



# The Daily Star



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**1** infected in 24 hours | **49** Total cases | **19** Total recovery | **5** Death | **35,114** Total deaths | **1,56,838** Total recoveries | **7,41,030** Total cases

## Shutdown likely to be a week longer

PARITHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government is likely to extend the ongoing shutdown for at least a week as part of its efforts to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Public health experts are in favour of such a move as the country has entered the crucial fourth week since it reported the first Covid-19 case. The ongoing shutdown will end on April 4.

At first, the government may extend the shutdown for five days till April 9. In that case, offices will reopen on April 12 after weekly holidays on April 10 and 11, according to sources.

The next course of action would be decided considering the overall situation at that time, they added.

"The government is actively considering extending the holidays because we don't want any gathering in such a situation. You will get to know the decision within a day or two," a minister told this newspaper yesterday, seeking anonymity.

A secretary of the government said, "The decision [to extend the shutdown] has not been taken yet. However, it is now under discussion and there is a possibility of extending the holidays."

Replying to a query, the secretary said, "It may be extended up to 10 days."

Sources in the government said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would hold a video conference with the officials of all 64 districts today to ensure better coordination of the ongoing activities to prevent the spread of the virus.

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**A 12-year-old boy and his four-month-old brother sleep on the central reservation of a street near Kamalapur Internal Container Depot in the capital. Their speech-impaired mother left them there to look for food when many who could help them have left the capital amid the coronavirus outbreak.**

PHOTO: MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

## US death toll could be one lakh or more

Says Trump  
CNN ONLINE

President Donald Trump acknowledged Sunday for the first time that deaths in the United States from coronavirus could reach 1,00,000 or more, adding that if the death toll stays at or below 100,000, "we all together have done a very good job."

Trump's assertion came after he was asked about comments the nation's top infectious disease expert, Dr Anthony Fauci, made earlier Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union" that based on models, 1,00,000 Americans or more could die from the virus.

On Sunday, Trump said during an evening news conference at the White House that he'd decided to extend the nationwide social distancing guidelines -- which include suggested limits on large gatherings -- for another 30 days to April 30.

During his news conference, Trump said he

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## Import 1,000 ventilators immediately

In interview with *Star*, Labaid MD also urges govt to loan pvt hospitals Tk 500cr to install 10,000 in phases

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government should help private hospitals procure ventilators because there could be an acute shortage of the key device in the fight against coronavirus, Labaid Limited Managing Director AM Shamim said.



Dr AM Shamim

Ventilator crisis is a pressing issue in different countries and if the government lends money immediately, the private hospitals will be able to install 1,000 ventilators in four to six weeks, he hoped.

"The government should provide us Tk 500 crore in interest-free loans to install around 10,000 ventilators in two months," Shamim told *The Daily Star* in an interview yesterday.

"The coming months are crucial because there could be an outbreak. We still have time, if we start working together now. We will be able to tackle the situation," he said.

He said the hospitals would be able to procure ventilators from China, spending Tk 6-8 lakh for each.

Bangladesh has so far reported 49 confirmed cases of Covid-19, with five deaths. Critically ill patients need ventilator support.

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## COVID-19 OUTBREAK

### Little souls left exposed

Orphans, street children now even more vulnerable for lack of hygiene products, basic medical services

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

As the coronavirus gains a foothold in the country, the increasing vulnerability of millions of orphaned and destitute children remains largely unaddressed.

Hundreds of thousands of street children lack awareness about hygiene practices and those living in orphanages don't have access to hygiene products and basic medical services.

According to an estimate by the non-governmental organisation SOS Children's Villages, there are around 4,400,000 orphaned children in Bangladesh.

However, the government's department of social services knows of around 2,00,000 kids who live in 85 government-run children's homes or "Shishu Paribar", and 4,000 private orphanages.

Homeless and orphaned children who live in the streets and in informal settlements remain beyond the purview of government monitoring during this health crisis.

Moreover, as the cities are increasingly deserted with movement restricted, these children -- who depend on busy streets for their survival -- are losing their source of income.

Young boys like Md Shujon Mia, a 13-year-old helper on a human haulier at Farmgate, collect fares from passengers and assist drivers. They earn between Tk 150 and Tk 200 a day.

As the human hauliers are off the roads amid the government-imposed public transport shutdown to curb the spread of the virus, the vehicle owners have told these children to go home.

"I don't know where to go now. Most of us used to stay in the garage of our vehicles. I lost my parents a long time ago and many of my friends are just like me. We are requesting our landlords to allow us to continue staying in the garage."

Saiful Islam, a friend of Shujon, said, "With our meagre savings, we can eat for the next two to three days."

"If we cannot work on our vehicles after that, we will starve."

The boys have little idea of the virus. "We cannot afford a square meal, how can we buy soap or masks? Our ustads [drivers] told us that the coronavirus will affect only rich and bad people. So, we are not worried about it."

The mass awareness of hygiene practices is not reaching these children who cannot stay at "home", interact with a lot of people regularly, and don't have access to basic hygiene products.

"We have set up hand-washing booths in different areas of Dhaka such as Mirpur and Abdullahpur, and in Sholoshohor railway station in Chattogram," said Dr Asma Akhter, a volunteer of Bidyanondo Foundation, a non-profit organisation working for vulnerable children.

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## Hunger, not virus, is their biggest worry

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

"Have you brought food for us?"

This was what 10-year-old Sohana asked these correspondents at the beginning of this conversation at Kamalapur Railway Station on Sunday noon.

"We had biriyani last night, given by some men. Since then, we haven't got anything to eat."

On a usual day, she and the other children sell bottled water, collect empty water bottles, and work as porters at the station.

From their meagre earnings, they would buy their food for the day.

As the government is enforcing a shutdown to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the country, street children are facing potential starvation.

Yasin Arafat, 11, said they sleep in a group on the footpath. His father is dead and his mother begs on the streets.

"Even if the tea shops remained open, we could get something to eat," said Yasin. Even if the stalls are open, they often have to fight with older vagrants for the food.

Near the AGB Colony kitchen market, 13-year-old Rajib was carrying a bag with

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## BUSINESS



### Walton to make ventilators

Bangladesh has just 1,250 ventilators to save the sickest of COVID-19 patients against the possible requirements for thousands of the respiratory equipment.

But ventilators are in short supply at the moment, given the rate at which the lethal, pneumonia-like virus is spreading across the globe. And in recent weeks, countries around the world have been scrambling to build and buy as many of them as possible.

So, the government has enlisted the service of local tech giant Walton to manufacture the life-saving equipment with support from Medtronic, a global supplier of the device.

READ MORE ON B1

## Six die with Covid-19-like symptoms

IEDCR confirms 1 more case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After testing 153 samples, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research yesterday reported one Covid-19 case, bringing the tally of confirmed cases to 49.

The patient is a woman, aged between 20 and 30, IEDCR Director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora said.

Meanwhile, at least six people, including a child, have died in different districts yesterday from what looks like coronavirus, our correspondents report.

The IEDCR also said four more Covid-19 patients made recoveries, taking the total number of recovered patients to 19.

"Of them, some had hypertension and diabetes. One of them was over 80 years old. Despite their underlying health conditions, they have

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**WORKING AS A FAMILY ... With masks donned, a man, his wife (behind the rickshaw van) and son take garbage to a Dhaka North City Corporation dumping station near Indira Road in the capital. The couple, who are private garbage persons, had to bring their child to work risking coronavirus infection as they have nobody to look after him.**

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Ambulance drivers fearful

Failing to get PPE, some private ambulances refuse to carry patients with Covid-19-like symptoms

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

An unknown fear grips Azizur Rahman every time he comes out of his home in the morning. An ambulance driver for years, Azizur feels he might contract coronavirus anytime as he has to come in contact with different patients every now and then.

"We need to carry patients all the time. We don't know who already has it [Covid-19] ... It's a scary time for us," said the man in his 50s. His voice cracked.

Employee of a private ambulance provider, Azizur wears mask and hand gloves and uses hand sanitiser while taking patients to hospitals and clinics in his vehicle. But he said these safety gears appear to be far from enough to protect him from the highly contagious coronavirus.

"We are in a grave risk. We too have families and children. They might be exposed to the virus as well. We are continuing to work even in this sensitive time. But if anything happens to us and our families, where will we go?" asked the father of three, urging the authorities to ensure their safety immediately.

Like Azizur, several thousand drivers and their assistants, who work at different private ambulance services, run the risk of getting infected as they don't have adequate safety gears.

The ambulance owners' association has requested the authorities to provide enough safety gears and necessary

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## EU announces virus help for Balkans after criticism

AFP, Brussels

The EU yesterday announced nearly 40 million euros to help Western Balkan countries deal with the coronavirus, after Brussels came under fire for not doing enough for its neighbours.

A further 140 million euros was announced for the European Union's "eastern partner" countries -- Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

The moves come as the EU seeks

to fight back in a publicity battle with China and Russia, who have made a great show of their gestures of support to countries struggling with the Covid-19 crisis.

In the Western Balkans, 38 million euros will go to governments to cover the immediate healthcare needs: four million each for Albania and North Macedonia, seven million for Bosnia and Herzegovina, three million for Montenegro and five million for Kosovo.

## Ambulances drivers fearful

FROM PAGE 1

training to the drivers and their assistants amid the looming crisis. But it has not received any response yet.

According to the association, there are more than 7,500 private ambulances across the country.

So, around 15,000 people -- at least one driver and an assistant for each ambulance -- are providing services to the people even in this tough time, it said.

"We hear many talking about the safety of doctors and nurses, but no one is talking about the ambulance drivers and their assistants," Alamgir Hossain, president of Dhaka Mohanagar Ambulance Malik Somobay Samity Ltd, told The Daily Star.

Apart from the privately-run ambulance services, the country has nearly 1,000 ambulances at different public hospitals.

Talking on the issue, Prof Muzaherul Huq, a former adviser of WHO's South East Asia region, said ambulance drivers and their assistants are an integral part of health services.

Like doctors and nurses, they too should be provided with necessary safety gears. Otherwise, apart from the drivers and the helpers, others, including their family members and other patients, might contract the virus, he warned.

He also said the authorities should ensure dedicated ambulance services for carrying patients with coronavirus-like symptoms.

At least five people have died with and 49 tested positive for coronavirus in the country, warranting several steps by the government to contain spread of the deadly virus.

Although ambulance drivers are providing services in this risky situation, there were at least two instances where ambulance drivers refused to carry patients with corona-like symptoms, a leader of the association told this correspondent, wishing not to be named.

The Dhaka-based organisation of ambulance owners provides services across the country with its 2,080 ambulances. The services can also be availed by calling 999, a toll-free national emergency helpline run by the police.

In the absence of any national platform, the association maintains contact with other ambulance owners elsewhere in the country.

In a letter sent to the director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) on March 22, the Somobay Samity sought training, awareness campaign and safety equipment for drivers and their assistants.

It said although ambulance owners and workers are ready to work along with the government to tackle the crisis, most of the drivers and their

assistants lacked awareness on coronavirus.

The awareness and the equipment they have are not enough, it said.

If any ambulance worker gets infected and all know about it through any news report, it will be difficult to continue the services, it added.

"In the given situation, the government should urgently provide necessary training, sanitisers, masks and other safety gears to the drivers and their helpers."

Beside, the letter mentioned that an additional deputy inspector general of police, who is in charge of the 999 service, also recommended taking such measures.

"Seven days have passed, we have not got any response from the authorities," Sariful Alam Mehdi, an adviser to the Samity, told The Daily Star on Sunday.

In absence of any government support, ambulance owners provided drivers and their assistants with some masks, gloves, and sanitisers which is very inadequate, Mehdi said.

Drivers and their assistants, in many cases, have to help patients get on and off ambulances. Thus, they are at risk, he said.

If the government provides them with safety gears and necessary training, the risk will be lesser, he said.

"So, the government should seriously consider the demands," he said.

Alamgir, president of the Samity, said Grameen Bank promised to provide them with 2,000 personal protective equipment (PPE) and that they were hopeful about getting some those soon.

However, it would be inadequate, he added.

Contacted, Aminul Hasan, director (hospital) at the DGHS, said they would provide PPEs to all who are involved in providing health services, including ambulance drivers and their assistants.

Asked when they would start the distribution, he said, "We are sending PPEs to the government hospitals now ... they would get PPEs shortly."

He said only ambulance drivers and assistants at government hospitals would get PPEs for now due a shortage of supply. "We will provide PPEs to private ambulance drivers and assistants when we will have enough stock," he told The Daily Star last night.

Meanwhile, demand for ambulance services declined sharply as a huge number of people left Dhaka after the government announced a nationwide shutdown from March 26 to April 4.

Alamgir said they usually received 10 to 12 calls every day, but now it has come down to five or six. "Demands for ambulance came down to 50 percent due to the shutdown," he said.

## Shutdown likely

FROM PAGE 1

During the video conference, the PM may come up with a directive on the extension of the shutdown.

According to sources, the government will reopen public and private offices in phases so that all those people who left the capital for village homes before the shutdown don't have to rush to the capital at the same time. Educational institutions will reopen in the last phase.

Contacted, Shaikh Yusuf Harun, secretary at the public administration ministry, said they were yet to get any directive in this regard.

"If we get any such directives, we will prepare a proposal and send it to the Prime Minister's Office for approval," he told this newspaper yesterday.

So far five people have died from Covid-19 in the country. The number of infected people now stands at 49 with one tested positive for the virus yesterday, according to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

On March 23, the government announced closure of all public and private offices from March 26 to April 4 to contain the spread of the virus.

Hospitals, kitchen markets, drug stores, media outlets and emergency services remained outside the purview of the closure.

The following day, the government decided to suspend all public transport services, inching closer to enforcing a lockdown.

Following the announcements, people in droves left the capital for their village homes, ignoring the government advice to stay at home.

The homebound rush increased the risk of spreading the virus across the country, experts said.

It is very difficult to know how many people left the capital after the government announcement. However, data from transport and mobile phone

operations gives a hint about it.

According to mobile phone operators, 1.28 crore subscribers left the capital in three days after the announcement. However, one person may have more than one SIM card while many don't have mobile phones.

Transport operators said they see such rush of people only ahead of the Eid vacation. An estimated 80 lakh holidaymakers leave the capital for their homes by bus, train and launch ahead of the vacation.

**WHAT EXPERTS SAY**

Prominent physician Prof ABM Abdullah said the government should extend the ongoing shutdown for at least five days.

"The extension will allow those who left the capital to complete their 14-day quarantine period," he told this newspaper last night.

"After that, the government should decide on the next course of action, considering the situation at that time."

Prof Md Nazrul Islam, former vice chancellor at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said this is a very crucial week which will end on April 4.

"The government should decide on reopening offices after evaluating the situation at the end of this period," said Nazrul, also a prominent virologist.

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former adviser (Southeast Asia region) of the World Health Organization, said the shutdown should be extended up to two weeks, and it must be enforced "effectively".

"Community transmission is going on. People with coronavirus symptoms should be segregated and tested. Those who will test positive for the virus must be kept in isolation.

"I think the shutdown should be extended for at least two weeks," he added.



Children at an orphanage at the capital's Azimpur watch TV. These children hardly have any protection amid the deadly coronavirus outbreak. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Hunger, not virus, is their biggest worry

FROM PAGE 1

five brinjals and four shrivelled tomatoes. In another bag, he carried about a kilo of rice. The rice was mixed with dirt, clearly visible through the plastic bag.

"I begged from a shop owner and he gave me this," said Rajib, who was accompanied by his 12-year-old friend Rassel.

While the rest of the nation, gripped with the fear of the virus, is largely confined to homes, these floating people are wondering where their next meal will come from.

"Can I really do anything if the virus attacks? Hunger is bigger problem than the virus," said Rajib.

**BEGGARS SUFFER SIMILARLY** During the conversation with Rajib, The Daily Star correspondents were surrounded by some elderly women who said they previously lived on alms.

"But now there is no scope to go to people's houses and beg for alms," said Mazeda Bibi. She has a son in Jamalpur but he does not provide for her.

"The situation is so grave that people even refuse to give drinking water now."

In her small polythene hut on the footpath adjacent to Motijheel Model School, all she had in the way of food was some chopped potato in a pot.

Vision-impaired Morium said her husband is also disabled. "We get food

but not regularly."

**WHAT AUTHORITIES THINKING?** AS Mahmood, director of Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF), "We are asking people to stay inside their homes as a protective measure against the virus but we are not thinking about those who have no homes at all.

"Street children are among the most vulnerable groups and if one or two are already infected, then a big disaster awaits us.

"It may not yet be too late and the government should take immediate steps to bring these children under observation as we do not know about their health condition."

Meanwhile, the Department of Social Services is planning to provide temporary accommodation facilities for street children at primary schools for their safety.

Sayda Akhtar, deputy director of the vagrancy programme of the social services department, told The Daily Star yesterday that they have accommodation facilities for street children referred by mobile courts and other organisations.

However, the present situation is not ideal and there are a large number of children living outside the shelter home, she said.

"We held an emergency meeting on Saturday to ensure street children's safety, she added.

## Little souls left exposed

FROM PAGE 1

"Due to the shortage of masks and hand sanitisers in the market, we could not adequately provide these to our students," he said.

"So, we did not want to take risks. Upon suggestion from the local authorities, we asked the guardians to take them home. However, we made sure that the guardians are taking their wards willingly and asked them to treat them well."

At Salimullah Muslim Orphanage, one of Dhaka's oldest orphanages, 70 out of 250 children are still living there. Officials said the institution is short of manpower in dealing with coronavirus prevention and preparedness.

"With our manpower, it is not possible for us to ensure whether the children are washing their hands and maintaining hygiene properly. We also don't have a registered doctor to check our children's health," said Md Jahir Uddin, member of the executive committee of the orphanage.

The orphanage is now seeking donations of hygiene products and medical support for the children from individuals and organisations.

In any case, orphanages are apprehensive of future support in such bleak times.

"Most orphanages in Bangladesh are run by donations from home and abroad. Very few receive government grants," said Professor Abdus Samad, superintendent of Muslim Mission Orphanage in Faridpur.

"Due to the coronavirus outbreak, many donations have stopped. In this deadlocked situation, we are also unable to look for new donors. If the situation does not improve, many orphanages in our country will not be able to feed their children," said Prof Samad.

Many private orphanages rely on collections by its staff in public spaces and before and after prayers at mosques.

## Import 1,000 ventilators immediately

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According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), there are 508 ICU beds in government hospitals and 737 private ones.

Shamim said health service providers in the private sector want to join the government efforts to fight the spread of coronavirus.

"It is time the public and private sectors came together and formed an alliance against Covid-19."

It will be needed to tackle an outbreak, Shamim said, adding that the government could offer a health insurance package for doctors, nurses and other medical employees.

Referring to the reports of shortage of safety gear for medical personnel,

Shamim suggested the safety gear be collected and distributed by a single authority.

"Private hospitals may purchase the equipment from the government. This will ensure smooth supply of the safety gear."

Shamim suggested that coronavirus testing facilities be decentralised and scaled up among private hospitals.

"If private hospitals can perform coronavirus tests, people's hassles will reduce. The hospitals will collect the kits from the government."

Shamim said there were around 400 hospitals across the country with over 50 beds.

"The government should give them a monetary incentive for smooth

"As the shelter homes have no capacity to provide accommodation to a large number of street children, we planned to write to the education ministry for primary schools to be temporarily allocate as accommodation for street children during this time."

The social services department also plans to build some temporary tents in vacant spaces at the shelter homes for the children's accommodation, she added.

