



# The Daily Star



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**"Please come help us in New York now. We need relief."**  
NY GOVERNOR ANDREW CUOMO PLEADS



**"There is no specific evidence to suggest that the wearing of masks by the mass population has any potential benefit."**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE WHO HEALTH EMERGENCIES PROGRAMME MIKE RYAN



**"We want to cooperate with the government instead of criticising them. Let's work together to fight the coronavirus."**  
BNP SECRETARY GENERAL MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM ALAMGIR



## CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

# Low test rate may be belying reality

*Fear experts; govt moves, though late, to scale up tests*

WASIM BIN HABIB and MOUJIB AHMED SUJAN

"We have a simple message for all countries: test, test, test."

These were the words Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organisation, said at a press briefing in Geneva in mid-March while expressing concern over the actions some nations have taken on detecting and containing the novel coronavirus.

With 51 reported infections and five deaths so far, is Bangladesh conducting enough tests?

The available data gives a grim picture. The country tested 1,602 people from late January until yesterday, which hardly gives a clear idea about the real situation in the entire country. And the reason is limited testing.

Until now, Bangladesh has a restrictive testing policy -- it tests only those with recent travel history to affected countries or those known to have come into contact with confirmed cases and have Covid-19 symptoms. And Bangladesh is now among the countries with very low testing rates.

Three weeks elapsed since the country recorded its first coronavirus case on March 8, but the authorities are still struggling to get a handle on the extent of the spread of

the virus. The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) maintains that there has been community transmission on a limited scale.

Experts, however, fear the number of infected people could be higher as many carriers of the virus could be off the radar due to limited testing.

They said widespread testing makes a big difference because, in many cases, coronavirus patients can be asymptomatic. Unless those are detected, the risk of virus transmission will be high.

Till last week, the IEDCR was the sole Covid-19 testing authority in the country. Only a couple of days ago, six other organisations -- five in the capital and one in Chattogram -- got the government nod to conduct tests.

People with coronavirus-like symptoms found it difficult to get tested after making phone calls on the hotlines provided by the IEDCR and Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The IEDCR and the DGHS received more than 70,000 coronavirus-related phone calls in 24 hours till 3:00pm yesterday. Of those, only 140 suspected cases were tested and

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Many city dwellers have started using their vehicles for essential travels in the capital over the last couple of days. The city had gone quiet since the 10-day closure began on March 26. The photo was taken from Mohakhali Flyover.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

# Shutdown to be stretched to Apr 9

*Says PM in video conference with field-level govt officials*

- >> Educational institutions to remain closed
- >> Transport movement could be limited
- >> All requested to stay indoors
- >> Warning against graft in food distribution
- >> Curbs on Pahela Baishakh celebrations

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government decided to extend the ongoing nationwide holidays for five more days till April 9 to contain the spread of deadly coronavirus.

"We had earlier announced a 10-day general holiday from March 26 and it'll be extended for five more days till April 9," she said.

The premier made the announcement while exchanging views on the country's coronavirus situation with public representatives and field-level government officials through videoconferencing from the Gono Bhaban.

When the cabinet secretary drew the PM's attention to the extension of holidays till April 9, she said it could be extended till April 9, but it would not be a complete shutdown.

"It can be done on a limited scale, and a scope will have to be created for the movement of some people," she said.

The movement of transport could be limited, she said, adding that the government would review the situation after completion of the 14-day (quarantine period).

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

# OMS rice for Tk 10 a kg in cities from next week

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and JAMIL MAHMUD

The government is going to launch a special open market sale (OMS) of coarse rice at Tk 10 a kg in all city corporation areas to ensure food for the urban poor amid the countrywide shutdown.

The shutdown is being enforced as part of the efforts to slow down the spread of novel coronavirus, which has so far claimed five lives in the country.

The food ministry yesterday got the government approval in this regard, said the ministry officials.

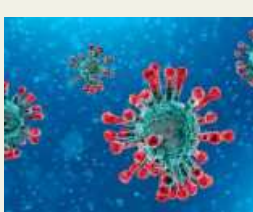
"We are trying to start selling rice from Saturday or Sunday," Nazmanara Khanum, secretary of the ministry, told The Daily Star.

