation is in our favour, we can think about the DPL and whether we can finish it. The reason we need time is because, when sports would begin again after such a crisis, we need some preparation. What will happen to the international calendar and the series which were not played is not clear yet. I have been in talks with other ICC members and no one can grasp when the calamity might end. So we don't know the fate of the international schedules yet. We would like to start with the DPL in April to be give ourselves some time to get prepared," Hassan said.

He said that they would be "focusing on what the other teams in the subcontinent are doing and how they will plan going

forward" and reiterated that their highest priority will be to "remain cautious and not to rush"

The DPL is the prime source of income for many cricketers and without any matches a lot of cricketers not under the BCB's first-class contract list are fearing financial hardships. The BCB had on March 28 announced that players who were not under its central contract list would receive a one-time incentive.

"It is our duty to help out the cricketers," Hassan said, before informing that BCB had contacted concerned authorities to make a donation to a government fund to fight the virus.



We are going to maintain the highest level of caution. We don't know where, when or how it will end. I think after April there may be a chance to talk but before that I don't think that there is an opportunity to talk about sports.

> **NAZMUL HASSAN BCB PRESIDENT**

## Smith's leadership ban ends



A two-year leadership ban slapped on Steve Smith after the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa ended Sunday, leaving the master batsman free to skipper Australia

The 30-year-old captained the team until he was suspended for 12 months over a brazen attempt to alter the ball with sandpaper under his watch during a Test in Cape Town in 2018.

Part of his punishment included a further year-long exile from any leadership role, which has now expired.

Co-conspirator and former vice-captain David Warner was banned from any leadership role for life, although both have successfully resumed their international careers.

There have been calls for Smith to take back the Test captaincy from Tim Paine, but it remains unclear whether he wants to, with the 35-year-old seemingly intent on

Coach Justin Langer last year praised Paine's leadership as "brilliant" and said Smith may not want the "burden" of captaincy on top of batting pressures.

Aaron Finch is skipper of the Twenty20 and one-day

Smith told Channel Nine television on Sunday he was focused only on trying to stay physically and mentally fit during the coronavirus shutdown of Australian cricket.

He was supposed to be preparing for a big-money payday at the Indian Premier League, but the tournament has already been delayed until April 15 in response to the

With India in a three-week lockdown in a bid to contain a spread of the virus, Smith admitted the IPL appeared unlikely to go ahead.

"I think the country's basically shut its borders until the 15th of April," he said.

#### CA defers contract list by one month

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Cricket Australia's contract list announcement will be pushed back at least a month as the game prepares to grapple with the coronavirus pandemic. Officials had planned

to bring forward the announcement of contracts from May to April this year, in a bid to provide more certainty to he states given the flowon effect.Contracts run on a financial year basis until the end of June, however, announcing the women's list on Wednesday and men's on Thursday would have assisted all parties. But that plan has been put on hold for now until the end of April, given the economic uncertainty due to the pandemic. The Australian Cricketers' Association agreed to the move. Australia are due to tour Bangladesh in June and England in July, with both those series now in serious drought.CA have been largely unaffected by the crisis for the 2019-20 financial year.

# Reminiscence: My first match

The cricket bug (intended) bit me hard around the winter of 1995, when Sri Lanka, West

Indies and Australia were locked in battle in the triseries down under and I was holed up at my grandparents' with fever, glued to the television.

The 1996 World Cup soon followed and I was hooked. That summer, we were lucky enough to go to England on my father's furlough, and at the back of my mind, I knew that I would be in the same country where the likes of Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Saeed Anwar and Inzamamul Haque would be engaged in a Test series.

In my early teen mind, I was just cherishing the opportunity to watch it on television in the same country. But my father, who viewed my cricket mania with a kind of amused annoyance, had the best surprise in store for me.

On July 29, he told me that he had bought tickets for the fifth day of the first Test. I cannot adequately describe my glee -- just picture was steeped in tradition. Reverence



In these times of social distancing, we must be safe while remembering that we do not get too used to

the world being at a standstill. We were meant to go watch matches together, agree with a few of our

neighbours and disagree with the rest. So, we are taking turns at The Daily Star Sport talking about

Pakistan pacer Wagar Younis is exultant after his signature yorker castles England's Graeme Hick on the fifth day of the first Test at Lord's on July 29, 1996. PHOTO: COLLECTED

the dinner table and shouting at the top of their voices.

looking media centre then, and was that of square leg or deep cover.

scenes of children running around is the only word to describe the feeling when entering the ground. I do not quite remember the name Lord's did not have the futuristic of the stand we sat in, but the view

England, who had reached 152

for one at lunch, certainly seemed to be responding well to the target of 408 set by Akram. Skipper Michael Atherton had been leading the way with 64. Alec Stewart hit 89. The pitch, Cricinfo tells me, was slow. The sound of ball hitting bat was clear as the tradition-obsessed crowd quietened down as the bowler ran up.