"We have already sent the meeting outcome to the [education] ministry and it is working on it," she said, adding the Unicef has also agreed to partially help with the initiatives.

The department is providing hotchpotch (khichuri) or biriyani to street children once a day and also in slums around the city with the help of NGOs, she said.

State Minister of the Ministry of Social Welfare Md Ashraf Ali Khan Khasru told The Daily Star yesterday that the social services department has shelter homes for street children but a large number of the children do not want to stay in the homes and live on the streets.

The ministry has already taken initiatives and allocated Tk 60.56 crore to ensure their food and safety, said Khasru.

"We are also providing food in different areas of the country daily."

And it is not surprising that at a time of such uncertainty, private donations are drying up as people worry about their personal finances.

While government-run children's homes enjoy regular funding, they too are affected by a lack of staff at this time.

At Sarkari Shishu Paribar, Tejgaon, a home for female orphans, an "aunt" looks after every 10 girls. There is also a medical assistant and a part-time doctor.

However, due to closure of government offices, caregivers and other staff are not coming to work regularly.

"Under these circumstances, we cannot force our employees to come to work regularly as public transport is off and parts of the city are shut down," said Jhama Zahin, deputy superintendent of the children's home.

"On the other hand, we have the responsibility to look after these children. In this situation, we are facing difficulties in maintaining hygiene in the home but we are trying our best. It's a difficult situation and we have informed the authorities about it," she said.

Md Sazzadul Islam, deputy director of the Department of Social Services, said, "We have developed a duty roster for the employees. All employees of the children's homes will stay on the premises by rotation."

Apprehending that the situation may deteriorate, the department is planning to develop an emergency helpline for destitute children, with support from Unicef.

"Through this programme, if you see a sick or malnourished child on the streets, you can inform us by dialling 1098, a toll-free number. Our team of social workers will reach out to the child. Unicef will support this program; however, it's still in the planning phase," added Sazzadul.

operation over the next three months. Private hospitals will surely return the money in instalments."

Randomly setting up hospitals may not be the solution, he said.

"Currently, there are around 1.5 lakh beds in private hospitals. The government could utilise these facilities."

Labaid has 300 beds, he said, adding, "If government asks, we can dedicate 150 for coronavirus patients. We have the establishment, trained personnel and other equipment. This would be a more feasible approach."

Referring to reports of people not getting treatment at different hospitals, Shamim said the problem would be solved if hospitals are dedicated for coronavirus patients only.

## Facebook offers \$100m to help virus-hit news media

AFP, Washington

Facebook said yesterday it was donating \$100 million to support news organizations globally hurting from the coronavirus pandemic, citing the need for reliable information about the crisis.

"The news industry is working under extraordinary conditions to keep people informed during the Covid-19 pandemic," said Facebook's news partnerships director, Campbell Brown.

"At a time when journalism is needed more than ever, ad revenues are declining due to the economic impact of the virus. Local journalists are being hit especially hard, even as people turn to them for critical information to keep their friends, families and communities safe."

## Six die

FROM PAGE 1

recovered," Flora said in the daily videoconference briefing from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) headquarters.

Among the four recovered yesterday, one is a doctor and one a nurse. The two others were treated at home.

Currently, 25 Covid-19 patients are under treatment while the total number of deaths with confirmed coronavirus so far is five.

Prof Flora informed that 24,113 people were in quarantine across the country while 346 others in isolation.

In Chattogram, Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID) tested 28 samples until Sunday and found no positive case, said Mamunur Rashid, deputy director of BITID.

**SIX DEAD WITH COVID-19 SYMPTOMS**

In Kushtia, a 51-year-old man suffering from cold, cough, fever and breathing problems for the past three days died at Kushtia General Hospital yesterday morning.

Nasal swab of the deceased was collected for testing in IEDCR, HM Anwarul Islam, civil surgeon of Kushtia, said.

Local administration has locked down the residence of the man.

In Dinajpur, at least 150 people of 30 families have been home-quarantined after a 30-year-old man from Tofshi village under Birampur upazila died with Covid-19-like symptoms early yesterday.

Thirty families of that village have been quarantined, said Tauhidur Rahman, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Birampurupazila.

In Sunamganj, a 55-year-old woman died at home early in the morning yesterday after suffering from fever, cough and respiratory problem.

Her husband, exhibiting similar symptoms, was sent to the Corona Isolation Centre at Sylhet Saheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital while other family members have been kept in home-quarantine.

In Jashore, a 12-year-old girl died at the isolation ward of Jashore General Hospital early yesterday.

The girl suffering from cold, cough and fever, said Arif Ahmed, residential medical officer (RMO) at the hospital.

Earlier, the IEDCR dismissed the necessity of collecting samples from the child, said Sheikh Abu Shaheen, civil surgeon (CS) of Jashore.

In Chandpur, two persons with flu-like symptoms died in separate hospitals in Dhaka since Saturday.

A 50-year-old man with fever and breathing problems from Hajiganj was admitted to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in Dhaka around five days ago, and died yesterday.

However, doctors of the hospital told his family members that he died after suffering a cardiac arrest, said his son.

Besides, a banker of Puranbazar area in Chandpur died on Saturday in Kurmitola General Hospital in Dhaka after 16 days of treatment.

He also exhibited Covid-19 symptoms -- fever and respiratory problems.

The hospital authorities informed his family members that he died from a cardiac arrest, his family said.

[Our Correspondents from Kushita, Dinajpur, Benapole, Thakurgoan, Chandpur and Bagerhat contributed to the report]

## US death toll

FROM PAGE 1

received what he called the "most accurate" or "most comprehensive" study today about the potential death toll from Covid-19.

He said there could be up more than 2 million cases if "we did nothing" but he did not give more details on the exact number. Fauci told CNN earlier Sunday that the US could see millions of cases of coronavirus in the US.

"When I heard the number today. First time I heard that number, because I have been asking the same question to some people. I felt even better about what we did last week with the \$2.2 trillion dollars," Trump said in reference to the historic stimulus package passed by Congress last week.

"Because you are talking about a potential of up to 2.2 million and some people said it could even be higher than that. You are talking about 2.2 million deaths. 2.2 million people from this," Trump said.



## Joining hands to wash hands

Ward councillors, local leaders, residents come together in Dhaka to install handwashing facilities

MATHEWS CHIRAN

After a tiring session of painting a nearby store, labourer Shaheen Mia finds the newly set up public hand-washing station, and he along with his co-worker grabs the bar of soap and scrubs away all dirt and grime, and possibly the coronavirus.

"We usually wash our hands with water only after work. Finding a bar of soap for ourselves is rare when we stay outside. Such an initiative is definitely helpful for us, especially amid this crisis," said Shaheen when approached by this correspondent.

This station, equipped with proper water supply and soap, is situated at Badda's Satarkul and is servicing residents and passers-by during a time when keeping one's hands squeaky clean is essential.

Like Shaheen, many passers-by are fully utilising the facility set up by Nilufar Yeasmin Etee, reserved ward councillor elect (38,39,40), in Badda.

She alone has set up at least 15 such stations in the three wards, keeping the current pandemic in mind. Although she is yet to assume office, she installed them on her own initiative.

"Although I'll assume office in May, I'm still a representative. I can't wait for the city corporation's assistance or direction to help my people amid this crisis," said Etee.

"At first, I wasn't sure the initiative would work. I first installed two basins beside by house for public use. After a while, people from all around started using them," she continued. "Then I realised that this is important for the people, and I should install more of them at different locations of the wards."

"Many residents made requests



Councillors, local leaders and residents of Badda have come together to install hand-washing stations at different points, which are equipped with supply of soap and water. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

to set up stations near their places, and I did so and installed some beside mosques too," she told this correspondent, adding that she will continue the initiative till the crisis remains.

So far, she has set up hand-washing stations at different locations, including Alirmor, Satarkul and Nururchala. She has a monitoring team which visits the areas two times a day to see if soap and water are available.

Till now, there has been no incidence of people stealing soap or the basins, as everyone is cooperative, she said.

It is not just Etee, however, as general ward councillors are also doing the same. Masum Gani, councillor of ward-21, on his own initiative has installed three such

stations at different points in the area.

"As part of measures to tackle Covid-19, we're installing them where there is frequent movement of people," said Gani. The city corporation is providing bleaching powder, toilet paper and a few bars of soap, but the councillor himself is doing most of the work.

When asked if anything gets stolen, he replied, "No, people here know each other and are helpful to keep the initiative going."

Beside main roads, healthcare facilities such as Ibn Sina installed their own hand-washing facilities for those who enter their buildings, but passers-by can use them as well.

Even local leaders and some residents have joined in.

Kamal Uddin Saheen, an organising

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## 'Stay put till flights resume'

UK High Commission advises its nationals  
DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UK High Commission in Dhaka has advised British nationals, who are staying in Bangladesh now, to be prepared to stay in the country until commercial flights resume.

"If you are a British national in Bangladesh, you should be prepared to stay in the country until commercial flights resume," it said. "You will need to be ready to comply with local isolation, testing or quarantine requirements, and to rely on the local health system."

The travel advisory was issued on Sunday as Biman Bangladesh has suspended its operations in last two routes - Manchester and London - for a week since yesterday amid global pandemic of Coronavirus.

With this, Biman Bangladesh has suspended all its routes. The British High Commission said given that many restrictions remain in place, and continue to be introduced, moving within Bangladesh may become more difficult than normal for British nationals.

"Unless you have an urgent reason to travel within Bangladesh, you may have to stay where you are whilst the flight ban

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## Blood donation stalled

Donors term police obstruction, lack of transportation as major obstacles

NILIMA JAHAN

On March 26, 19-year-old Iqbal Hossain (not his real name), a volunteer of a blood donation organisation, was out to donate blood to an anaemia patient at Ibn Sina Hospital of Sylhet.

Although the roads were deserted, the teenager from Jaintapur felt a sense of duty, especially because the rarity of his A-negative type blood. However, a police personnel suddenly approached him and started beating him up for stepping out into the streets, without even hearing him out.

"The police didn't pay heed to him, even after he mentioned what he was out for. Instead, another officer joined in and started baton-charging him. Shaken, my friend ran from the scene and came back home instead of going to the hospital," said Sabbir Hossain, Iqbal's friend and fellow volunteer.

After Iqbal's story was posted on an online blood donation platform's group, others came forward expressing fear of similar incidents happening to them, especially after coming across some videos that have gone viral on social media.

Md Nazrul Islam, who has donated blood and platelet over 80 times, said he couldn't go to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) to donate platelet to a cancer patient who was badly in need of it on Sunday.

"I had to refuse because I was afraid that I would not get any scope to tell police that I'm out for a noble cause. Sometimes, they don't wait to hear any explanation," he said.

According to Afsana Nazneen Priya, a call centre agent of Roktadaner Opekkhay Bangladesh, the organisation got 19 blood requests from different critical patients over Saturday and Sunday. However, they could only serve eight patients as most donors were unwilling to go out during the lockdown.

Along with this panic, another issue that contributes to this is the lack of transportation during the shutdown.

"Since we work from home, we cannot ensure transport facilities for our donors. It is also difficult for patients' attendants to ensure transportation for donors," she said.

"Besides, the person who will donate blood shouldn't walk or run before or after donating blood. They must be well rested," she added.

Md Rubel Miah, a glass factory worker of Tangail, was overcome with anxiety when he was failing to manage a platelet donor at the DMCH for his 11-year-old brother suffering from kidney disease.

Rubel isn't the most well-connected person in this city, yet he contacted a number of donors with the help of a blood donation organisation. However, everyone turned him down due to the ongoing situation.

Md Belayet Rahman Aslam, a donor who donated even during the lockdown, said he had to face a lot of hassle while coming to DMCH from Mirpur 12.

"Since there was no public transport, I walked till Kazipara and found a motorbiker, and requested him to take me to DMCH. The biker was also in fear of getting beaten up by the police, but he agreed when I told him my case," Belayet said.

Rakhi Biswas, hailing from Sunamganj, initially struggled to find a donor for her husband Probangshu Das, who is suffering from severe rectal bleeding. She called some 25 donors who matched the blood type, but every one of them denied the journey to Mount Adora Hospital of Sylhet, fearing police and the army. Rakhi, alone in the city with her sick husband, eventually found a donor with help from the hospital, but only after going through a lot of trouble. Had it not been for the hospital's help, the couple's future could've been hanging in the balance, she said.

## LOCKDOWN IN INDIA

### Govt planning evacuation of Bangladeshis stranded there

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is weighing options to evacuate several hundred Bangladeshi citizens who have been stranded in India amid a 21-day lockdown that the country has been enforcing since March 24 in a bid to stop the transmission of novel coronavirus.

"We are working out the details on how to do it. We are talking to Biman Bangladesh, which we are considering to be the better option," Farid Hossain, press minister of Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi, told The Daily Star yesterday.

As of yesterday, more than 500 Bangladeshis, mostly in Chennai and Bengaluru, contacted the Bangladesh High Commission through its hotline number.

Majority of them want to return to Bangladesh, while some are facing financial problems and others need to extend their visas.

Farid Hossain said local Indian airlines are not available, adding that the High Commission is talking to Air India as well as Biman for evacuation of the stranded Bangladeshis.

"Those who will return to Bangladesh will have to pay themselves. If Biman is chartered, the passengers' relatives can buy tickets from Bangladesh. In that case, there will be no issues of money transfer," he said.

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## Ctg doctors consulting patients over phone, IM

BMA publishes list of 100 physicians who are providing the service free of cost

ARUN BIKASH DEV, Ctg

A number of doctors in Chattogram are offering treatment to patients remotely, as they are not attending private practice amidst countrywide shutdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Physicians were offering treatment over phone and via social media and instant messaging (IM) services like WhatsApp and Facebook since Sunday.

Moreover, they are not charging any fees for this service. Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), Chattogram published a list of 100 doctors who will deliver treatment to patients through teleconference. In the list published on Sunday, the organisation mentioned names and telephone number of the doctors, so that patients can contact them in any emergency situation.

Shuvescha Ghosh, an expecting mother, has been trying to consult a gynecologist for a week, in vain. A friend of hers informed her about the BMA list, and Shuvescha dialled the number of Dr Priti Barua, a consultant of gynecology yesterday morning, and narrated her problems to the doctor. Dr Priti advised her some medication and lifestyle changes.

"I was tensed about my health condition, but after talking to the doctor, I feel relieved," she told The Daily Star.

Contacted, Dr Barua said she received some four phone calls from patients since yesterday morning [till 11:30am] and advised them according to their problems.

"I cannot attend private chamber but I feel a sense of peace that I can serve my patients through

phone," she said.

Dr Bijay Sarkar, another doctor of the list, told The Daily Star he received three phone calls yesterday morning [till 12:30pm]. Most of them seemed to be worried as they were suffering from flu and mild fever.

"I assured them not to be worried and prescribed them medication," he said.

Contacted, Dr Faisal Iqbal Chowdhury, general secretary of BMA Chattogram, said their list includes consultants of different disciplines.

Patients can avail their service from 10am to 1pm, and again from 6pm to 9pm.

"We know many patients are worried as doctors have not been attending their private practice, so we have initiated this teleconference treatment service on humanitarian grounds," he said.

"From BMA, we are also providing personal protective equipment, including gloves, goggles and masks to doctors in different hospitals in Chattogram, so that doctors can provide treatment to patients keeping themselves safe," he said.

However, it's not just doctors on the list who are keeping their doors open to patients, albeit virtually.

Dr AKM Rezaul Karim, professor and head of Paediatric Haematology and Oncology in Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), issued a notice to his patients through his Facebook account on Sunday, where he said he could not attend his private chamber regularly due to the Covid-19 situation. Rezaul mentioned his cellphone number and asked patients to send

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## Newborn rescued from dumpster

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

These days, port city's Ice Factory Road remains mostly quiet due to the countrywide shutdown announced by the government to slow the spread of coronavirus.

But yesterday morning was different. A scream broke through the silence and forced people to take notice. And when they did, they were shocked -- a newborn lying in a roadside dumpster was screaming as loud as he could.

Locals informed police right away and law enforcers from Sadarghat Police Station rescued the baby boy around 11am, said OC Fazlur Rahman.

"The infant's condition is okay now. At first, we took him to CCC Memon Maternity Hospital," he said, adding, "After primary treatment, doctors referred the neonate to Chattogram Medical College Hospital."

The baby is now being treated at the childcare unit of the hospital.

The OC said they were trying to identify who left the baby in the dumpster.

## Sylhet, Khulna get PCR machines

PHOTO: COLLECTED



The equipment that arrived at KMCH yesterday will enable tests to be conducted from next week.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital and Khulna Medical College Hospital yesterday received polymerase chain reaction machines that will be used to test for Covid-19.

Dr Himangshu Lal Roy, deputy director of Osmani hospital, said once the machine is installed at the microbiology and virology laboratory and pathologists are trained, the lab will be functional for testing coronavirus.

"It will take another five to seven days to start testing in the lab," he said, adding that all suspected patients in Sylhet will be then tested there, instead of sending samples to IEDCR in Dhaka.

Since the coronavirus outbreak in Bangladesh, IEDCR was the only authorised organisation to test suspected patients. On March 26, three other labs -- two in Dhaka and one in Chattogram -- started testing.

Medical colleges at Rajshahi and Mymensingh have already received PCR machines.

Meanwhile, Dr ATM Monzur Morshed, director of KMCH, said after installing the PCR machine following necessary procedures, they will be able to conduct tests within a week.

Dr Sailendranath Biswas, focal person of Corona Isolation Unit at KMCH, said using the machine, they will be able to test Covid-19 with samples of throat swabs and blood and provide results within a day.

## BDR CARNAGE CASE

### SC appeal delayed by closure of court

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The ongoing coronavirus outbreak has caused a delay in filing appeals with the Supreme Court challenging its High Court verdict in the sensational BDR carnage case.

No appeal was filed with the SC's Appellate Division against the HC verdict in this case, as authorities concerned are yet to provide the certified copy of the judgment to the defence and state sides, as court activities remain suspended as precautionary measure against the outbreak.

The certified copy of any HC verdict is necessary for both the defence and prosecution to move appeals before the Appellate Division, challenging an HC judgment.

The HC on January 8 released the 29,059-page full text of its verdict, that confirmed death penalty for 139 accused and upheld life imprisonment of 185 others for their involvement in the atrocities and massacre at the BDR Palkhona headquarters in 2009.

The verdict is one of the largest in the world in terms of accused involved (846) and numbers of pages.

"We have applied to the copy section of the High Court for the certified copy of its verdict in BDR mutiny case, after it [HC] released the full text in January this year. The section was scheduled to give us

an estimate of the cost for a certified copy on March 29. But, the section could not give the estimate till date as court functions have been closed due to coronavirus," Advocate Aminul Islam, a defence lawyer for more than 400 accused of the case, told The Daily Star March 29.

He said, "We hope we will get the estimate after April 5, when the court activities are scheduled to be resume. After we receive the certified copy, we will prepare the appeals for our clients, who are now serving in jail, and then we will file appeals with the apex court seeking acquittal for our clients (convicted accused). The appeals will be filed in 30 days after we will receive the certified copy," he said.

"Once the appeals are filed, the Supreme Court may set a date for starting their hearing. The chief justice may constitute a bench for hearing and disposing of the appeals in this particular case," Advocate Aminul said, adding that it cannot be said at this moment how much time will be needed for final disposal of this case.

Contacted, Supreme Court spokesperson Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star on Sunday that the HC's copy section has readied the certified copy of the HC verdict in BDR carnage case, and it will be supplied to the state and defence sides after April 5.

"A new printer machine worth Tk

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There may be no one left on the streets to notice them, but bougainvillea flowers have graced springtime in this empty city with its exquisite colour. This photo was taken yesterday in front of Ramna Park.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



## Apollo Hospital rebranded as Evercare Hospital

CITY DESK

Following investment in STS Holdings Ltd by Evercare and CDC Group, Apollo Hospital Dhaka has been rebranded as Evercare Hospital Dhaka.

It is now part of Evercare Group's global chain of 28 hospitals across South Asia and Africa. The renaming of Apollo Hospital will be effective from tomorrow.

Evercare is an integrated healthcare delivery platform operating across Africa and Asia. With a portfolio comprising of 28 hospitals, 18 clinics, 54 diagnostic centres and two hospitals under construction, Evercare is building a foundation of continuous quality improvement and standardised care, said a press release.

Evercare is wholly owned by the Evercare Health Fund, a US\$ 1bn emerging markets healthcare fund managed by The Rise Fund.

Evercare Group intends to enhance the hospital's clinical capabilities by establishing super speciality departments.

## Don't spread rumours against police: PHQ

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Police Headquarters (PHQ) yesterday called upon all not to spread misleading information and rumours against law enforcers, as it is demotivating officials who are working for the welfare of the country amid the coronavirus outbreak.

PHQ came up with the appeal, after it found that photoshopped pictures of police action during the arson attacks in 2011 at the time of the BNP-Jamaat blockade are being posted and shared on social media. People are believing those posts and expressing their wrath towards law enforcers, said a PHQ statement.

Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general of PHQ, told The Daily Star that police personnel have been working relentlessly on various platforms to prevent the spread of coronavirus and to ensure the welfare of the country.

"Police are interacting with millions of people across the country every day to prevent spread of the virus. Of these, several members of police have been accused of unwanted coercion during certain events or interactions," said the AIG.

Unit commanders have been ordered to investigate the incidents immediately, said the AIG.

"The inspector general of police spoke to all commanders through video messages and phones and also instructed officers deployed at field level," said Rana.

As a result, such incidents have not been repeated or come to the notice of PHQ, nor were those published or found visible in most print, electronic and online media, he said.

However, some news outlets are still publishing news using manipulated images to make it seem as if the police actions have continued, said the AIG.

The AIG further requested to all to assist police in this regard.

"Appropriate legal action will be taken for spreading rumors and lies among the people. Our cyber teams are working to find out those behind the rumors," he added.

## 30 judges' home quarantine completed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the home quarantine of 30 lower court judges, who returned from Australia on March 15 after a two-week training, ended yesterday, and they are now doing well.

"The judges, who came from Australia, will join offices on April 5 when the courts resume," the minister told The Daily Star.

He also said none of the lower court judges and staff members has been reported to be infected.

Necessary measures will be taken if any of them are infected, he said.

The law minister had earlier instructed the 30 lower court judges to remain in home quarantine for 15 days.

Meanwhile, the law ministry has opened a monitoring desk in order to take necessary steps to tackle a possible coronavirus outbreak among lower court judges and employees.

Two deputy secretaries of the ministry have been assigned to get updates from more than 1,800

judicial officers and around 18,000 employees.

## Joining hands

FROM PAGE 3

secretary of Badda Thana Awami League, has installed six stations in the same ward.

Local shopkeeper Md Kabir said, "This is a great initiative by the councillors and local leaders. We can now wash our hands with soap outdoors whenever we need to. No one dares to steal anything; we all look after them."

## SC appeal delayed

FROM PAGE 3

60,000 has been purchased for printing the certified of the High Court verdict in BDR mutiny case," he added.

Saifur Rahman, however, could not say the approximate cost of a certified copy.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam had earlier told this newspaper that the state will file appeals with the Appellate Division against the parts of the HC verdict that acquitted the accused, and seek due punishment for them.

## Stay put till flights

FROM PAGE 3

and lockdown remains in place."

The UK government has no plans for repatriation flights from Dhaka, but is monitoring the situation.

The British Government is prioritising

In the same area, HA Parvez installed a basin in front of his building five days ago, spending nearly Tk 20,000.

"Everyone should help each other according to their capabilities to overcome the crisis. I'm just doing my part," he said.

Earlier on March 17, Dhaka North City Corporation launched hand-washing stations at 25 key points for residents.

The mutiny on February 25-26, 2009 left the nation shocked -- as details of the unthinkable cruelty perpetrated at the Palkhona headquarters of the paramilitary force emerged. BDR was later renamed Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

The HC on November 27, 2017 pronounced the verdict that confirmed death penalty for 139, upheld life imprisonment of 185, three to 10 years' imprisonment of 200 and acquitted 283 accused of the case.

repatriation flights in countries where there are very large numbers of stranded nationals, where there have been no commercial options available for some time, and no flights are scheduled for the foreseeable future," said the high commission.

## Ctg doctors consulting

FROM PAGE 3

messages and photo of test reports via WhatsApp.

"I would try to reply once I receive your SMS and message," he said.

Dr Rupa Dutta, a medical officer of Chattogram General Hospital, told The Daily Star that she was not attending private chamber but was delivering treatment to patients over phone.

## Govt planning

FROM PAGE 3

In that case, the Biman flight can come to Chennai from where the Bangladeshis can fly to Dhaka.

However, the details will be notified after the government finalises the deal with the airline, he added.

The Indian external affairs ministry has assured Bangladesh of any assistance in this regard, the press minister said.

For those facing financial issues, the government has already talked to Bangladesh Bank. Their relatives can send money through Western Union using Bank Asia and Social Islamic Bank Limited, he added.

Bangladesh Bank also instructed the banks to lift the credit limit of those having credit cards, Farid Hossain said.

"Indian Ministry of External Affairs also assured of extension of visas for those whose visas have expired or about to expire," he said.

Hossain said the Bangladeshis stranded in India can contact the hotline number of the Bangladesh High Commission -- +91859552494 -- for any assistance concerning the matter.

## 'Stop strikes, gheraos'

FROM PAGE 12

indulging in creating some sort of misunderstanding among the people over the friendship treaty that was concluded between Bangladesh and India during Indira Gandhi's recent visit to Bangladesh. "I know their activities but I also know how to stop them," he says.

In reference to Bhutto's recent comment that Pakistani troops killed only 50,000 people in Bangladesh, Bangabandhu asks, "Will Mr Bhutto exonerate us if we kill 50,000 of his men in West Pakistan in the manner his countrymen did in Bangladesh?" He regrets that instead of feeling ashamed of what his countrymen did, Bhutto is now going all out to defend the criminals.

**JIHAD AGAINST 'LOOTPAT SAMITY'**  
Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan

Bhashani calls upon the people to extend full cooperation to the government in controlling antisocial activity in the country. Addressing a public meeting in Chittagong he assures Bangabandhu that NAP, as an opposition party, is not interested in getting to power but only helping him to remove corruption from society. He warns that if necessary he will wage a jihad against the 'lootpat samity'.

Bhashani further says that in the absence of law and order and security of people's life and property, neither can the government stay nor can freedom be preserved.

**\$4M FRENCH AID FOR BANGLADESH**

French veteran parliamentarian Raymond Offroy at a press conference in Dhaka today says that the French government has decided

to give Bangladesh a gift of four million dollars for its rehabilitation programme. Besides, he says, a convoy of 100 trucks, barges and other means of transportation will be provided to Bangladesh to overcome its communication difficulties. A high-powered French economic and technical delegation will soon visit the country to assess the needs and requirements of Bangladesh in its rehabilitation and reconstruction programme, he adds.

The French politician and diplomat calls Bangabandhu the "De Gaulle" of Bangladesh and says that the people of the new nation is lucky to have a leader like him.

**SOURCES:** April 1, 1972 issues of Ittefaq, The Bangladesh Observer, Azad, Morning News, Dainik Bangla and Purbodesh.

## Drop in China's new virus cases

REUTERS, WUHAN

China reported a drop in new coronavirus infections for a fourth day as drastic curbs on international travellers reined in the number of imported cases, while policymakers turned their efforts to healing the world's second-largest economy.

The city of Wuhan, at the centre of the outbreak, reported no new cases for a sixth day, as businesses reopened and residents set about reclaiming a more normal life after a lockdown for almost two months.

Smartly turned out staff waited in masks and gloves to greet customers at entrances to the newly-reopened Wuhan International Plaza, home to boutiques of luxury brands such as Cartier and Louis Vuitton.

"The Wuhan International Plaza is very representative (of the city)," said Zhang Yu, 29. "So its reopening really makes me feel this city is coming back to life."

Sunday's figure of 31 new cases, including one locally transmitted infection, was down from 45 the previous day, the National Health Commission said.

As infections fall, policymakers are scrambling to revitalise an economy nearly paralysed by months-long curbs to control the spread of the flu-like disease.

The central bank unexpectedly cut the interest rate on reverse repurchase agreements by 20 basis points, the largest in nearly five years.

The government is pushing businesses and factories to reopen, as it rolls out fiscal and monetary stimulus to spur recovery from what is feared to be an outright economic contraction in the quarter to March.

China's exports and imports could worsen as the pandemic spreads, depressing demand both at home and abroad, Xin Guobin, the vice minister of industry and information technology, said yesterday.

The country has extended loans of 200 billion yuan (\$28 billion) to 5,000 businesses, from 300 billion allocated to help companies as they resume work, Xin said.

Authorities in Ningbo said they would encourage national banks to offer preferential credit of up to 100 billion yuan to the eastern port city's larger export firms. The city government will subsidise such loans, it said in a notice.

**VIRUS CONCERNS**

While new infections have fallen sharply from February's peak, authorities worry about a second wave triggered by returning Chinese, many of them students.

China cut international flights massively from Sunday for an indefinite period, after it began denying entry to almost all foreigners a day earlier.

The return to work also prompted concern about potential domestic infections, especially over carriers who exhibit no, or very mild, symptoms of the highly contagious virus.

Northwestern Gansu province reported a new case of a traveller from the central province of Hubei, who drove back with a virus-free health code, national health authorities said.

Hubei authorities say 4.6 million people in the province returned to work by Saturday, with 2.8 million of them heading for other parts of China.

Most of the departing migrant

workers went to the southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, the eastern provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu, and northeast China.

In Hubei's capital of Wuhan, more retail complexes and shopping streets reopened.

Electric carmaker Tesla Inc has also reopened a showroom in Wuhan, a company executive said on Weibo.

Shoppers queued 1-1/2 metres (5 ft) apart for temperature checks at Wuhan International Plaza, while flashing "green" mobile telephone codes attesting to a clean bill of health.

To be cleared to resume work, Wuhan residents have been asked to take nucleic acid tests twice.

"Being able to be healthy and leave the house, and meet other colleagues who are also healthy is a very happy thing," said Wang Xueman, a cosmetics sales representative.

## Zimbabwe begins coronavirus lockdown

AFP, HARARE

Zimbabwean authorities yesterday began enforcing a three-week lockdown in its fight against the spread of coronavirus after the disease left one person dead and infected six others.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa declared a 21-day "total" lockdown from yesterday curtailing movement within the country, shutting most shops and suspending flights in and out of Zimbabwe.

## Two raped in Pabna, Jashore

FROM PAGE 12

Hospital. The girl's father said his daughter was returning home from the wedding ceremony at about 8:00pm.

On the way home, two accused Jahid Hossain, 20, and Shanto Hossain, 25, caught his daughter and made her unconscious with a handkerchief dipped in chemicals and raped her in a field, he said.

"The accused often stalked my daughter on her way to school. I asked them to stop," said the father, adding that locals rescued his daughter in a critical condition yesterday morning.

Bahauddin Faruki, officer-in-charge of Ishwardi Police Station, said a case was filed against Jahid and Shanto.

A Pabna court sent Jahid to jail after police produced him before the court yesterday.

In another incident, a housewife was allegedly gang-raped in Jashore's Abhoynagar upazila on Sunday night.

Quoting the victim, police said the 22-year-old woman was returning home from a shrine around 7:00pm.

On the way, Soheli, Hekmat Ali, Tipu Shikdar, and Nazmul Islam took her to a nearby bush and raped

her at knife point.

Hearing the victim's screams, locals rushed to the spot and rescued her.

After the victim lodged a case with Abhoynagar Police Station that night, police raided different areas in the upazila and arrested Soheli, said Tajul Islam, officer-in-charge of the station.

The woman was sent to Jashore General Hospital for medical tests, the OC added.

A Jashore court sent the arrestee to jail after police produced him before the court yesterday afternoon.

*Our Pabna and Benapole correspondents contributed to this report.*

## Illegals in Malaysia

FROM PAGE 12

Malaysia's lockdown exempted those engaged in services like health, transport, banking, law enforcement and the food.

The Malaysian Institute of Economic Research, a local think tank predicts a recession and forecasts that the economy may contract by 2.9 percent this year with 2.4 million job losses.

Jonny, 25, an undocumented Bangladeshi construction worker in Serdang of Selangor district, said, "We are not leaving the dormitory and have been spending our savings. If the one-month lockdown continues further, I will have to ask my family in Bangladesh to send money."

He lives at a labour camp with over 200 migrant workers. About five of them live in each room. A supervisor routinely checks their temperature and if they detect someone has a fever, they are sent them to a hospital. That's not the case in all labour camps, especially where undocumented migrants live.

Syed Mawla, a Bangladeshi community leader in Kuala Lumpur, said ensuring health screening for undocumented workers would be a big challenge for the Malaysian authorities.

"Malaysia can't effectively combat Covid-19 if migrants, stateless people, and refugees are unable to get health care because they can't afford it, face discrimination, or fear arrest and deportation," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch, in a statement on March 24.

"With many living in crowded settlements with no running water and no ability to isolate those who get sick, they are especially vulnerable to the Covid-19 infection," he said.

The New York-based global rights watchdog said for many non-citizens in Malaysia, who must pay more

for health care than citizens do, the costs of health care can present an insurmountable barrier. Language and cultural barriers may also impede access to services.

"While the Ministry of Health announced on March 23, 2020 that Covid-19 tests will be free for foreigners as well as for Malaysians, the announcement does not make clear whether free tests are available for those who are undocumented, or whether those who are found to be ill will have to pay the 'foreigner fee' for treatment."

Federal Territories Minister Annuar Musa recently encouraged undocumented migrants to come forward and be tested, but did not expressly state that they would not face legal repercussions, HRW said.

"The Malaysian government needs to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic by making sure everyone, regardless of their legal status, can access health care without risk of arrest or other repercussions and is aware that they can do so, and that hospitals treat all those who come without discrimination.

"Covid-19 does not discriminate, and neither should the Malaysian government."

Contacted, Zahirul Islam, labour counsellor at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, said many Bangladeshi undocumented workers called the mission's hotline number to ask whether they would be harassed if they went for coronavirus tests. However, after the government assured that there will be no security problem and treatment charges if undocumented workers and refugees take the Covid-19 screening, the number of calls dropped.

Zahirul added that the mission was working to create awareness among

Bangladeshi migrant workers about the virus.

Migrant researcher Abu Hayat suggested that a vigorous information campaign should be launched among the migrant communities across Malaysia.

## Workout

FROM PAGE 12

take a three-minute break every 30 minutes."

So, self-isolating should not mean being inactive, instead there are plenty of exercises one can do at home without any apparatus to get a full-body workout and even some cardio, said Jashim Uddin Ahmad, principal of Government College of Physical Education, Dhaka.

"This is the golden time for family members to stay together and to work out together. Members of a household house can teach each other about exercise and can work out together," he said.

As exercising is integral to maintaining health and fitness, it is important for everyone to schedule the workout, for example, 7:00am to 8:00am, he said.

"If we can fix a time, it will help people find a focus and family members can get ready for exercise," he said.

The indoor exercises Jashim recommended were skipping, various freehand exercises, breathing exercises, and yoga. As going outside of the home is restricted, people can walk inside the room or climb stairs. A daily exercise of 30 minutes is a must for every adult to remain healthy, he said.

"We can play some indoor games like carrom and chess with family members and this will strengthen bonding," he suggested.

## Mercedes F1 to make new breathing aid

FROM PAGE 12

pressure device (CPAP), which helps patients with breathing difficulties.

A version of the equipment, which increases air and oxygen flow into the lungs, has already been used in hospitals in Italy and China to help Covid-19 patients with serious lung infections.

Teams at UCL and Mercedes have reverse-engineered the device and say they can make them quickly "by the thousands" and provide hospitals across Britain, as pressure builds due to more confirmed cases.

Reports from Italy indicated about 50 percent of patients given CPAP did not need mechanical ventilation, which requires sedation and a tube placed into the patient's windpipe, UCL said.

Clinical trials with 100 of the machines are to be carried out at University College London Hospital, it added in a statement on Sunday.

"These devices will help save lives by ensuring that ventilators, a

limited resource, are used only for the severely ill," said UCLH critical care consultant Mervyn Singer.

"While they will be tested at UCLH first, we hope they will make a real difference to hospitals across the UK by reducing demand on intensive care staff and beds, as well as helping patients recover without the need for more invasive ventilation."

Britain's state-run National Health Service currently has some 8,000 ventilators and the government has ordered 8,000 more. But there is concern there will be a shortage as the virus peaks.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has put his government on a war footing, appealing to major manufacturers and industry to repurpose their production, including for medical devices.

Tim Baker, from UCL's mechanical engineering department, said the process took days instead of years and improvements were made to the

## Govt, media to work in unison

FROM PAGE 12

Shampadak Parishad President Mahfuz Anam, General Secretary Naem Nizam, ATCO Senior Vice President Mozammel Babu, its member Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Noab President AK Azad and executive members Matiuur Rahman and Tarik Sujat were present, among others.

Hasan, also the joint general secretary of the ruling Awami League, said various rumours were being spread in the country over

the Covid-19 and some online news portals were creating panic among the people by running fake news.

Noting that the country's mainstream media was playing a vital role against rumours, he said, "The government is taking actions against those circulating rumours. We have sought cooperation from the mainstream media to this end.

"People should not panic, rather they should be made aware of [coronavirus]. Today, we discussed what the government should do at

this moment. We have decided to work together."

The minister said various problems have surfaced in newspapers and television channels during the crisis period and the circulation of many newspapers declined drastically.

Hasan said newspaper workers and hawkers were in trouble and the TV channels were also facing the same situation. The problems were discussed in the meeting yesterday, he added.



## Worship that set a virus time bomb in France

REUTERS, Paris

From the stage of an evangelical superchurch, the leader of the gospel choir kicked off an evening of prayer and preaching: "We're going to celebrate the Lord! Are you feeling the joy tonight?" "Yes!" shouted the hundreds gathered at the Christian Open Door church on February 18. Some of them had travelled thousands of miles to take part in the week-long gathering in Mulhouse, a city of 100,000 on France's borders with Germany and Switzerland.

For many members of this globe-spanning flock, the annual celebration is the highlight of the church calendar. This time, someone in the congregation was carrying the coronavirus.

The prayer meeting kicked off the biggest cluster of Covid-19 in France - one of northern Europe's hardest-hit countries - to date, local government said. Around 2,500 confirmed cases have been linked to it.

Worshippers at the church have unwittingly taken the disease caused by the virus home to the West African state of Burkina Faso, to the Mediterranean island of Corsica, to Guyana in Latin America, to Switzerland, to a French nuclear power plant, and into the workshops of one of Europe's biggest automakers.