England had reached tea with three wickets down, and it seemed a draw was looming. But after the break, came Waqar, who had earlier dismissed opener Nick Knight. Running in furiously, and bowling lightning fast, he made short work of England's batsmen. Graeme Hick was first to go, and Jack Russell -- the only one not to be bowled among Waqar's three victims after tea -- and Dominic Cork followed. England lost their last nine wickets for 76 runs, with leg-spinner Mushtaq Ahmed also

But in my mind's eye, it was the sight of Waqar putting the fear of God into Englishmen that still lingers, and probably a big part of why I am in this job.

#### After spending the past week in self-isolation, Cristiano Ronaldo finally stepped out of his home in Funchal, taking two of his children around his neighbourhood in strollers, with partner Georgina Rodriguez. PHOTO: AFP

## Fans turn to Belarus to fill void



With football at a virtual standstill around the globe, fans in need of their weekly fix are turning to the Belarusian Premier League to fill the void as it carries

on with matches despite the coronavirus outbreak.

The league, one of Europe's least glamorous competitions, is drawing foreign fans' attention the decision to carry on and allow fans into stadiums has helped the Belarus Football Federation get broadcasting deals with sports networks in 10 countries, including Russia, Israel and India, where fans have been left with nothing to watch.

postponing matches or cancelling the from time to time," he said.

season it began earlier this month.

While most of its teams, perhaps with the exception of BATE Borisov and Dinamo Minsk, are unknown to the majority of soccer fans, the league is making the most of stoppages to the world's top competitions.

Belarus has so far reported 94 coronavirus cases but has taken few measures to curb the outbreak. President Alexander Lukashenko. who has held power since 1994, has downplayed the need for social distancing and bragged that he continues to play ice hockey and embrace fellow players.

Yuri, a Dinamo Minsk supporter hopes fans will still flip the channel to the Belarusian league when European leagues

"They will not only watch English or It has said it has no intention of Italian leagues, but also the Belarusian one

#### MSC's polls postponed

SPORTS REPORTER

The elections and annual general meeting Mohammedan Sporting Club Limited, scheduled for April 18, have been postponed indefinitely in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

announcement was sent to media through an e-mail, with a letter signed by AM Amin Uddin, independent chairman of the club.

"Like everywhere else in the world, Bangladesh is also infcted by the coronavirus pandemic. In these circumstances, all activities regarding the preannounced April 18 AGM and elections of the club will be halted until further decision," said the letter.



PADMA BRIDGE RAIL LINK PROJECT IS BEING BUILT WITH BSRM

COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT







## Someshwari is being butchered

Violating court order, sand lifters go wild in Netrakona

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Violating a court directive, some unscrupulous people continue to illegally lift sand from the Someshwari river, posing a threat to ecological diversity.

However, the local administration turns a blind eye paving the way for the destruction of the Someshwari, considered an abundant source of high-quality sand.

Locals and environmentalists say the once crystal-clear river is nearing its death due to unlawful and unregulated extraction of sand and stone by using illegal "shallow" machines.

The Netrokona district administration has leased out seven spots of the river for lifting sand.

The leased out balumahals (designated sand quarries) are Bijoypur-Bhawanipur (287 acres); Teribazar-Shibganj Bazar (976 acres); Teribazar-Chaitati (287 acres); Birisiri-Keronkhola (341 acres); Gaoakandia (142 acres); Jhanjail-Shankarpur (140 acres); Omargaon-Hashanoagaon-Bishauti (35 acres).

The administration imposes certain conditions for sand lifting -- including that sand can be only lifted from morning to dusk and motorised pumps or dredgers cannot be used in the process.

However, leaseholders continue to lift sand round the clock; at times, up to 200 dredgers can be seen in the river lifting sand, alleged locals.



Planes of local carriers are parked on the apron of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday as all flights, except one weekly to China, of local airlines have been cancelled.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Earnings of Bede dry up

Emrul Hasan Bappi

The life of Bede community members in Shariatpur has come to a halt as they are prevented from earning their livelihood by roaming around localities amid fear of coronavirus spread.

The local administration asked them not to go out of their homes without offering any financial assistance, said 35-year-old Bede woman Hasina Begum.

As a result, the day-to-day earnings have stopped putting the community members in trouble surviving, she added.

Showing snake charming, acrobatics of monkey, magic tricks, and selling herbal medicines, amulets, river oyster pearls and talismans in different areas are the

aditional income sources of the Bede. Besides, some males of the community work as day labourers. But all of these have now stopped due to the direction from the

local administration. Hasina said, "Our income sources have completely closed as we do not go outside. We even fail to ensure one meal a day to our families. We will not survive if the

government does not help us. Like Hasina, around 600 people in Domshar and Angaria unions in Sadar upazila of Shariatpur have enveloped their lives because of the crisis that occurred due to ongoing 10-day shutdown.

Abdul Sattar, sardar of a Bede SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

### Bangabandhu calls for mass education



Bangabandhu talking to intellectuals in Chittagong on March 30, 1972.