Weeks later, Germany partially closed its border with France, suspending a free-movement pact that has been in place for the past 25 years.

The church cluster was a key factor, two people familiar with the German decision told Reuters. Church officials told Reuters that 17 members of the congregation have since died of complications linked to the disease.

Other religious gatherings have been linked to the spread of the virus: A large church in South Korea has triggered more than 5,000 cases there.



Workers set up a field hospital in front of Mount Sinai West Hospital inside Central Park in New York City on Sunday. A senior US scientist issued a cautious prediction that the novel coronavirus could claim 100,000 to 200,000 lives in the United States. Inset, medical staff push a Covid-19 patient on a stretcher towards a French medical helicopter in Strasbourg yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## UK epidemic slowing

Top epidemiologist says antibody test could be ready in days

REUTERS, London

The coronavirus epidemic in the United Kingdom is showing signs of slowing and antibody tests could be ready in days, Neil Ferguson, a professor of mathematical biology at Imperial College London, said yesterday.

"We think the epidemic is just about slowing in the UK right now," Ferguson told BBC radio. Britain, which has the world's fifth largest economy, initially took an approach to containing the spread of the disease that was modest in comparison to European countries such as Italy.

But Prime Minister Boris Johnson imposed stringent controls after projections showed a quarter of a million people could die. Johnson on Friday became the first leader of a major power to announce a positive test result for coronavirus. He is self-isolating in Downing Street. Ferguson said a third or even 40% of people do not get any symptoms.

He said perhaps 2% to 3% of the United Kingdom's population had been infected. But Ferguson cautioned that the data was not good enough to make firm extrapolations. He said

antibody tests were in the final stage of validation right now and could be hopefully ready to use in "days rather than weeks".

Health officials said on Sunday that figures showed that 1,228 patients in the UK who tested positive for coronavirus (Covid-19) had died. As of 0800 GMT on March 29, a total of 127,737 people in the UK have been tested, of which 108,215 were confirmed negative and 19,522 were confirmed positive.

When asked whether the antibody test would be ready in days, junior health minister Helen Whately told BBC radio: "I am not going to confirm when that's going to arrive." Britain has begun rolling out antigen tests - which are different to antibody tests - for healthcare workers but the numbers being tested are far below the levels of Germany, Europe's largest economy.

Whately said there was capacity to have 10,000 people a day tested though 7,000 were tested on Saturday or Sunday. She said the government hoped to get to 25,000 tests per day over the next few weeks.

A total of 1,27,737 people in UK have been tested  
Govt hopes to get to 25,000 tests per day over the next few weeks

## No community spread of virus

Says India's health ministry as 92 new cases surfaced in 24-hrs

AGENCIES

India is still in the local transmission stage of the coronavirus pandemic, the government said yesterday, responding to questions about a health ministry document that said the country was currently in "local transmission and limited community transmission phase."

"Nowhere are we calling it community transmission. We are still in the local transmission stage. If we use the word 'community' then there is speculation," said Luv Agarwal of the Indian Council of Medical Research.

India has close to 1,100 coronavirus cases, including 29 deaths. Ninety-two new cases and four deaths due to Covid-19 have been reported in the last 24 hours, the health ministry said yesterday.

The ministry also released a document detailing SOPs for transporting a suspected case of coronavirus, reports NDTV. "This SOP is applicable to the current phase of Covid-19 pandemic in India (local transmission and limited community transmission)," the document said.

Of the four stages, Stage 1 is when cases are imported from affected countries. Only those who travelled abroad test positive. The government says India is still on Stage 2, when there is local transmission from infected persons.

## Germany ramps up virus testing

Uses smartphone location data to trace patient's movements

AFP, Berlin

In the race against the coronavirus, Germany is betting on widespread testing and quarantining to break the infection chain, a strategy borrowed from South Korea whose success in slowing the outbreak has become the envy of the world.

Germany is already carrying out more coronavirus tests than any other European country at a rate of 300,000 to 500,000 a week, according to officials.

But Chancellor Angela Merkel's government aims to ramp that up to at least 200,000 tests a day, according to an interior ministry document seen by several German media outlets.

The goal would be to test all those who suspect they have caught the virus, as well as the entire circle of people who have come into contact with a confirmed case.

Current testing criteria are focussed on those who are sick with Covid-19 symptoms and have had contact with a confirmed case.

The idea, according to the document, is to move from tests "that confirm the situation" to tests that "get ahead of it".

A crucial weapon in the battle would be the use of smartphone location data to trace a patient's recent movements, to more accurately track down and isolate potentially infected people.



## N Korea tests 'super-large' rocket launchers

Nuclear-armed North Korea successfully tested "super-large multiple rocket launchers", state media said yesterday, but leader Kim Jong Un was not described as commanding the drill as analysts say Pyongyang seeks to normalise its launches. With the world focused on the coronavirus pandemic and North Korea insisting it has not had a single Covid-19 case, the isolated state has carried out four such firings this month. Unusually, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) did not say in its report that Kim had directed Sunday's test. The leader is almost always shown overseeing the North's launches but on this occasion KCNA said it was led by ruling party vice chairman Ri Pyong Chol and conducted by the Academy of National Defence Science.

## Taliban kill dozens of Afghan troops in attacks

The Taliban have killed about two dozen Afghan police and pro-government fighters, officials said yesterday, in two attacks that come as the foes are supposed to be preparing for peace talks. In one of the incidents late Sunday, the insurgents killed at least six soldiers and 13 police and pro-government militiamen at several outposts near a police headquarters building in northeastern Takhar province, provincial police spokesman Khalil Assir told AFP. A wedding party was being held in the building at the time, but the attackers did not reach the headquarters. "The police bravely defended and prevented the Taliban from entering the celebration," Assir said.

## US won't pay Harry and Meghan security: Trump

President Donald Trump said Sunday that the United States would not pay security costs for Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, appearing to confirm that the royal couple have moved to live in California. They reportedly flew by private jet from Canada to Los Angeles before the border between the two countries closed because of the deadly coronavirus outbreak. The couple, who had been living in Canada for several months, rocked the royal family earlier this year with their decision to no longer represent the British monarchy and to pursue a new, independent life. "I am a great friend and admirer of the Queen & the United Kingdom," Trump tweeted.

SOURCE: AFP



Homeless people eat food sitting in lines outside a shelter during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the Covid-19 novel coronavirus in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'It is my first time'

NY food banks flooded with newcomers deprived of income

AFP, New York

New York food banks have become inundated with newcomers deprived of income since the near-total halt of business in the United States' economic capital.

Sacks of oranges, sweet potatoes and onions are spread over three tables at an open-air market in Washington Heights, a neighborhood in the north of Manhattan. Sterilized milk and cans of tuna and salmon cover three others.

Hundreds of people came over the weekend to restock at the distribution center, one of many run by City Harvest, a major New York-based charity.

There are no long lines reminiscent of the soup kitchens of the 1930s. Instead, people trickle in, often wearing masks for protection and keeping their distance from each other under the direction of market volunteers.

Among the customers is Lina Alba, 40, a single mother with five children aged between 11 and 23. She worked as a maid in a Manhattan hotel until it

closed two weeks ago.

Her two oldest children also lost their jobs.

"It is my first time," she said. "We need the help now. This is crazy. So we don't know what's gonna happen in a few weeks."

She's trying to stay positive, though. "At least I'm spending time with my kids... I am the teacher, I am the mom -- I am everything."

"We are alive, we are healthy, we just need to pray." It took the single mother a week to register for unemployment -- the service flooded, pointing to much worse unemployment numbers than those announced by the federal government on Thursday. But on Friday, "I did it, finally,"

Alba said, relieved.

The benefits should start arriving in three weeks. Alba also hopes to receive soon at least \$1,200 from the federal government. "It's not gonna be enough," but "you're gonna appreciate anything right now," she said, noting that "a lot of people" need help. "It is the whole entire city."



## Nature takes back world's empty city streets

AFP, Paris

As humans retreat into their homes as more and more countries go under coronavirus lockdown, wild animals are slipping cover to explore the empty streets of some of our biggest cities.

Wild boars have descended from the hills around Barcelona while sika deer are nosing their way around the deserted metro stations of Nara, Japan.

Indian social media has gone wild about footage of a stag scampering through Dehradun, the capital of the northern state of Uttarakhand.

Gangs of wild turkeys have been strutting the streets of Oakland, California, while a puma turned up in the centre of the Chilean capital Santiago, which is under curfew.

"This is the habitat they once had and that we've taken away from them," said Marcelo Giagnoni, the head of Chile's agricultural and livestock service that helped police capture the curious big cat.

While sightings of dolphins in Venice's canals turned out to be fanciful, they have

been popping up in ports elsewhere in the Mediterranean as emboldened wildlife takes "free rein to wander our cities and towns", said Romain Julliard, head of research at the French Natural History Museum.

He told AFP that foxes were at the vanguard of the new urban explorers. "They change their behaviour very quickly. When a place becomes quiet, they're straight in there."

Animals and birds that normally live in urban parks, like sparrows and pigeons are also more likely to venture beyond their usual territories, Julliard said, "freeing a space for other animals".

While the dawn and dusk choruses have been bringing comfort to many quarantined city dwellers, the museum's acoustics specialist Jerome Sueur said that doesn't mean there are more urban birds than before.

It is more that with reduced traffic noise we can hear them better. Some, however, "stop singing when there is noise, so now they are letting themselves go."



STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
Closed	Closed	\$1,623.90 (per ounce)	\$22.96 (per barrel)	▲ 4.61%	▼ 1.57%	▼ 4.45%	▼ 0.90%	BUY TK 83.95	89.67	98.12	11.69
				28,440.32	19,084.97	2,416.24	2,747.21	SELL TK 84.95	93.47	101.92	12.29

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## TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

### Running out of ventilators is a real possibility. And Walton comes to rescue.

SOHEL PARVEZ and MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

For weeks now, the nation has been obsessed with one set of numbers: how many confirmed cases of coronavirus and how many have died?

But there is a whole other set of numbers the public needs to start paying attention to: how many ventilators do we have in this country?

Ventilators blow oxygen into the lungs of patients suffering from severe pulmonary stress and are essential for saving the lives of the sickest COVID-19 patients.

Bangladesh has just 1,250 ventilators -- 500 in public hospitals and 750 in the private ones -- according to Md Aminul Hasan, director for hospitals and clinic at the Directorate General of Health Services.

If the pandemic spreads, the country with more than 16 crore population will need at least 25,000 ventilators, said AM Shamim, managing director of Labaid Group, which owns a chain of private hospitals.

But ventilators are in short supply at the moment, given the rate at which the lethal, pneumonia-like virus is spreading across the globe. And in recent weeks, countries around the world have been scrambling to build and buy as many of them as possible.

Although regular manufacturers like Medtronic, Philips, Draegerwerk and Getinge said they have boosted their production, big names of other industries such as General Motors, Airbus, McLaren and Dyson have offered their engineering expertise or factory lines.

At the time of writing, the total number of confirmed cases of coronavirus around the globe stand at 740,157 and the total number of deaths 35,097.

One of the options available to Bangladesh is to explore scope of getting the device brought in from China, where the number of COVID-19 cases have dropped.

And another way is to explore the scope of making ventilators locally and develop manpower by training to run the devices properly.

The government is on this course and has enlisted the service of local tech giant Walton to manufacture it with support from Medtronic.

"We have already had a huge chat with the Medtronic team, which is run by an iconic Bangladeshi expatriate Omar Ishrak, and they have assured us to help in manufacturing ventilators in our country," said Zunaïd Ahmed Palak, state minister for the ICT division, yesterday in an online press conference.

Palak with this team attended a video

conference on Saturday with the research and development team of Medtronic and they have assured to share their source code.

"We are very hopeful to get their source code and patent by Wednesday and might go for manufacturing within the shortest possible time."

The junior state minister said he has already informed the prime minister of the development and spoke with the health minister over phone.

"It will be a huge mileage for Bangladesh," Palak added.

Access to Information (a2i) programme under ICT division is coordinating the

production anytime soon is undecided.

But the government though is planning to buy another 300 ventilators without further ado, according to Hasan.

"We are getting a lot of call. But none have the device anymore now," said Mohamad Saifur Rahman, manager monitoring and analytics therapeutic care of Philips Bangladesh, adding that all five portable ventilators its distributors had were sold recently.

Medical equipment sellers said nearly a dozen firms import and market ventilators made mainly by manufacturers based in the US and Europe.

critical and they may need ventilator support.

"Let us not think of the worst," he added.

The biggest preparation should be to prevent the spread of the disease by getting people to stay in, said Mohammad Mushtuq Husain, adviser of the Institute Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

The government should provide support to the needy so that they do not need to get out of their homes, he added.

Shamim says ventilators can still be managed if the government provides support to the private sector.

The government has given Tk 100 crore



issue and with its help Walton has already applied before the directorate general of health services yesterday. Golam Murshed, executive director of Walton, told The Daily Star.

Other than ventilators, Walton said it is planning to manufacture a few other medical devices like UV disinfectant, goggles, shield, respiratory mask, oxygen concentrator and PAPER.

Walton has also applied to import the components for the life-saving machines.

About 50 local engineers have already started work on this project, Murshed said, adding that the company can begin manufacturing the goggles and protective shield from the first week of April and the other equipment after that.

Another group of local engineers and physicians have developed a ventilator named Spondon recently too, said a press statement.

Whether they would go into

And because of slow demand and relatively high cost, ranging from \$10,000 to \$25,000, they usually do not maintain a large inventory.

"We usually do not have ready stock. And it is supplied mainly based on order," said Shahidul Islam, director technical of Widespread Solutions, a medical equipment supplier and marketer in Bangladesh.

It may take seven to 15 days to import the devices into the country if the manufacturer has available stock.

However, getting supply from the US is unlikely right now as demand is through the roof there, he said.

But Md Maniruzzaman Bhuiyan, president of the Bangladesh Private Clinic Diagnostic Owners Association (BPCDOA), is not too worried about the shortage of the lifesaving equipment.

"Only a small portion of COVID-19 patients will need ventilator support."

Some 80 per cent of the patients recover normally. Of the remaining 20 per cent, the condition of five per cent among them may be

for the health sector and if the state bears half the prices of each ventilator the private sector will import a lot.

"We will import 1,000 ventilators in 15 days if the government provides subsidy," he added.

As of now, the Directorate of Drug Administration (DGDA) requested the National Board of Revenue to remove all duty and taxes on import of ventilators, said Director of DGDA Md Mostafizur Rahman.

Arif Mahmud, head of medical of Apollo Hospital that is set to be renamed as Evercare Hospital, said the hospital is in the process of adding 20 more ventilators to its existing 56.

Md EE Yousuf Siddique, chief administrative officer of Square Hospital, however said having the equipment only will not be helpful.

"It requires trained manpower including trained intensivist respiratory therapists and trained nurses to run the machines," he said, adding that Square can help train human resource to run the machines.

### Corporate giants join in fight

JAGARAN CHAKMA and AHSAAN HABIB

Despite being hit by the fallout of the coronavirus, Bangladesh's corporate giants are not sitting idle as they have joined the government's efforts by enhancing supplies to the ill-equipped health sector and extending helping hand to the low-income people who are facing existential crisis because of the lockdown.

Major businesses are providing personal protective equipment (PPE), medicines and test kits to hospitals as well as essentials to the needy.

Akij Group is building a 301-bed specialised hospital for coronavirus patients at the heart of the capital, while Bashundhara Group has handed over its sprawling International Convention City Bashundhara to the government for converting into a hospital.

Their efforts come as the government announced a ten-day countrywide lockdown until April 4 to slow the spread of the deadly virus.

Pran-RFL Group is seeking approval from the Drug Administration for its 20-bed isolation centre in its Amzad Khan Memorial Hospital in Natore.

"The centre is almost ready as we have a hospital there. People will be treated there once we get the nod," said Kamruzzaman Kamal, Pran's director for marketing.

The company has also provided 4,500 surgical masks and 500 bottles of hand sanitisers to public hospitals in Dhaka and given away 40,000 packs of noodles and 1,000 packs of biscuits for the poor through two volunteer organisations.

Square Pharmaceuticals has donated 10,000 PPEs to the Directorate General of Drug Administration, while Sheltech Group will provide 5,000 PPEs to two hospitals.

"It is our responsibility to stand by the government at this critical moment. We should not think about business now. Rather saving lives should be our priority," said Tanvir Ahmed, Sheltech's MD.

The group is providing food to 1,000 low-income people in Dhaka and the initiative will continue until the recovery from the pandemic. Besides, it has a plan to provide ration containing lentil, rice, milk, edible oil and soap to 5,000 families.

PHP Family will provide Tk 2 crore to the Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund, said Dilshad Ahmed, its head of media and public relations.

Sufi Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, chairman of PHP Family, has also donated honorarium of the Ekushey Padak to the treatment fund of the Chattogram Medical College and Hospital.

Youngone Group in Chattogram would donate 25,000 PPEs to hospitals and has formed a coordination committee to assess the need of the hospitals.

Premier Cement distributed masks and sanitisers among 6,000 people, said its MD Mohammed Amirul Haque.

Beximco has donated Tk 15 crore to provide PPEs, medicines and test kits for healthcare workers.

The coronavirus crisis has to be fought on all fronts involving both private and public sectors, said Beximco Group Vice-Chairman Salman F Rahman in a statement.

ACI Pharmaceuticals donated 5,000 PPEs and will provide masks in large volumes for doctors and nurses, said M Mohibuz Zaman, its chief operating officer.

Confidence Group donated 4,000 PPEs to a number of organisations, such as the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, the Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital, the police force, the Chittagong Medical College Hospital, the Dhaka Medical College Hospital and the Fire Service and Civil Defence.

### The 9pc lending rate from next month seems unlikely

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Banks' capacity to provide loans at 9 per cent interest has shrunk even before the government-fixed ceiling is implemented as both individuals and corporate institutions are withdrawing deposits to protect themselves from the ongoing economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Bangladesh Bank instructed banks on February 24 to set a maximum 9 per cent interest rate on all loan products save for credit cards from April 1.

Although the central bank has already slashed both the policy rate and the cash reserve ratio (CRR), this is not enough to bring down the interest rate for loans.

The banking sector has got an additional fund of Tk 6,400 crore through slashing of the CRR by 25 basis points to 5.75 per cent.

But corporate clients have recently been forced to take out a large amount of money to pay wages and salaries to employees at a time when their production has come to a halt.

Similarly, individuals are cashing out fixed and deposit pension schemes prematurely fearing the impending health and financial risks.

"Banks in Bangladesh will face liquidity pressure like lenders in other countries. How can banks lend smoothly then if they do not have adequate loanable funds?" said

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh.

Lenders have been implementing 6 per cent interest rate on fixed deposit schemes since February as part of their preparation to provide loans at 9 per cent interest from next month.

"But the economy is in meltdown. We will have to give our all-out effort to mobilise deposits when the lockdown is lifted."

Banks will face hurdles in attracting depositors at 6 per cent interest, which will create a stringent situation for implementation of the single-digit lending rate, Rahman added.

The lending rate could be brought down to single-digit if the central bank implements quantitative easing as per its announcement, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

On March 22, the BB said it would buy Treasury bills and bonds from banks and non-bank financial institutions to tackle the imminent economic slowdown.

Quantitative easing (QE) is a form of unconventional monetary policy in which a central bank purchases longer-term government securities or other types of securities from the open market in order to increase money supply and encourage lending and investment.

The central bank rarely purchases T-bills and bonds from banks.

The BB will have to set a roadmap on the amount of cash it will inject into the money market within a certain period.

Otherwise, the banking sector will not get the confidence to lower the interest rate on lending, Mansur said.

"Lending rate should be brought down in the interest of the private sector, which has been struggling to get their desired funds for long."

Small and medium enterprises will have to be given more support through loans under refinancing schemes as they are being hit hard by the ongoing crisis, said Mansur, also a former official of the International Monetary Fund.

Rahman, also the managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, echoed the same as Mansur.

He feared that defaulted loans would go up further after June when the central

bank's moratorium period for borrowers ends.

Inflation will not be fuelled if the central bank injects money into the market, said Arif Khan, managing director of IDLC Finance.

Both global and local demand have dried up and the declining petroleum price is a harbinger of the trend, he said.

"Borrowers are now unable to repay loans, adding an extra pressure on lenders. We are not permitted to violate the central bank's instruction to give out loans at single-digit."

Against the backdrop, many lenders may adopt a go-slow policy on loan disbursement, putting an adverse impact on the private sector, Khan said.

"Banks' profitability will see a sharp decline if they give out loans at single digit without managing deposits at 6 per cent," said Emranul Huq, managing director of Dhaka Bank.

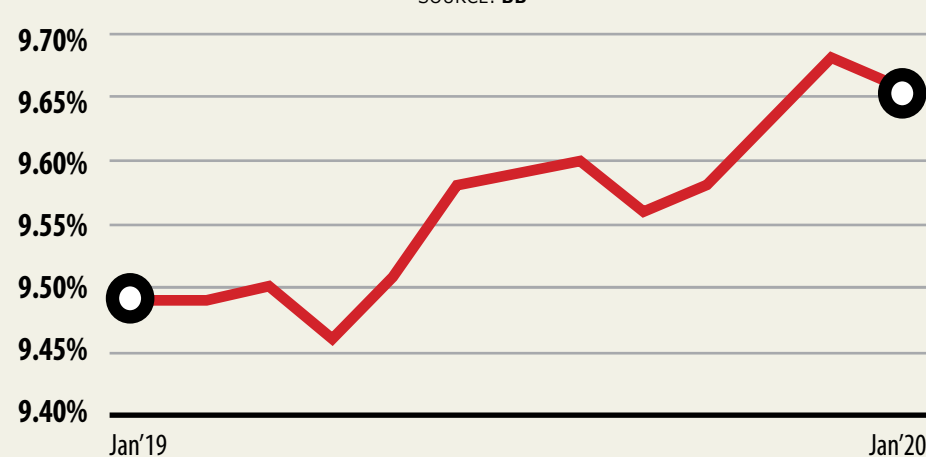
The loan-deposit ratio should be relaxed along with quantitative easing measure in order to widen banks' capacity to disburse loans, he added.

The BB has yet to backtrack from its stance, said its spokesperson Md Serajul Islam.

"We are closely monitoring both global and domestic financial state of affairs. And the central bank will take decisions when the lockdown is lifted."

#### WEIGHTED AVERAGE LENDING RATES

SOURCE: BB





TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

# Soft loans, wages to come from stimulus package

Most garment factories keep their shutters down

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and REFAVET ULLAH MIRDHA

The government will disburse interest-free soft loans for two years among the export-oriented sectors from the Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package the prime minister unveiled to cope with the fallout from COVID-19.

Companies and exporters seeking to avail a loan from the fund will, however, have to pay 2 per cent service charge to banks -- a condition that was opposed yesterday by a number of garment entrepreneurs.

Most garment factories were closed yesterday although there is an option of keeping them open if there are work orders from international retailers, said an official of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

"The units that have work orders were open. But the number is very negligible," he added.

Earlier, the government's Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments and the BGMEA said garment factories with work orders can run their units after ensuring adequate health safety measures to protect workers from the deadly bug.

However, there is little compliance by factory managements and workers and whatever did exist is waning every day, said the BGMEA official asking not to be named.

During her March 25 address to the nation, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had stated that the stimulus package would be used to pay workers of the export-oriented sectors.

Immediately, the finance ministry swung into action to devise a method to distribute the funds.

Managements of export-oriented companies or factories would have to provide salary sheets and workers' list and their mobile banking accounts to banks so that salaries for April can be directly disbursed, said a senior finance ministry official yesterday.

The banks, afterwards, will forward the same documents to the Bangladesh Bank for reimbursements, said the official.

The borrowers will get a six-month grace period, meaning that they will start paying back the borrowed money in instalments to the government from the seventh month of receiving the money.

The finance ministry will send a guideline in this connection to the BB within a couple of days so that disbursement can start as soon as possible.

The government has come up with the rescue package as Bangladesh's export sectors had been reeling from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic even before the presence of the virus was established in the country.

This is because economic activities in major export destinations such as the European Union, the United States and the United Kingdom have almost ground to a



# Infrastructure project works grind to a halt

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The coronavirus pandemic has thrown a spanner in the works of all major infrastructure projects, a turn of events that is poised to delay implementation and scale up cost, according to project officials and experts.

The government is currently implementing more than \$30 billion worth of infrastructure projects such as the Padma bridge, Rooppur nuclear power plant, Matarbari power plant, Karnaphuli river tunnel and Dhaka metro rail.

"Progress is slowing down every day due to the pandemic and I am not sure what will happen if the outbreak prolongs," said Md Shafiqul Islam, project director of Padma bridge, the country's largest infrastructure project.

The construction work is about 86 per cent complete, he said, adding that more than 3.9 kilometres of the 6.15km bridge is visible now after 26 of the 41 spans were installed.

According to the revised deadline, the country's longest bridge will open to traffic in June next year.

"Project implementation has taken a back seat as our priority is to ensure the safety of the employees and workers," Islam said, adding that they would be able to assess the impact once the pandemic is over.

Coronavirus is a global issue and Bangladesh's infrastructure projects cannot remain unscathed, said

## THE BIG FIVE MEGA PROJECTS

Padma multipurpose bridge	Tk 30,193cr
Padma bridge rail link	Tk 34,988cr
Rooppur nuclear power plant	Tk 106,760cr
Karnaphuli river tunnel	Tk 8,447cr
Matarbari power project	Tk 39,100cr

MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company, a government-owned entity that is implementing the metro rail project.

"Our outdoor work is on hold as per the government's instruction."

About 1,000 foreign nationals, from mid-level to experts, are involved with the project.

At present, more than nine kilometres of the 20.10km long viaduct are visible, Siddique added.

Construction work of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT Line)-6, which began in 2016, has made 38.35 per cent progress as of November last year and was expected to

open to public on December 16 next year. The deadline might be pushed back now.

The coronavirus pandemic is a fresh blow to the infrastructure projects that customarily have to navigate through several barriers, said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

"It's an unavoidable situation, but there should be the scope to restructure plans for rapid implementation of the projects."

Neither foreign nor local employees are able to work under the prevailing situation, which will definitely slow down the progress of the projects and in the long run affect the economy, he added.

"Project officials should continue working from home to offset the impact," Moazzem said.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the infrastructure projects is inevitable as people's safety should be the first priority, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

The slow progress in the infrastructure projects due to the pandemic will leave a negative impact on economic growth, he said, adding that losses could be minimised if the implementing entities and contractors can reach a consensus for putting in extra effort.

"But everything will depend on the charisma of the government and the project directors."



halt in recent weeks.

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.

As of yesterday, \$2.87 billion worth garment export orders were cancelled by international retailers, according to data compiled by the BGMEA.

Some 1,041 factories having 2.08 million workers reported losing work orders for 906.68 million units of garments.

Domestic market-based industries and services sectors are also slowly feeling the effects of a 10-day government shutdown aimed at preventing the spread of the pneumonia-like virus.

Many workers in the informal sector have completely lost their incomes and they do not have any coping capacity.

If the government considers giving out the Tk 5,000 crore as loan, it will not serve the real purpose, said Shahidul Haque Mukul, managing director of Adams Apparels.

"So, we are worried. It will be very difficult to obtain the money from this fiscal package as the government will impose a lot of conditions," he told The Daily Star over the phone.

Many factory owners will not feel encouraged to take the loan for the conditions and for it being an added burden following the coronavirus-induced work losses, he said.

Garment exporters are in trouble because the international retailers have been cancelling work orders every day, said Anwar ul Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), a former BGMEA president.

So, it will be difficult for them to survive through this critical time by borrowing money from banks, Parvez said. Moreover, it will take a long time for normalcy to return in the major export destinations in the west like Europe and the US, he said.

"The government should consider these issues before taking the decision on stimulus package for the export-oriented sectors so that we can survive," Parvez said.

If it is not a grant, the government should allow at least seven years in repayment period so that exporters can adjust the loan with their balance sheets once normalcy is restored at home and abroad, the entrepreneur added.

Apart from garments, sectors such as leather, jute and ceramics are also being affected due to the global outbreak, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi told American media outlet CNBC on Friday.

The export-oriented industries would be supported under the immediate plan while 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.

MAHMUDUL HASAN and SHADMA MALIK

The existential question confronting many right now: how do you look put together when even simple grooming could spread the virus?

With the novel coronavirus threatening to wreck havoc on the country's healthcare system, the government on March 23 ordered nonessential businesses -- salons, barbershops, nail parlours and gyms among them -- to close their doors to slow the outbreak's spread.

This has left many -- like Mofizur Rahman Palash, an assistant commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police -- to

do the job themselves, often to disastrous results.

As a member of the disciplined force, he needs a tidy appearance at all times, but his overgrown hair amid all shuttered barbershops is making it difficult. So now, he is planning to do it himself.

But Md Muktadir Rashid, a resident of capital's Mirpur 1 area, close to handing over a pair of scissors and trimmer to his wife.

"The mercury is rising, so I badly need a haircut," he said, adding that even if his wife messes up his hair the ongoing movement control order means not many would get to witness it.

But for the myriads of personal-care workers and establishment the pandemic is turning out to be a source of grave concern.

Even though Bangladesh did not announce its maiden cases until March 8, the damage to their business began from the beginning of this month.

"Given the looming threat of coronavirus and the nature of our service, which needs working in proximity, panicked clients stopped coming," Taslima, manager at Farzana Shakil in Gulshan 1, told The Daily Star last week.

Clients were avoiding doing facials and body massages as those involved close human contact, said Juthi, manager of Women's Care in Banasree.

But now, many are wondering how long they can afford to keep their business running without customers.

"From next month, it would be a challenge to make a living," said Ruksana Aktar Nipa, an employee at Red Beauty parlour in the capital's Banasree, said business in all three branches in the capital are closed from March 22.

Md Hossain, manager of Adonis in capital's Dhanmondi, a salon for men, echoed the same.

"We just shut our business for the safety of our staff and customers. We paid the salary of our all 11 staff for this month. I don't know what will happen next month," he added.

But for those who are willing to make house calls, this is boom time. Many say their phones are buzzing with texts and calls from clients.

One such person who is taking grooming services is Afsana Ali, a resident of Gulshan. Yesterday she phoned an employee at the beauty salon she frequents to come to her house to do her nails.

"With nails, of course it's not the end of the world if you don't have it. But if they don't look good and they're not kept up, it's kind of like mental health status, you know? You look down and it's like, 'Everything's falling apart, and my nails are falling apart'," Ali said.

But the employee she called had no free time for the next two days: her days were choc-a-bloc with requests.

Tipra Chakma, who works in a beauty parlour in Gulshan, is going over to her salon's regular clients' houses for haircuts, facials, manicures and pedicures, and massages.

When Chakma was informed of the possibility of contracting the deadly virus from doing such house calls, she shrugged it off. "People are serious about getting their hair done. The money is good -- how can you say no?"



# Grooming industry in an anxious wait



## Humanity is not dead yet

*We applaud voluntary initiatives to support those less fortunate*

IN these dark and depressing times, when we are bombarded with news of death, hardship and mismanagement of scarce resources, it is truly heartening to see that individuals and small organisations are stepping up and reaching out to those most in need of support. Social distancing measures and shutdown of private and public institutions to stop the spread of coronavirus have left day labourers, rickshaw pullers and domestic help, among other vulnerable communities, in the lurch, with no savings to fall back on. For most people in the margins, who live in overcrowded slums or on the streets, social distancing and purchase of masks and sanitisers are not in the realm of possibilities. They are also in need of basic necessities like food and medicine. It is, therefore, commendable that those who do have the means are doing their part, in whatever limited capacity they can, to ease the sufferings of those less fortunate, be it collecting and coordinating donations for various marginalised communities, buying groceries for rickshaw pullers or providing masks, soaps and sanitisers for free. While some are doing the charity work through their voluntary or non-profit organisations, others are reaching out individually.

It is in these crucial moments of crisis that our humanity is tested. It is easy enough to recoil into our privileged cocoons and wait for the storm to pass, or worse still, to take advantage of the crisis and make profit off of people's miseries. But we are assured, through these small acts of compassion, that humanity is not dead yet and that solidarity and love can, and will, overpower selfishness and greed. We applaud those who have taken these initiatives and call upon others to do the same—let's each do our part to share the burden of low-income and marginalised groups.

## Widespread testing will give the real picture

*We cannot underestimate transmission*

AS we have said time and again in this column, echoing the directives of WHO and experts within the country and outside—we must speed up the testing process on an urgent basis, now that we are entering the fourth week since Bangladesh reported its first official Covid-19 case. So far, Bangladesh has reported 49 cases and five deaths. This hardly gives the real picture and can lead to a false sense of security, grossly underestimating the scale of the outbreak. As we have seen in countries like Italy, Spain, France, Germany and the US, during the initial days when testing was very limited, the number of cases was also low. But after testing was expanded, the number of cases went up exponentially along with the number of deaths, especially after the fourth week.

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 Sunday, Bangladesh tested 1,185 people for the virus, which is far below South Korea's daily testing capacity of around 20,000. We can take Spain's delayed response, with 45 cases within 31 days of the first reported case, as an example. Now, in about a month, the total number of confirmed cases has crossed 64,000. With such grim statistics, can we afford to wait? Reports of several people dying after getting Covid-19-like symptoms make it all the more urgent to have testing facilities available all over the country.

It is a relief that ICDDR,B has been given permission to start testing, with the government giving it kits. But it begs the question—why was such a world reputed institute that has been doing all kinds of disease related research, not given permission to conduct testing long before this?

Now that the experts and the experience of other countries affected by the virus have given us the facts, the authorities must speed up testing by expanding testing facilities all over the country. Testing kits have to be distributed to the designated hospitals with proper monitoring from IEDCR. At this point, the capacity of IEDCR has to be expanded so that it can carry out more tests, monitor cases all over the country and evaluate the situation in a realistic manner. Without widespread testing, it is not possible to get a clear picture of the transmission rates of the virus, especially within such a huge population. Only better knowledge of the ground realities can guide us to the actions that need to be taken.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Test more suspected coronavirus patients; it's urgent

We have learned from reports that although IEDCR has been receiving a lot of phone calls on their hotline numbers from suspected coronavirus patients, they are only testing a negligible number of them, which is very unfortunate. Our common sense tells us that if we test less, we will get less patients. So, what is happening is, the IEDCR is not finding many infected patients. There were days when they found no new patients, which seems unbelievable because we are regularly coming across reports in the media that patients with Covid-19 like symptoms have been found all over the country.

So, what we need now is to increase our testing facilities. We need more labs in the capital as well as in the divisional cities so that people do not need to wait for days before they can get tested. If people can get tested at the beginning, it will also make the jobs of the doctors easy, as they will not be afraid to treat patients with common cold, cough and flu like symptoms.

Md Jamal Hossain, Hajiganj, Chandpur

# Covid-induced economic crisis and the world of work

*Is the government response adequate?*



RIZWANUL ISLAM

THE coronavirus disease (Covid-19) that started in China has now become a global health crisis which, in turn, has caused an economic crisis. The global economy is now bracing for a deep recession. In recent days, several financial institutions, including Morgan Stanley, Bank of America and Deutsche Bank, have forecast a global recession for 2020. And now the IMF Managing Director has also announced that the global economy is in recession.

Countries putting restrictions on travel and gatherings, airlines stopping flights, and people cancelling holidays are adversely affecting a number of service industries, such as hotels, travel, trade etc. Restrictions on public life are also having a negative impact on internal trade, transport, restaurants and hence, on the demand for goods and services. The global economy is in a demand-deficient recession which is going to jeopardise jobs and create an adverse effect on the lives and livelihoods of people.

The economic downturn is affecting the world of work in various ways. Layoffs resulting in unemployment is an immediate outcome of recession. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has projected that open unemployment may rise by 25 million (in the "high" scenario). Compared to the total global unemployment figure of 188 million in 2019, this represents about 13 percent increase. Even in the "mid" scenario of the ILO, unemployment is likely to increase by about 13 million.

Reports of massive layoffs and a sharp rise in jobless claims are already coming from countries like the USA. One projection from the New York Times mentions that the rate of unemployment is set to rise from the current level of 3.5 percent to 6 percent by 2021.

Apart from outright layoffs, labour markets could adjust in other ways, such as through short term work (meaning, in effect, sharing of the reduced amount of work that is available among existing workers), wage reduction, etc.

When the virus hit China, it was thought that Bangladesh would face disruptions in its supply chain which, in turn, may affect production in different sectors. However, the situation changed rapidly, and now the major markets of Bangladesh's export goods, mainly the USA and European countries, are facing recession due to shrinking demand.

Take the case of ready-made garments (RMG). As country after country go into lockdown mode, demand deficiency has already hit the industry. Likewise, the demand for other export items like jute and jute goods, and frozen foods, may also falter.

During this recession, demand deficiency will not remain confined to export oriented goods alone. Measures taken to fight the health crisis are having a dampening effect on a wide range of economic activities including manufacturing, trade, transport, education, etc. The shut-down that started in Bangladesh on March 26 has led to the closure of large swaths of economic activities throughout the country.

How is the labour market going to be affected? In the RMG industry, layoffs may not result immediately because the government has announced a package of assistance aimed at covering wage payments. But the same cannot be said about other sectors that are facing business closure and uncertainties.

In situations where layoffs are caused only (or primarily) by deficiency in external demand, the tendency usually is for the retrenched workers to crowd into informal sector trade and service type activities. But in the present situation,



The RMG industry in Bangladesh employs about 4 million workers, whose wages will be supported by the government during the recession, but what about the millions of workers in other industries?

PHOTO: AFP

with all economic activities coming to a standstill, where are they going to go? There are not many alternatives. In fact, those who are engaged in multitudes of micro and small enterprises in the informal sector are already facing difficulties in maintaining their livelihoods.

Both monetary and fiscal policies may be used to fight recession. Central banks can provide guidance by lowering the indicative rate of interest and if necessary, by adopting quantitative easing. This is done to make credit cheaper and more easily available so that businesses can tide over the difficult period. On the fiscal side, measures may be taken to provide stimulus to economic activities, to bail out targeted sectors/activities, and to strengthen social protection. Both types of policies have already been announced by various countries including the UK, US, Germany, Switzerland etc.

What has the Government of

Bangladesh done? First, Bangladesh Bank announced a few "policy support" measures to protect exporters and importers. What these would imply in reality remains to be seen. Then, on March 25, the Prime Minister announced a set of policies that include the following: (i) a package of Tk 5,000 crore for export-oriented industries, with a stipulation that the money would be used for providing salaries and wages of workers and employees; (ii) provision of assistance through the "Return-to-Home" programme for homeless and landless people under which there would be homes free of cost, six month's food and cash assistance; (iii) continuation of the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and rice for Tk 10 per kg programmes; and (iv) accommodation in Bhashan Char island to provide shelter for 100,000 people.