MARCH 30, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

BANGABANDHU'S ADDRESS TO **INTELLECTUALS** 

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today emphasises the need for mass

education in the country. He observes that without mass education, economic problems cannot be solved effectively, nor can socialism be implemented. Addressing intellectuals at the government house in Chittagong, the prime minister says that an education commission is being set up with educationists and scientists. He further says there is no scope for differences regarding the need for a people-oriented education system. He observes that our

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

#### Construction of Covid-19 hospital to continue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities have decided to continue setting up the dedicated hospital for coronavirus patients in the capital's Tejgaon industrial area which was halted for a day due to protesting locals.

Akij Group and Gonoshasthaya Kendra have jointly taken the initiative to build a 301-beded hospital with in Tejgaon.

The hospital's construction saw a temporary halt on Saturday when a group of locals staged demonstration against it, saying setting up a hospital for coronavirus patients could cause the

virus spread in the locality. The incident halted the refurbishment works at a building for hours.

Contacted, Ali Hossain Khan, officer-in-charge SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

#### 5+ STAY HOME, STAY WELL

## Time to teach values, hygiene

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The countrywide school shutdown, enforced to curb further spread of the coronavirus, can be an ideal time for parents to teach their children morality, personal hygiene and share various tales, especially folk.

During the shutdown, it is critical to provide help to children at home, for whom confinement can be a reason to become restless. These students cannot meet with their schoolmates and friends, which can aggravate the problem.

"Usually, parents get little time to teach morality to their children. So, this is the right time for parents to give more time to their kids," said Professor Siddiqur Rahman, former Director of the Institute of Education and Research at the University of Dhaka.

He said once kids and parents have identified the subjects they will study, they make a schedule and display it prominently so that everyone in the family knows what is coming and when it is over.

Most kids work off a schedule in their classrooms, so recreating something similar at home can ease the transition to a different learning environment for the foreseeable future, the educationist said.

Parents can also make time for fun with their children and read stories and poetry to them to enrich their minds, he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

#### US diplomats, citizens head home today

Chartered flight to take them to America

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A group of US citizens, including some diplomats, will be leaving Bangladesh today in a chartered flight arranged by the US government amid fears of coronavirus pandemic, US embassy officials in Dhaka have said.

They have not, however, specified the number of

those leaving.
"I can tell you the flight will be full ... They are going because they want to be with their loved ones," an official said in a videoconference with some journalists yesterday.

An airlines source said the number of passengers would around 300.

The US State Department last week issued a travel advisory recommending its citizens not to travel abroad.

And if anyone wants to return to the US, the department would arrange it for them, the advisory said.

In response, some 10,000 US citizens have already returned to the US from 28 countries, the embassy officials in Dhaka

All passengers must agree to reimburse the U.S. Government for the flight by signing a promissory note for approximately the amount of a fullfare economy flight, or comparable alternate transportation. to the designated destination that would have been charged immediately before this

Asked, if the US citizens would feel safer in their country than in Bangladesh amid the coronavirus outbreak, a US diplomat said as per the regulations in Bangladesh, anyone having fever or symptoms of Covid-19 will be quarantined.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 8



AZAN 4-45 12-45 4-45 6-20 7-45 JAMAAT 5-20 1-15 5-00 6-25 8-15

#### Ctg admin in aid of the destitute

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

The Chattogram district administration and metropolitan police distributed relief materials to 480 poor and lowincome families yesterday.

The families were severely hit by a 10-day countrywide shutdown enforced by the government on Thursday to contain the spread of novel coronavirus.

The Chattogram district administration and metropolitan police have been distributing relief materials in different parts of the district since

**Deputy Commissioner** of Chattogram Elias Hossain, along with his team, yesterday visited some houses who returned from abroad and are in home quarantine at Khulshi, one of the posh areas in the port city.

Masudur Rahman, assistant commissioner of Chattogram district administration, said DC Elias distributed the relief SEE PAGE 5 COL 8



Parvin Begum sitting on the pavement of Dhanmondi Road-21. She has no husband or children to take care of her. She used to live on alms but now she is in serious trouble. The 10-day closure to slow the spread of coronavirus has left streets devoid of people, and now she is finding it hard to survive.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Made for poor, eco-friendly too

Biodegradable masks being made from scraps at RMG factories for free distribution in 64 dists

Nilima Jahan

Some members of a garment factory alliance have been producing biodegradable general-use masks from surplus fabrics to distribute among the poor for free.

Following the coronavirus outbreak, masks, often made of non-woven materials including plastic, have been in high demand and are selling in the market at Tk 30 to Tk

Under such circumstances, at least nine factories, which are part of Eco-friendly Low-Cost Liquid Absorbent (Ella) alliance, decided to distribute their masks in all 64 districts through the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA).

They entered an agreement with BIDA on March 19, Mamunur Rahman, coordinator of Ella, told The Daily

He said initially they had planned to supply 25 lakh free masks but as the factories are closing down, they might need to revise their target.

"In our textile industry, we have a wide range of good quality fabric scraps and leftovers that can be reused for diverse purposes," said Mamumur, who also founded Ella Pad, a free sanitary napkin produced at a lower cost from textile scraps for workers of Ella's members.

He said the fabric scraps can be used to produce generaluse masks in response to the current situation, when there is an apparent shortage of the product in the market.

Ella members have already distributed free masks to the workers of their factories, he added.

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