What do all of the above imply—especially if one looks at the overall magnitude of the problem? Let's look

every time there is a crisis. Couldn't the industry itself devise some built-in mechanism, for example, by creating a reserve fund with contributions from members during periods of growth which could be used at times of crisis to tide over the difficult period?

It's true that the RMG industry employs about four million workers and is also the major source of foreign exchange for the country. But consider the following numbers. Outside agriculture and the RMG industry, there are some 5 million more in various manufacturing industries and another 13 million workers in other sectors, of whom 85 percent are in the informal sector. Many of the five million non-RMG industrial workers are also in micro and small size enterprises. With all economic activities shut down for nearly two weeks (as of now), workers engaged in them, and the self-employed who run many of them, must be struggling to make ends meet. And who knows when economic activities will start again? Shouldn't there be some measure to extend support to them?

Then look at the other measures mentioned, e.g., the return home programme and VGD, VGF, etc. The former is basically an ongoing programme targeted at the homeless and destitute—not an economic activity-based measure. Can that be expected to accommodate the millions who had to leave the urban areas during this period of shutdown? Also, there are many who couldn't leave and are facing joblessness and precarious situations in the cities.

Likewise, VGF and VGD represent targeted programmes—identified with cards given to the target households. Can those programmes be expanded rapidly, with new beneficiaries included for support? And finally, Bhashan Char, where 100,000 people can be accommodated. Are we expecting that those who are facing a jobless and income-less situation in urban or semi-urban areas will apply for relocating to Bhashan Char?

In the absence of real automatic stabilisers like unemployment benefits, measures are needed to provide income support to workers, the self-employed in small businesses and owners of micro and small enterprises. Some innovation would be needed to develop a package of support to such workers and businesses. The possibility of support in the form of food grains also needs to be considered. It is important to formulate a comprehensive package of measures that could simultaneously provide stimulus to economic activities and protection to those who require it. This task is urgent.

The fiscal cost of a stimulus package of the kind mentioned above can be met by a reallocation of the present budget and by tolerating a temporary increase in budget deficit. The rest of the world is doing it that way.

Dr Rizwanul Islam is an economist and former Special Adviser, Employment Sector, International Labour Office, Geneva.

## COVID-19

# Why Bangladesh could be amongst the worst affected during this pandemic



MOHAMMAD RAIYAN KHAN

FOLLOWING the declaration of Covid-19 as a pandemic, the global community has faced the insurmountable task of addressing the rising burden of disease. Since early January,

the pattern of Covid-19 has become concerningly familiar. Whilst initial outbreaks appear manageable, nations are given a momentary license to maintain the social and economic status quo. As disease growth becomes exponential, the actions of governments and individuals remain linear. As of February 22, nine cases were reported across Italy. At present, they are confronted with 700 deaths per day, and a health sector on the verge of collapse. The United States and Spain are now facing a similar sequence of events. In the absence of significant preventative measures, any given region is weeks, if not days, from this reality. As of March 30, Bangladesh has 49 confirmed cases and five deaths due to Covid-19. Although these figures may represent significant understating, it suggests that we are only at the beginning of an indefinite state of emergency.

To understand the epidemiological burden of an infectious disease outbreak, it is necessary to examine the interplay between the host, pathogen and environment. These factors are often dynamic and subject to variation or external influence. For example, viruses may mutate efficiently enough to produce new strains—an occurrence commonly seen in seasonal influenza. Populations may also develop immunity, either through immunisation or previous infection. The physical environment in

which individuals and viruses interact may either accelerate or restrict the rate of transmission. These factors collectively determine the "basic reproduction number" or "R0" of a pathogen. The R0 represents the number of cases that one infected individual is expected to generate within a population at risk. When R0 is more than 1, outbreaks will continue to spread amongst the population. Recent studies have estimated the R0 of Covid-19 to range between 2.4 and 3.3.

Bangladesh remains especially vulnerable to environmental influences on Covid-19 transmission. The capital, Dhaka, currently has the third highest population density in the world. Many individuals are reliant on public transport for commuting within and between cities. Ferries represent particularly high-risk environments, largely due to the physical proximity of passengers and usage of shared facilities over extended periods of time. During the initial stages of this pandemic, the Diamond Princess cruise ship became an epicentre for Covid-19, resulting in more than 800 cases amongst its 3,700 passengers. Residential environments represent another high-risk population. Around 3 million individuals currently reside within impoverished urban settlements and slums throughout Dhaka. Living conditions are often typified by dense habitation and compromised access to water and sanitation facilities. Observational studies in such settings have shown significantly higher rates of infectious respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis. Through widespread testing of Covid-19, South Korea has identified that individuals between 20-39 years confer higher rates of asymptomatic infection. Although not unique to Bangladesh, elderly residents remain especially vulnerable if preventative measures are not taken within intergenerational households. This

pattern of disease transmission has likely contributed towards the overall disease burden in Italy.

Bangladesh has few protective factors in the context of disease transmission. This is compounded by the possibility of widespread morbidity and mortality. Reported case-fatality rates of Covid-19 have varied significantly between countries. This variation is largely explained by the rate of testing, population risk factors and access to healthcare. With further availability of testing, many experts agree that the true case-fatality rate is closer to 1 percent. Mortality risk factors within a population can be expressed as both modifiable and non-modifiable. For example, Italy's relatively higher case-fatality rate is partly explained by its ageing population—the second highest in the world. When considering modifiable risk factors for Covid-19 mortality, Bangladesh is left in a precarious position. A recent study published in the Lancet revealed the most common comorbidities associated with mortality in Covid-19 were hypertension, chronic obstructive lung disease, diabetes and coronary heart disease. The prevalence estimates for these conditions in Bangladesh are 24.7 percent for hypertension, 12.5 percent for chronic obstructive lung disease, 7.4 percent for diabetes and 5 percent for coronary heart disease. Moreover, individuals affected by multiple comorbidities are subject to a greater mortality risk within the population.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have reported that an estimated 14.3 percent of those affected in the 20-44 age group have required hospitalisation. A further 2 percent within this distribution have required Intensive Care Unit (ICU) support. Italy currently has 12.5 ICU

beds per 100,000 people—the third highest rate in the world. Despite this, the provision of ICU services has been largely disproportionate to demand. Consequently, challenging ethical decisions around which individuals should receive critical care have frequently needed to be taken. Many individuals who would have otherwise received such interventions have missed out due to limited resources. Bangladesh faces this pandemic with significantly less resources than many of these countries. Once ICU capacity is exhausted, there is a significant risk that the rate of hospitalisation and mortality will share a similar magnitude.

At present, lockdown measures have taken place throughout the country. Without a vaccine, physical distancing and hygiene precautions are the only viable means of reducing the burden of disease. During the peak of the outbreak in Wuhan, China, aggressive lockdown measures resulted in the R0 falling to an estimated 0.32. For many citizens, this is likely to result in loss of income and food insecurity. Whilst governments have a duty to provide a safety net for the welfare of those affected, there is a moral imperative for society to share this responsibility. Moreover, these actions extend towards matters of health literacy, as many vulnerable individuals may find themselves without the knowledge required to prevent disease transmission. Individual actions will form the cornerstone of the response to this pandemic. Non-compliance with these measures may result in severe medical, social and economic consequences for society. As many other countries are discovering, every action we take today is worth a thousand tomorrow.

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# Coronavirus threat: Tea workers' say no to work



PHILIP GAIN

**T**HE tea workers of Shamshearnagar Tea Garden in Kamalganj upazila, Moulvibazar, took matters into their own hands in defiance of the garden management and stopped work from March 27. Owned by Duncan Brothers, Shamshearnagar Tea Garden is a big garden with 2,404 registered workers. Early in the morning of March 27, a group of some 50 members of *panchayets*, elders, and workers went to the manager of the tea garden to tell him that they want to stop work.

"We argued with the manager in reference to the Prime Minister's speech of March 25 and her instructions for everybody to stay at home," said Srikanta Kanu Gopal, general secretary of Shamshearnagar main garden *panchayet*. "But the manager responded with a letter from the Deputy Director of Labour (DDL), Sreemangal, saying that the holiday is not applicable for tea workers. Our lives are more precious than tea. So, we have shut down the tea garden."

While the decisive action of *panchayets* and tea workers in Shamshearnagar Tea Garden did not surprise Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU), the lone union of nearly 100,000 registered tea workers, it was an embarrassment to Bangladesh Tea Association (BTA), which represents the owners of the tea gardens and the state.

BTA, with a circular of the Cabinet Division and the letter from the DDL in hand, has declined to stop operations of the tea gardens during the lockdown of the country from March 26 to April 4.

Shamshearnagar Tea Garden also resumed its operations on March 30, with work hours up to 2pm. "The *panchayets*, UP members, and tea workers went to the manager to know if they will get wages and benefits if they do not work," reported Asha Ormal, joint general secretary of the *panchayet* committee of Shamshearnagar Tea Garden (main). "Understanding that the manager cannot make this decision, we proposed to work half-day from 30 March while we wait for a decision from the upper level. We do not want the tea workers to starve."

The manager of Shamshearnagar Tea Garden also corroborated this view, saying that the decision is not one that he can independently make, and that "we did not force anybody to work; the workers later joined work again."

On the other hand, the Sylhet Valley Committee of BCSU has shut down all 23 gardens in the district. "We have sent letters to all managers in these tea gardens," said Raju Guala, president of the Sylhet Valley

Committee, "demanding full pay of wages and rations during the shutdown."

The BCSU, relatively weaker at the negotiation table compared to the government and owners, sent a letter to the DDL in Sreemangal on March 26—asking for the state and owners to take appropriate measures to shut down the tea gardens with full pay and ration to the tea workers—when it saw a press release from the Cabinet Division directing all government and non-government offices to shut down. The DDL, Sreemangal, gave a quick response the same day: "According to the press release of the Cabinet Division, these general holidays are

falling prices of tea," he said. "And like the tea workers, we also need help. With production costs going up, it has become a big challenge for us to run the industry." The official said that the BTA will write to the appropriate government offices once the offices resume after April 4.

However, Rambhajan Kairi, general secretary of BCSU, observed that this action will be too late by then. "We, the workers and the communities in the labour lines, are in a state of fear in the current situation."

What is well demonstrated from the action of the tea workers in Shamshearnagar Tea Garden and its four subsidiary gardens is that

labour laws. The water man (*paniwala*) brings mainly portable water to their workplace. Many workers drink water from the same glasses. Some drink water poured onto the palms of their hands, which are not properly washed or even washed at all. What can be more dangerous than this for the spreading of a pathogen?

Second, there is no toilet for the female tealeaf pickers who work all day in the garden. They have to defecate in the open if it becomes necessary. After defecation in the open, they generally do not wash their hands with soap.

Third, proper hand wash, the single

Fifth, *patta*, or selling of local liquor, is seen in almost all tea gardens, and is no less concerning. *Patta* attracts visitors from nearby cities and local Bengali villages. The law enforcing agencies, administration, union councils and BCSU can work together to at least temporarily close all *pattas* and strictly restrict outside visitors from entering the tea gardens.

One may wonder what is right for the tea workers and tea gardens in Bangladesh at this moment. We may check what has been happening in Indian tea gardens at this time of crisis. According to a Times of India report, tea gardens in Assam have decided to shut down all its operations during the state lockdown. "Tea is no more an essential commodity and hence will not fall in the list of exempted services during a lockdown period," said Adviser of North Eastern Tea Association (NETA) Bidyananda Barkakoty in a statement. The Consultative Committee of Plantation Association (CCPA) has also announced that a tea garden lockdown is inevitable. However, essential services in Assam tea gardens will continue on a roster basis. Assam has at least 850 tea gardens employing two million workers, according to government records. While in Assam the owners, state government and trade unions have been working together for the safety of tea workers, what we see in Bangladesh is very sad. BTA, the counterpart of NETA in Assam, has taken a hardline stance on shutting down the tea gardens at the time of a global pandemic. We also do not see enough sympathy in the government agencies responsible for overseeing the wellbeing of tea workers.

What the *panchayets* and tea workers of Shamshearnagar Tea Garden did on March 27, followed by other gardens in Moulvibazar district and finally, all gardens in the Sylhet division, demonstrate the desperation of the tea workers, who experience deprivation and neglect in their everyday life. It will not be surprising if workers shut down many more gardens as the days go by. The government offices are closed at this moment, as well as the BTA and BCSU offices. But we trust they can still discuss matters and take crucial policy decisions regarding shutting down the operations of tea gardens. We hope the tea workers can also be incorporated into the Tk 5,000 crore package announced by the government. A tiny slice from this amount will be sufficient to pay the wages of the tea workers during this emergency. The owners also have a responsibility so that the tea workers do not starve. Tea workers will volunteer to work according to a roster to prevent any permanent damage to the gardens, which is their lifeblood, but their concerns still need to be heard immediately.

Philip Gain is a researcher and director of the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD).



PHOTO: PHILIP GAIN

not applicable for the tea workers."

The DDL, on a separate occasion, also said that the press release specifically says that manufacturers, distributors and traders of medicine, food and industries, institutions, markets and shops would run under their own management, and that the BTA said that they would run tea gardens under their own management since the government did not ask them to shut down operations. However, he said that they have asked all to ensure the safety and hygiene of workers during this period.

A topmost official of BTA, unwilling to be identified, confirmed that they are concerned but not prepared to shut down the tea gardens. "We are already beset with the

they do not have enough trust in BCSU's soft move and in the garden management. It is true that the tea gardens are away from our sight, in what seems to be a distant place. But what is evident from the work conditions in the tea gardens and that in the labour lines where tea workers and their communities live is that they must maintain social isolation among themselves, like the rest of the country. The following are some arguments in support of the tea workers, who work six days a week and now want to stay home and protect themselves.

First, the tea workers, particularly the female tea leaf pickers, work in groups. There are no toilets and washing facilities under a shade at the workplace, as provided for by

most significant practice in the fight against coronavirus, is almost non-existent in the tea gardens. I phoned some workers to know about hand wash practices at this time; they report cut pieces of soap have been supplied by the management, but the water that the *paniwala* brings and the soap are both inadequate. They still eat their lunch with hands that are dirty from plucking tea leaf. They also eat their lunch in open spaces and in groups, sitting close to each other.

Fourth, at the time of collection of tea leaves, twice a day, a few hundred tea leaf pickers huddle together with their head-loads of tea leaves. This is still done, during a time when the most feared pathogen on the planet may spread.

# Covid-19 and the Rohingya refugee crisis

The first confirmed coronavirus case in Cox's Bazar exposes how our systems fail the most vulnerable

ATHENA RAYBURN

**A**LL around the world, the numbers are climbing. Each day registers thousands of new cases and lives lost. In Europe, now the epicenter of the pandemic, governments know that the worst is yet to come and are implementing increasingly restrictive measures to enforce social distancing and isolation. In Cox's Bazar, we have been watching the world and holding our breath for the first confirmed case of Covid-19. With reports of the first confirmed case in the local community in Cox's Bazar, it's just a matter of time until the virus reaches the vulnerable population living in cramped conditions in the largest refugee settlement on earth. Thousands of people could die.

One million Rohingya refugees, half of whom are children, have been sheltering in sprawling camps in Cox's Bazar since August 2017, when they were forced to flee their homes in the face of horrific violence. For almost three years, Rohingya refugees have been telling us they want to go home and resume normal life. They want their children to go to school and for families separated by the conflict to be reunited. So

far, international attempts to hold Myanmar accountable for alleged crimes against the Rohingya and improve conditions in Rakhine state have failed spectacularly. In short, it will be years until the Rohingya see justice.

As global life grinds to a halt in a bid to contain the coronavirus, we must remember that for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, their lives have already been in limbo for years; it is their status quo, and it will not end with the containment of coronavirus.

If there is one lesson for refugees that we must take away from this crisis—it must be that refugee camps, and a life in limbo, should never be considered an acceptable long-term solution. We must challenge perceptions that because the Rohingya in Cox's Bazar escaped Myanmar with their lives, they are safe. The coronavirus is a warning to us that there is not endless time to resolve the issues in Myanmar that would finally allow the Rohingya to return home. While the people and Government of Bangladesh have generously continued to shelter the Rohingya for years, life in the camps is not safe.

Children, in particular girls, are at a high risk of exploitation, violence and trafficking. Rohingya refugees do not have access to livelihood opportunities to help them

support their families.

We are now witnessing the impact that coronavirus is having in communities that can social distance, wash hands and have access to strong healthcare systems, yet this virus has still brought them to their knees. In the densely packed camps of Cox's Bazar, options of social distancing or self-isolation are remote, with many refugees living in cramped conditions in makeshift shelters made of bamboo and tarpaulin. Even simple hygiene practices such as regular hand washing become complicated feats of logistical planning when access to clean water is severely limited.

The Government of Bangladesh and humanitarian agencies have sprung into action. Rohingya refugees are included in the Government's national plan to respond to Covid-19, food distribution agencies are developing new ways to distribute food that minimises close person to person contact. Rohingya volunteers are mobilising throughout the camps to spread hygiene and prevention messaging that will protect their families and loved ones. Volunteers from the host community are being trained too, supporting everything from delivering awareness trainings to implementing referral

mechanisms and medical treatment. The humanitarian agencies in Cox's Bazar have already stripped back to essential-only services like healthcare and food distribution. This is a necessary step to ensure we are reducing the chances of transmission and minimising the impact of this disease on the Rohingya community, but, this decision too, will come at a cost. Just two months ago, the Bangladeshi Government approved the use of the Myanmar school curriculum in the camps, but children's education will now have to be suspended to contain the coronavirus. Our child-friendly spaces are closed and may be repurposed for medical use if the need arises. Rohingya children are now not only at risk of Covid-19 but will have to face this challenge without access to their regular support systems or safe spaces to play.

We will do whatever we can to work with the Government of Bangladesh and Rohingya refugees to protect them from Covid-19. But the fact remains, Rohingya children should not be living in these camps. They should not have to fight a global pandemic with the bare minimum needed to survive. They should be at home, at school; playing and learning. At a time when there are more displaced people around the world than ever

before—the coronavirus has exposed how our systems fail the most vulnerable. Our global mechanisms for accountability and the protection of human rights have failed the Rohingya so far—it is absolutely essential that we do not fail them again. This is a global pandemic and the virus is now hitting the most vulnerable communities. We must come together. Only a global response will stop the spread of the virus everywhere. This means the international community must step up to offer medical support, testing kits, share data and provide much needed funding to support the response. But stepping up also means so much more than that. When the dust settles, when planes start flying again and the borders re-open—we cannot go back to "business as usual", we cannot assume we have endless time to resolve this crisis, that Rohingya children can wait. Rohingya children must be afforded a future of hope and opportunity, like every child deserves. We may not have the power to safeguard against another pandemic. But we do have the power to ensure it isn't the most vulnerable that end up paying the heaviest price.

Athena Rayburn is Save the Children's Humanitarian Advocacy Manager, based in Cox's Bazar.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**JEAN-PAUL SARTRE**  
(1905-1980)  
French philosopher, writer and political activist

*If you are lonely when you're alone, you are in bad company.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 "Sexy" Beatles girl
- 6 Lightning home
- 11 Bitter humor
- 12 Self-evident truth
- 13 Subsequently
- 14 Gerald Ford's wife
- 15 Excitation
- 17 "Bali-"
- 19 Keats work
- 20 June honoree
- 23 Acid's opposite
- 25 Go it alone
- 26 Start of a surreptitious warning
- 28 Oxford, e.g.
- 29 Son of Poseidon
- 30 Playing marble
- 31 Auction signal

**DOWN**

- 1 Pop's daughter
- 2 "Exodus" hero
- 3 "You're telling me!"
- 4 Ruler division
- 5 Skeptical reaction
- 6 Dinner setting
- 7 Skating jump
- 8 Cambridge sch.
- 9 Poker prize
- 10 One of Jo's sisters
- 16 Foolish
- 17 Possessed, in the Bible
- 18 Island greeting
- 20 "I have no ideal!"
- 21 Crazy as -
- 22 Soft
- 24 Finished off
- 25 Enjoy Aspen
- 27 Trials
- 31 Floppy top
- 33 Tear down
- 34 Scissors sound me!"
- 35 Track trip
- 36 Aussie bird
- 37 Crone
- 39 Despondent
- 40 Snaky shape

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO [dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com).

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

RECAP SPAR  
OMEGA SLOMO  
BARED TARPIS  
ONES GAGGLE  
TAB MUG YES  
STREAMER  
EAST SNUG  
STREAKER  
MOB ROT ROE  
AMAZED BARS  
RAGES BEIGE  
CHESS LENIN  
HALT TREAT

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott





Empty pots are being brought to Sonahara Modhyapara Milk Cooperative Society at Sonahara village in Pabna's Faridpur upazila as the Milk Vita has stopped buying milk from there. Inset, a milk collection centre of Pran Dairy at the same village lies closed.

PHOTO: STAR

## Corona brings woe for dairy farmers in Pabna, Sirajganj

Big companies curtail milk collection from the major supply zone; stakeholders want govt support for survival

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, back from Baghabari and Faridpur

A large number of dairy farmers in Pabna and Sirajganj are facing a tough time as big milk factories have drastically cut collection of the item from the famous milk producing zone during the ongoing general holidays and countrywide shutdown-like situation aimed at containing the spread of coronavirus.

Md Sakhawat Hossain, a dairy farmer of Sonahara village in Pabna's Faridpur upazila, was shocked as he came to know that state-owned factory Milk Vita has cut half of their usual milk collection target for an uncertain period.

Sakhawat, who has continued supplying milk to Baghabari centre of Milk Vita through a local cooperative for the last few years, has now 15 cows that give 55 to 60 litres of milk daily. He has been supplying only 20 to 25 litres for the last few days.

"Failing to sell the milk to the cooperative I rushed to the owners of local sweet producers but they also refused to buy milk as all the shops got closed due to the threat of coronavirus," said Sakhawat.

He lastly went to a 'ghosh' (chhana producer) and sold the milk for a meagre Tk 15 per litre, that too after repeated request.

"Due to the countrywide shutdown, no one is buying milk from us. What will I do with the huge quantity of milk collected from my cows? I have to spend a good amount of money for buying cattle feed," he said.

Worry of Saidur Rahman of Sonahara village is much more as he usually collects 500 litres of milk from 50 farmers in the village for supplying to Milk Vita at Baghabari through Sonahara Modhyapara Milk Cooperative Society.

"The 50 dairy farmers of Sonahara village are dependent on sale to Milk Vita for their livelihood. Due to the cut in milk collection we are facing serious trouble with the huge amount of milk, which is a perishable item," Saidur said.

Most other big milk companies like Arong, Pran and Akiz have also drastically cut milk collection from the farmers.

They termed the present situation a serious challenge for the dairy industry.

"Usually we used to collect 5000 to 6000 litres of milk every day, but now we are buying only 2500 to 3000 litres," said Mahatab Hossain, manager at Arong's milk collection centre in Faridpur upazila.

"I get 60 litres of milk daily from my 15 cows. Due to the sudden halt of milk collection by the companies, I sold a portion of the milk for Tk 15 per litre and collected cream from another portion. The remaining 20 litres of milk got wasted," said Eusuf Ali, a dairy farmer of Gopalnagar village in the upazila.

Usually a huge quantity of milk is produced in five upazilas of Pabna and Sirajganj and Milk Vita and other milk factories collect over 2 lakh litres, he said.

"Due to the 10 days' leave announced by the government for preventing the spread of Covid-19 disease, the Milk Vita authority has curtailed the milk collection," Amio Kumar Mondol, manager of Baghabari Milk Vita told The Daily Star.

Dairy farmers want subsidy from the government through Milk Vita for survival of the large-scale dairy farming in the region.

"As the factories closed milk collection, our earnings from its sale has stopped. But we have to buy cow feed for high prices," said Md Abul Hossain, a marginal dairy farmer.

"Crop farmers and fishermen get subsidy in times of need. If we get such benefits during this crisis period, it will help to save our dairy farms. We supply milk for the big companies like Milk Vita but they don't take any responsibility during the crisis," he added.

Asked about the matter, Alimun Rajib, general manager of the Milk Vita, however, said, "Now we don't have any plan to give subsidy because this is a temporary crisis. If the crisis stays long then the authority may think about it."

Dr Al Mamun Hossain Mondol, district livestock officer of Pabna, said, "This is really a crisis period for the dairy industry in Pabna and Sirajganj as well the whole country. Farmers should try to preserve milk through alternative ways, such as producing cream. We have informed the higher authorities about the situation."

STONE-CRUSHING WORKERS IN LALMONIRHAT

## Silicosis death toll rising

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

The stone-crushing workers in Patgram upazila are left to suffer as most are too poor to afford treatment for an irreversible lung disease silicosis which is their occupational hazard.

Silicosis is a disease caused by silicon poisoning -- a common side-effect of working in stone-crushing yards. The workers breathe in the silica dust while working in the yards, and the silicon settles in their lungs, slowly solidifying their respiratory systems.

Patgram is dotted with hundreds of stone-crushing yards, where large mountain boulders imported from Bhutan or India are broken down into small chips and fine powder to make products for mosaic, plaster, and building construction.

At least 67 stone-crushing workers died of silicosis in the last six to seven years, said Burimari Union Parishad Chairman Abu Sayed Newaz Nishat, adding he has a list of 100 stone-crushing workers with the disease in the union.

However, the number could be higher as more than 20,000 workers are employed in the stone-crushing industry there, he stated.

There is no official figure for the total number of deaths resulting from silicosis.

When the stone-crushing yards first started operations, impoverished villagers of the border area flocked to sell their labour, but soon realised the job came with fatal side-effects.

Stone-crushing workers affected by this disease have become physically weak and lost their ability to work. With poverty and hunger hanging over the workers' heads, they are left with nothing to do but wait for death.

Fifty-five-year-old Tofazzal Hossain, from Kamarerhat village in Burimari, has been suffering from silicosis for seven years.

He was forced to sell his lone asset -- eight decimals of land -- to meet his treatment costs. After selling his land, he sought shelter on other's land.

"I have been dying of this disease for the past six years," said Tofazzal.

"We used to work as a group of 15 people all of us have been affected by silicosis. Only eight of us are alive now," he said.

Worker Momin Ali had explained to a correspondent of this newspaper last year that the silicosis-affected workers need to take Pulfibro, a life-saving medication for these workers, four times a day. Each pill costs Tk 60.

Today, the workers earn between Tk 360 and Tk 400 a day for their labour.

Pulfibro, the brand name for the drug Pirfenidone, reduces the fibrous tissue formations which fill up the air pockets inside the lungs of the silicosis affected workers. As long as the silicon resides in the lungs of the workers, the lungs will continue to envelope the pollutant with scar tissue, and the workers will have to continue taking this expensive pill to undo the damage.

Momin Ali passed away on February 15 this year at Rangpur Medical College Hospital, as his respiratory system collapsed. He was the coordinator of an unofficial Burimari-based group called the "Silicosis Patient Association", which fought for the rights of the workers.

The workers have been seeking financial assistance for their treatment from the local

administration, public representatives, and wealthy locals. But their pleas remain unheard.

Many have ended up foregoing treatment due to a lack of money; many others have died with no treatment.

"When I receive treatment, I feel a little better. Whenever I stop treatment, I fall sick. But I cannot afford all the medical expenses," said Rashidul Karim, 45, a stone-crushing labourer of Ufarmara village suffering from silicosis.

"By selling off my only asset, one bigha arable land, I sought treatment at the National Institute of Diseases of the Chest and Hospital in Dhaka, as well as hospitals in Rangpur and Lalmonirhat. There is nothing to sell anymore so I cannot afford the medical treatment," he said.

"I have been suffering from this disease for the last five years. Four of my co-workers have gone," he said. With no ability to work, he has to sit at home.

Shaheen Islam, a 42-year-old worker from Dangirpar village, said that he did not know about silicosis when he started work in the stone-crushing yards 14 years ago. Without any precautionary measures in place, all the workers were affected.

"I have been suffering from this disease for eight years. Some of my friends have died of it. My condition is not good either. I'm dying while trapped in my house," he said.

"If I could get treatment, I would probably survive a few more days," he added.

Stone-crushing labourers Rezaul Haque, 38, of Dolapara village; Rahimuddin, 46, of Natarbari village; Altaf Hossain, 48, of Islampur village; Noor Islam, 48, of Bamandal village; Afaz Uddin of Kamarerhat village, and others have also given up due to their financial condition and lack of help.

"Many of us now work while covering our nose and mouth with clothes but most people still don't know to do this," said Nazrul Islam, a 42-year-old labourer in the Burimari land port area.

"We have no alternative work so we crush stones. I know how dangerous and incurable silicosis is, but there is no way out," said another labourer, Safiar Rahman.

Dr Bipul Chandra Roy, a tuberculosis and chest disease specialist at RDRS Bangladesh in Lalmonirhat, said that he is providing treatment to many patients suffering from silicosis. While some receive regular treatment, most are irregular patients as they cannot afford the medicine.

Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner Md Abu Jafar told The Daily Star a team from the Ministry of Labour and Employment met with the labourers a month ago. The ministry is preparing to provide financial assistance, he said, but when the help will arrive is a question he does not have an answer to.

"I am contacting the ministry to speed up the steps. And if anyone with the disease appeals to me, I will help," added the deputy commissioner.

Contacted, Patgram Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer (UHFP) Dr Arup Paul said silicosis affected patients are more vulnerable to the coronavirus infection. They all must stay at home during the ongoing crisis period.

Health officials are collecting information of the silicosis affected people, he added.

## Bogura hospital starts treating corona patients

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Bogura 250-bed Mohammad Ali Hospital, which was evacuated on March 24 as preparation for treating only patients with symptoms of coronavirus infection, admitted three patients in last two days.

Following a decision by Bogura District Corona Prevention Committee, the hospital authorities on March 24 took initiative to shift 119 admitted patients to other medical facilities and started cleaning and disinfecting the hospital premises to prepare the hospital for only coronavirus patients.

"Of the two patients admitted on Sunday, a 25-year-old youth hails from Khulna district. Two weeks ago, he came to his father's workplace in Bogura's Kahaloo upazila. Then he got fever and started suffering from breathing problem," said Shafique Amin Kajal, resident medical officer (RMO) of the hospital.

"Another male patient from Bogura's Dhunat upazila was admitted at noon. The 1200-bed Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogura shifted the 40-year-old man to our hospital as he is suffering from shortness of breath," he said.

A 50-year-old patient with cardiovascular

problem, sent here from Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital, has been admitted today [Monday], he said.

Necessary equipment including testing kits have been arranged for diagnosis and treatment of patients, officials said.

A 14-member medical team consisting doctors and nurses are providing services at Bogura Mohammad Ali Hospital round the clock and doctors and nurses from different hospitals of Bogura will join the medical team according to the roster, said RMO Shafique.

The authorities have arranged 400 personal protective equipment for the doctors, nurses and others concerned to ensure their safety during performance of their professional work in the crisis period, he added.

According to the police report, 3129 people returned to Bogura from abroad (mostly countries with the coronavirus infection) in March, but only 750 people in the district are in home quarantine now.

"A large number of people who returned from abroad recently did not provide their original addresses, making it difficult to find them. The police are searching for them," said Bogura Civil Surgeon Gausul Azim Chowdhury.

## Pregnant woman dies at FMCH

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Allegation of negligence was raised after a two and a half-month pregnant woman died at Faridpur Medical College Hospital (FMCH) yesterday morning.

Relatives of the woman, Ripa Das, 32, an assistant teacher at Ramkol Government Primary School in Pangsha upazila of Rajbari, alleged that she died around 8:30am due to negligence of the hospital's doctors and staffers.

Ripa was wife of Mithun Sarkar, from Ramkol village in Rajbari's Pangsha upazila, and daughter of Anil Kumar Das, from Tapakhola area in Faridpur town.

Ripa's brother-in-law Dheeraj Kumar said after they admitted her to the hospital around 2:00pm on Sunday with excessive bleeding, the doctors there said her baby needed to be aborted.

"Ripa was taken inside the operation theatre around 7:00pm on Sunday. Kaniz Fatema, a gynaecologist, conducted the operation there."

Shortly after Ripa was brought out of the post-operative room around 7:00am yesterday, she

started to have breathing problems. The intern doctors and nurses did not act promptly although her relatives repeatedly requested them to give her oxygen urgently, Dheeraj said.

"They took a long time to bring in an oxygen cylinder. But it was too late -- Ripa had died before she was given the oxygen," he added.

Contacted, FMCH Superintendent Saifur Rahman said, "Kaniz Fatema [the gynaecologist] informed me that the patient was in good condition after the operation. Her condition deteriorated suddenly and she died on Monday morning. I don't know whether the patient died due to a lack of oxygen. If anyone files a written complaint, we will investigate the matter."

Ripa's in-law Dheeraj yesterday said they could not file any complaint with the hospital authorities as they took the body in Pangsha upazila of Rajbari for completing cremation and other funeral proceedings.

Ripa's family would file a formal complaint with the FMCH authorities after all the funeral formalities are over, he also said.

## The Koras of the War

Embroided in battle with poverty, two aging war veterans yet to receive proper state recognition

KONGKON KARMAKER with FIROOZA MUZAHID

"I've got to do something for my country -- that's all I could think of. I have to free my country from Pakistan," Kina Kora reminisced about how he felt when the Pakistani occupation army cracked down on unarmed Bangladeshis in the dark night of March 25 in 1971.

Now 68, Kina Kora can still vividly recollect those turbulent days of '71 when he was only nineteen years of age.

Some time around the end of March or early April that year, Kina and three others left their village to join the war -- the war to liberate their motherland.

One of the three was his 21-year-old brother Sattan Kora. The other two, Thopal and Gopal Kora, also 19 and 21 at the time, were also siblings.

These four courageous youths belong to the Koras -- a timid but hardworking small ethnic community on the verge of extinction. Only 21 Kora families still live in the remote village of Haljay, in Dinajpur's Biral upazila. Before Bangladesh won independence in '71, there were around 200 Kora families in Haljay, now known as Korapara.

With sparkle in his eyes, Kina continued the story. "We were young and brave" and driven by Bangabandhu's fiery speech of 7th March.

After leaving the village, on their way to receive training on guerrilla warfare in West Bengal of India, they somehow got separated. Sattan ended up in Siliguri's Panighatta, where he received his training. The other three got their training in Hamzapur, near the western border of Dinajpur.

Kina said, "After the training at Hamzapur, I was stationed in Ghugudanga village of Dinajpur Sadar upazila, where the Pakistanis had a stronghold."

"A fierce battle ensued between the Pakistanis and us. We lost our comrade Alim Uddin there. Later, we engaged in heavy fighting with the Pakistanis in

Jamalpur and Ramsagar areas of Sadar upazila."

But around September, before the struggle for freedom of his motherland ended, Kina had to return home to stand by his family's struggle for survival.

"My family was in a dire situation when I came home," Kina said, adding that his family and the villagers were suffering from a near-famine situation.

Out of his three compatriots, Gopal, son of Papua Kora, died in 1973 and Gopal's brother Thopal is now incapable of talking perceptibly due to paralysis,

Confirming that Sattan had sustained injuries during the war, Saleq said he could not interview Kina due to time constraint at the time.

Asked whether he or the other Koras, who fought in Bangladesh's War of Independence, ever received any formal recognition as freedom fighters, Kina said the four Kora fighters were given some sort of documentation by the then government after independence of the country.

"We were given some papers then. But, that got washed away during the



PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

Thopal Kora, left, is now incapable of talking perceptibly due to paralysis. Kina Kora, right, took arms training with Thopal and Gopal Kora at Hamzapur in India.

said Kina, who still makes a living by working as an agricultural day labourer.

His brother Sattan, who passed away in India in 2018, was wounded during the war, he said, adding that Sattan had moved to the country in 1987 following a land dispute with villagers.

Saleq Khokon, a Dhaka-based writer and researcher of small ethnic communities, said about 13 years ago, when Sattan Kora was visiting his village home, Saleq had the opportunity to interview Sattan and Thopal -- two among the four Koras who had fought in the Liberation War of 1971.

devastating flood of 1987," he said helplessly.

Ever since he returned home from the war 49 years ago, he and the other members of his community have been struggling to stave off hunger and poverty, Kina said. "Thopal's and my family still live from hand to mouth."

Even though they fought for the country's independence without expecting any return, said the Kora fighter, adding that formal recognition as freedom fighters during their lifetime would offer some solace amid financial hardship and illness.





## Would fight for my place in Test side: Mahmudullah

Despite playing international cricket for more than a decade now, Mahmudullah Riyad has perhaps endured more ups and downs than the other four among the fantastic five of Bangladesh cricket. The 34-year-old, despite scoring three centuries in four Test matches not too long ago, lost his place in the Test side following some below-par performances in the four Tests that ensued after those centuries. However, Mahmudullah has the responsibility of leading the Bangladesh team in Twenty20s. During these testing times of coronavirus pandemic, the veteran batsman spoke to *The Daily Star's* Mazhar Uddin over phone, discussing his plans about T20 captaincy, his return to Test cricket and his batting overall. The excerpts of the exclusive interview are as follows:

**The Daily Star (TDS):** How is life during the growing coronavirus outbreak worldwide?

**Mahmudullah Riyad (MR):** Life is good so far Alhamdulillah; healthy and fine. I'm spending time with my family members at home. I think because of the pandemic worldwide, we all are trying to remain disciplined and maintain safety properly. It's better to stay at home, and we know we have to wash our hands and wear masks. If we really need to go outside, we should definitely wear masks properly and maintain social distance. Cricketers-wise it's frustrating and I am especially missing my game a lot at the moment although I am working on my fitness.

**TDS:** What are your plans as captain of the T20 side?

**MR:** I always believe that to play T20 cricket, you need freedom to play your shots and obviously you have to take that freedom on to your game. You just can't carry fear of failure in your

heart and play. Being the T20 captain, I have always tried to spread these two messages to the boys within the group. Probably we still have a lot to prove in the shortest format and hopefully we can do it properly this time around. For that I need to have all the support from the management and the players so that I can gain the trust as a captain and we can do well as a group.

**TDS:** Do you think long-term role helps a captain? Do you also want long-term captaincy?

**MR:** Obviously, I think long-term captaincy always makes a difference to a person who leads the side and also with the players to gain the confidence. I think the captain needs to earn the respect and confidence from the players, of which Mashrafe (Bin Mortaza) bhai is a perfect example. He has that image within our group and probably it's a good idea to follow in this regard. Obviously, every captain has his own plans and methods to



lead the team. I have my own style to lead the team and what I always want is to be more consistent in the T20 format. We still need to prove to the world and we have to be a better and

consistent side in the shortest format. **TDS:** How do you see Mominul Haque as a captain? Many thought he was too introvert as a person for that role.

**MR:** I think Mominul is the right

choice as the Test captain. He is a hard-working cricketer and a performer and I believe he will definitely grow as a captain. I wish him all the best. I don't think he is introvert as a captain. He is quite expressive when he needs to be and also demanding according to the situations which is a very good sign for a captain.

**TDS:** What are your plans regarding a return to the Test side?

**MR:** I don't know because there is no cricket at the moment and we are all waiting to return to the field. Obviously, there will be plans once I return to cricket and definitely, I would like to fight for my place in the Test team. I hope I will get the opportunity.

**TDS:** After scoring your maiden Test hundred back in 2010, you went seven years without a century. Then you scored three centuries in four matches in 2018-19. Did you think your Test form was finally turning around?

**MR:** Actually, I never thought of it that way, never thought about the three centuries in four Tests. In fact Tamim mentioned that to me once and only then I got to realise that. However, I think I need to be more consistent in Test cricket and I always try to work on that. I didn't perform up to the mark in the last few Tests as the expectation is always there being a senior player. I need to step up but I didn't deliver and also, I got injured during the pink ball Test in Kolkata. But I am looking forward to getting back to the Test side and to try to perform as much I can to make an opportunity for myself.

**TDS:** Among the four tons, which one do you rate the highest?

**MR:** My maiden Test hundred is always very special to me. I think we were struggling at a certain position in that Test against New Zealand back in 2010 in Hamilton. Shakib and I had a very good partnership and I always cherish that hundred.

## Reminiscence: My first match

We are taking turns at *The Daily Star Sport* talking about what our first live experience at a sports venue was. It is my turn today to share experience after our very own Sakeb Subhan, who wrote yesterday with the byline 'from London, 1996'.



Naturally, when I first tried to go down memory lane to reminisce about my first match at a sports venue, my first international match as a sports reporter came to mind -- the Bangladesh-India opening match in the Silver Jubilee Independence Cup in January 1998. It was the match through which I was introduced to the etiquette of not clapping in the press box. I could recall all the details and enthusiasm surrounding the match that Bangladesh lost by four wickets at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

That match, however, immediately faded once I went deeper down memory lane as an old film strip in my mind emerged... me perched atop trees at Circuit House Playground in Mymensingh to watch the fast bowling craft of Golam Nawsher Prince in a local tournament.

How can I forget the enthusiasm, madness and festivity when I watched the Lila Devi Shield -- the annual football tournament for boys? The northern district headquarters in Bangladesh had a rich football culture, but there was no shortage of cricket tournaments.

We grew up listening to our seniors talking about a match between the visiting Sri Lanka side and a local side in 1978 in Mymensingh, to the extent that it now seems that I had actually watched this match at the venue.

The first match I remember watching at a proper venue was between Hyderabad Blues and Central Zone, led by Roquibul Hasan, if I am not wrong, at the district stadium in 1982. My memory of this match is mostly unclear but one thing is as clear as if it happened yesterday was the madness among the fans who had thronged the stadium in huge numbers. It was not easy, especially

for a boy, to enter the stadium with a few friends, sneaking past the huge crowd. The other thing was the roar of the crowd after a young batsman smashed consecutive boundaries against Bhagwat Subramanya Chandrasekhar, the captain of the visiting team who is one of the best leg-spinners of all time.

The term pinch-hitting was unfamiliar to many cricket followers before the 1992 World Cup, when New Zealand employed a slightly different form of the tactic to considerable effect with Mark Greatbatch playing the role. So, definitely we had no idea about what role young Nazim Siraji had employed when he came to the crease to punish the Indian maestro during his sparkling knock, but he had established an everlasting memory of what actually a 'dashing batsman' means.

That's it from Bishwajit Roy, from Mymensingh in 1982.



The Circuit House Playground in Mymensingh was a welcome destination on a trip down memory lane to the year 1982.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Stadiums open for coronavirus treatment

SPORTS REPORTER

All the stadiums of the country, especially the indoor ones, can be used as hospitals to treat coronavirus patients if needed, state minister for youth and sports, Zahid Ahsan Rasel, said yesterday.

"The government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already taken all possible preparations to face coronavirus, and thanks to Almighty Allah, coronavirus is yet to turn into an epidemic in Bangladesh due to the steps taken timely. But, we don't want to sit with complacency; rather we are ready to face any situation," the minister said in a press release yesterday.

"As per demand, the health directorate and local administration can use all the stadiums of the country, especially the indoor stadiums, to treat coronavirus patients," the press release added.

There are 80 stadiums at district, division and metropolitan areas apart from 125 mini stadiums at upazila level, informed Rasel, who is also chairman of National Sports Council, the state-run organisation bestowed with the responsibility of maintenance and renovation of sports facilities across the country.

## Olympics from July 23, 2021

AFP, Tokyo

The Tokyo Olympics will begin on July 23 next year, organisers said on Monday, after the coronavirus forced the historic decision to postpone the Games until 2021.

The announcement comes less than a week after the organisers were forced to delay the Games under heavy pressure from athletes and sports federations as the global outbreak worsened.

"The Olympics will be held from July 23 to August 8, 2021. The Paralympics will be held from August 24 to September 5," Tokyo 2020 chief Yoshiro Mori told reporters at a hastily arranged evening news conference.

## Messi confirms pay cut, fires at board

AFP, Madrid



Lionel Messi confirmed on Monday that Barcelona's players will take a 70 per cent pay cut and make financial contributions to ensure the club's other employees are paid in full during the state of alarm in Spain.

After announcing the pay cut, he added: "We want to clarify that our desire has always been to apply a drop in salary because we fully understand that this is an exceptional situation and we are the first ones who have ALWAYS helped the club when asked. Many times we have even done it on our own initiative when we thought it necessary or important. Therefore, it never ceases to amaze us that from within the club there were those who tried to put us under the magnifying glass and tried to add pressure to do something that we always knew we would do."

Messi's message was soon posted by teammates, including Gerard Pique, Sergio Busquets, Luis Suarez, Jordi Alba, Antoine Griezmann and Frenkie de Jong. Barcelona released their own statement shortly afterwards, which said members of "all professional sports teams and most of the basketball team" had agreed to reduce their salaries.

Earlier, Atletico Madrid said they will impose salary reductions on staff whose hours have been affected while Espanyol confirmed pay cuts for sporting staff.

## Chayan prepared for the sacrifice

ANISUR RAHMAN



While most people of the country including sports stars are staying indoors to contain the spread of coronavirus, some national hockey players, especially the ones employed by Bangladesh Navy, are mentally gearing up to step out and serve the people in their hour of need.

National hockey players such as Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Mamunur Rahman Chayan, Farhad Ahmed Shitul, Sarwar Hossain, Asharful Islam, Mainul Islam Koushik, Fazle Hossain Rabbi and Ruman are serving Bangladesh Navy while playing for the national team.

The last time they represented Bangladesh was in the Asian Games in Jakarta in late 2018. Domestically the Navy players last played in the Shaheed Smriti Hockey tournament in February, winning the title by beating Bangladesh Army, which is now playing an important role by assisting local administration in distributing relief materials and keeping people at home.

The duty of Bangladesh Navy's employees under the players' scheme is not like other soldiers or officials, instead they have a basic military training to deal with any emergency situation and they are always ready to serve the people as members of the armed forces.

"We are physically alright but not good mentally because of the coronavirus situation. We are employees of Bangladesh Navy which is our first identity and then we are hockey players. Wearing the Navy uniform, our first job is to ensure the safety of our country. As members of the armed forces, we don't have any vacation.

Bangladesh Army is working at district level while Bangladesh Navy is working at remote coastal areas where Army officials can't go. As we are in Dhaka, we are performing administrative tasks," veteran player Mamunur Rahman Chayan told the *Daily Star* on Sunday.

"We are physically and mentally ready to work with the people if we are asked to work at the ground level. Of course, we will think ourselves lucky to serve the people and save them, especially after representing Bangladesh in hockey. I think serving people is more prestigious than representing the nation at international level as a player," said Chief Petty Officer Chayan, who joined Bangladesh Navy in 2013.

Chayan first represented Bangladesh at international level in 2004 and captained the national team for five to six years since 2010 and he has been a key factor behind many victories, thanks to his deadly penalty-corner conversions. He retired after the 2018 Asian Games, with the last match against South Korea in that tournament also being the last international match that Bangladesh have played.

"The situation has been stable in the last two days [Saturday, Sunday], but if it worsens, we will wholeheartedly obey any order that comes from the high-ups.

"We had basic training on how to deal with emergency situations. All the armed forces officials know they might get infected, but they are putting those thoughts aside to enforce social distancing because the main task of the armed forces is to sacrifice themselves to save the country's people. If we die doing this, we know we will be honoured as shaheed," said the 32-year-old from Faridpur.







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# Illegals in Malaysia in a pickle

About 2 lakh Bangladeshis try to ride out long lockdown

PORIMOL PALMA and JAMIL MAHMUD

An estimated two lakh irregular Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia are particularly vulnerable to coronavirus infections with the Southeast Asian country enforcing about a-month-long lockdown since March 18.

The undocumented migrants will also not be eligible for the basic pay Malaysian government had promised to provide to workers during the lockdown.

Even though officials announced that irregular migrants will not be arrested when they go to hospitals for screening, the workers are afraid of going to hospitals.

"The regular workers can get basic salary, but undocumented ones are not getting anything," said Abu Hayat, an independent Bangladeshi researcher based in Kuala Lumpur.

Non-payment and high risks of Covid-19 infection have created uncertainty and depression among the undocumented migrants, he said.

"There are many migrants who work in remote areas. They are not aware of the coronavirus risks and are unlikely to visit any hospital for screening," Hayat told The Daily Star over the phone.

Malaysia, home to about eight lakh Bangladeshis, including the two lakh undocumented ones, reported at least 2,470 infections and 34 deaths from Covid-19.

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Villagers of Jalshuk installed a barricade and a sink on Brahmanbaria-Nabinagar Road to make people wash their hands before they proceed to the village. Youths of the village came up with the idea in their efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus.

PHOTO: MASUK HRIDDOY

## AGAINST CORONAVIRUS Govt, media to work in unison

Says info minister at meet with leaders of media houses

BSS, Dhaka

Information Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday said the government and the media would work together to cope with the coronavirus crisis.

"The government and the media will work together to tackle the coronavirus crisis.... At the same time, today [yesterday] we discussed the media's internal problems emerging from the current crisis," he told reporters after a meeting with media owners and editors.

Leaders of Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab), the Editors Guild, Bangladesh, the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) and the Shampadak Parishad took part in the meeting at the minister's Minto Road residence in the city.

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# Four killed as a locomotive hits 3-wheeler

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Four people were killed and two others injured as a train engine hit a battery-run three-wheeler on an unmanned level crossing in Rangpur's Pargachha upazila yesterday afternoon.

The dead are Hamidul Islam Dukhu, 35, driver of the vehicle, its passengers Nurnahar Begum, 32, Mostafizur Rahman, 30, and Sumi Begum, 28.

Md Shamsuzzoha, station master of Pargachha Railway Station, said the engine was heading for Bonarpara from the central locomotive factory in Parbatipur.

While crossing Annadanagar village in Pargachha, the engine hit the three-wheeler on the level crossing around 1:00pm, leaving two people dead on the spot, he added.

Locals rushed to the scene and sent four injured to Rangpur Medical College Hospital. Of them, Mostafizur and Sumi died soon after being admitted to the hospital.

Ferdous Begum, 33, and Hamida Begum, 40, were undergoing treatment.

Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of Pargachha Police Station, said he informed Government Railway Police of Bonarpara about the incident.

The bodies of the victims were handed to their relatives.

## FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

### 'Stop strikes, gheraos'



Bangabandhu waving at the crowd on his arrival in Khulna on March 31, 1972.

MARCH 31, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

#### BANGABANDHU VISITS KHULNA

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman calls upon the people to do away with strikes and gheraos and invest their energies into rebuilding the country. He asks them to maintain discipline and increase production in industries and in fields.

Addressing a mammoth public meeting at the Circuit House in Khulna, Bangabandhu says that with the nationalisation of industries, banks and insurance companies, a great responsibility falls upon the people who are now the sole owners of these organisations.

Bangabandhu warns that a section of political elements is

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

# Seven more Bangladeshis die in NY

23 perish in US so far

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 23 Bangladeshis died of Covid-19 in the US as of last night, according to the US authorities.

Of them, seven breathed their last in the last 24 hours. The highest number of deaths -- 20 -- were reported in New York, where many Bangladeshis live.

The hospital authorities of the country confirmed the deaths to Bangladesh journalists in the US.

Neher Siddique, a Bangladeshi journalist residing in New York, told The Daily Star that the authorities already banned entry of outsiders to the hospitals to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

They are not even allowing journalists and close relatives of any of the patients admitted to the hospitals, he added.

Several other Bangladeshis died after

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

## 15+ STAY HOME, STAY WELL

# Workout can help fight coronavirus

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Gymnasiums are closed, exercising outside is restricted and self-isolating mandates are forcing people to make big changes to their workout routines.

But in the days of Covid-19, exercise is especially important because it provides a physical and mental boost.

World Health Organisation director general Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at a press conference recently said, "We know that for many people life is changing dramatically. My family is no different. My daughter is now taking her classes online from home because her school is closed. During this difficult time, it's important to continue looking after your physical and mental health. This will not only help you in the long term; it will also help you fight Covid-19 if you get it."

He said, "WHO recommends 30 minutes of physical activity a day for adults and one hour a day for children. If your local or national guidelines allow to go outside for a walk, [go for] a run or a ride and keep a safe distance from others. If you can't leave the house, find an exercise video online, dance to music, do some yoga or walk up and down the stairs."

"If you're working at home make sure you don't sit in the same position for long periods; get up and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

# Two raped in Pabna, Jashore

STAR REPORT

A schoolgirl and a housewife were allegedly raped in Pabna and Jashore on Sunday night.

Courts in Pabna and Jashore yesterday sent two men to jail on charges of raping the two.

In Pabna's Ishwardi, two men raped the 12-year-old schoolgirl when she was returning home from a relative's house after attending a wedding ceremony on Sunday night.

The fifth grader is undergoing treatment at Pabna Medical College

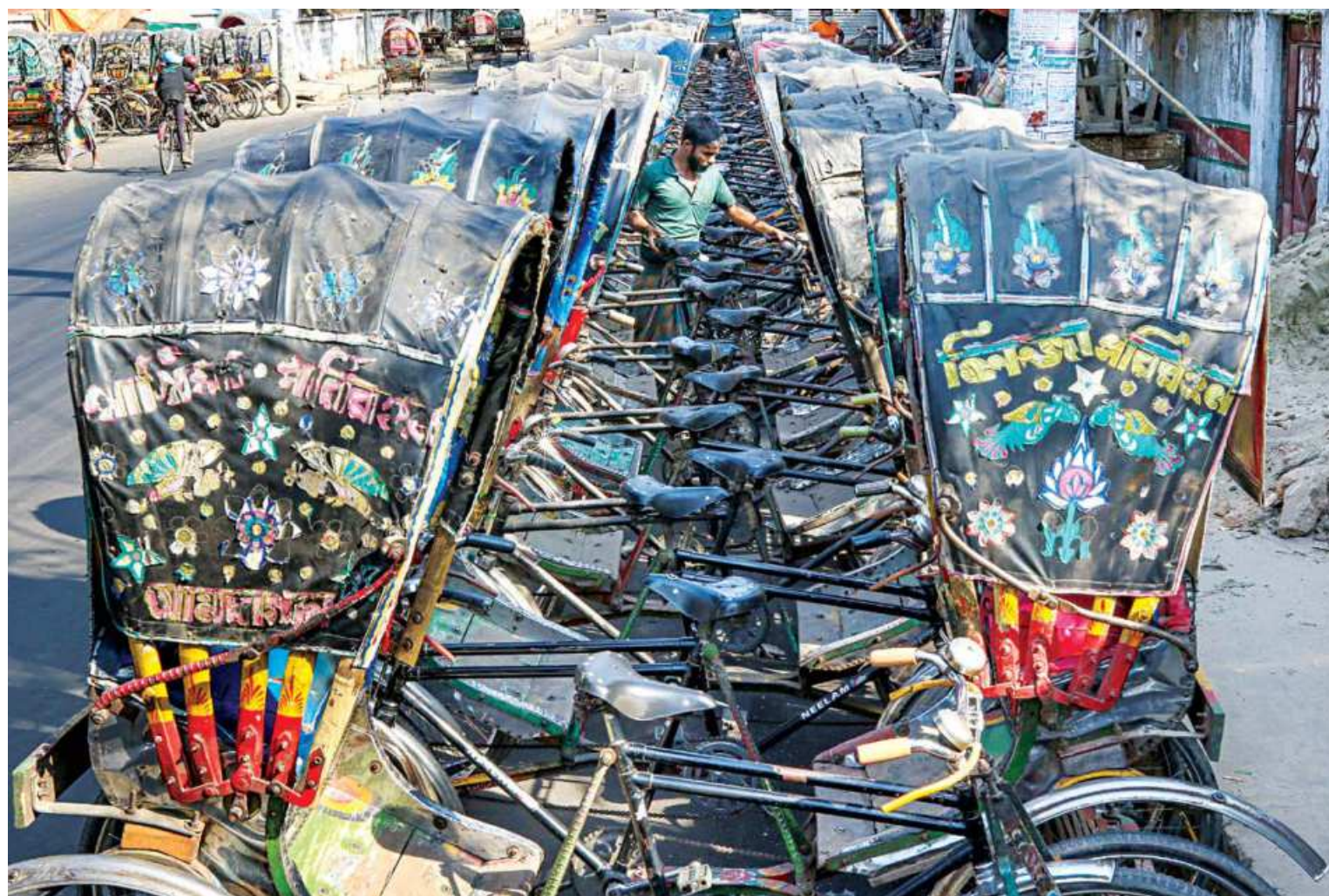
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### PRAYER TIMING MARCH 31

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

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



Rows of rickshaws parked in Aam Bagan area of Chattogram city yesterday. People are staying home in the port city resulting in fewer passengers. Many rickshaw pullers find it not worth their while as they have to wait a long time to get passengers.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

## FEARS OVER CORONAVIRUS

# 20,000 tea workers go on work abstention in Sylhet

UNB, Sylhet

At least 20,000 workers of 27 tea gardens in Sylhet went on strike yesterday morning demanding suspension of work to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus.

Raju Goala, president of Bangladesh Tea Workers Union in Sylhet, said the workers had been demanding suspension of work for the last few days fearing an outbreak of the virus in the tea gardens.

The workers abstained from work as they did not get any response from the authorities of the 27 tea gardens in the district, he said.

Raju hoped that the authorities would provide them with wages and ration during the strike.

The government on March 23 declared general holidays from March 26 to April 4, aiming to slow the spread of coronavirus. But production was not suspended in the 27 tea gardens.

# Mercedes F1 to make new breathing aid

AFP, London

Medical researchers and engineers have teamed up with Formula One outfit Mercedes to adapt a breathing aid for mass production that could keep coronavirus patients off much-needed ventilators.

University College London said UK regulators had approved its adaptation of the continuous positive airway

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Today is the 49<sup>th</sup> Death Anniversary of **S N H Rizvi**



We request all relatives, friends and well-wishers to remember him in their prayers and to pray for eternal peace of his soul