Before this, the ministry will have to formulate a special guideline, she said, adding that she would soon hold meetings with the food minister, relevant ministry officials, and

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

# Nearly half the world in lockdown

*Spain sees deadliest day; World Bank says crisis may push 11m in Asia into poverty*



Date	Global Death Toll Multiplied Every Week
Mar-30	34,018
Mar-23	16,513
Mar-16	7,162
Mar-09	4,025
Mar-02	3,117

AGENCIES

Tightened lockdowns across the planet saw nearly half of humanity told to stay at home in a bid to stem the spiralling coronavirus pandemic, as Spain recorded its deadliest day yesterday and the United States braced for the full impact of the disease.

Meanwhile, the World Bank warned in a report released Monday that the economic fallout from the pandemic could drive an additional 11 million people into poverty in East Asia and the Pacific unless "urgent action" is taken.

And G20 finance ministers and central bankers yesterday pledged to address the debt burden of low-income countries and deliver aid to emerging markets as part of a plan to combat the pandemic.

The announcement followed a second round of virtual talks after G20 leaders pledged a "united front" last week and

said they were injecting \$5 trillion into the global economy to head off a feared deep recession.

The virus has claimed more than 38,000 lives worldwide in a health crisis that is rapidly reorganising political power, hampering the global economy and altering the daily existence of some 3.6 billion people.

Spain, whose outbreak is the world's second deadliest after Italy, reported another national record with 849 deaths in one day, dampening hopes it could have passed the peak of the crisis that has debilitated the country for weeks.

In battered Italy, flags flew at half-mast during a minute of silence to honour the more than 11,500 people who have perished from the virus, and the medical staff still working through nightmarish

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

# 10-DAY SHUTDOWN Lax enforcement a cause of worry

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and RASHIDUL HASAN

As the authorities are set to extend the shutdown to contain the spread of coronavirus, experts have pointed out that lax enforcement of the ongoing nationwide closure has raised questions about the effectiveness of the government move. Amid a slack surveillance, many are still roaming on streets and alleyways in cities and other urban areas, ignoring the government advice to stay indoors.

Besides, a good number of people from the low income bracket, including day labourers and rickshaw pullers, have to go out to earn their living as they struggle to survive.

The situation in villages seemed even worse. A large number of the people, who went there from the capital after the government announced the shutdown, were showing least interest in following the government advice, The Daily Star correspondents reported.

These increased the risk of coronavirus transmission among people.

The experts said the government must ensure that all stay home at any cost and urged it to do everything possible to make them stay indoors, saying the country is now passing through a very crucial time in the fight against coronavirus.

They called for enforcing the shutdown very strictly. Prof Muzaherul Huq, a former adviser (Southeast Asia Region) of the World Health Organization, said the shutdown should be extended by up to two weeks and it must be enforced "effectively".

"Currently, the shutdown is being implemented loosely. Many people are roaming on the streets, posing risk. So the shutdown must be enforced effectively," he told The Daily Star on Monday.

He said, "Community transmission is going on. People with coronavirus symptoms should be segregated and

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



With PPE and hand sanitisers in high demand, many set up shops on the pavement near Midford Hospital and are selling those with a high markup. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

ইউনিয়ন ব্যাংক লিমিটেড

সমৃদ্ধির ৮ বছর পদার্থনে সম্মানিত গ্রাহক, শুভাকাঙ্ক্ষী ও শুভাকাঙ্ক্ষীদের প্রতি আমাদের আন্তরিক কৃতজ্ঞতা। সেবা ব্যাংকিং সেবায় এবং পারস্পরিক দৃঢ় বন্ধনে আমরা নিশ্চিত করতে পেরেছি এই সাফল্য।

সমৃদ্ধির সর্বোচ্চ শিখরে পৌঁছে যেতে অব্যাহত থাকুক আপনার এই শ্রেণা। ভালবাসা আর আশ্রয় আমাদের পাশে থাকার জন্য সবাইকে আন্তরিক ধন্যবাদ।









### Stop wearing masks if you're not sick: WHO

World Health Organization officials Monday said they still recommend people not wear face masks unless they are sick with Covid-19 or caring for someone who is sick. "There is no specific evidence to suggest that the wearing of masks by the mass population has any potential benefit. In fact, there's some evidence to suggest the opposite in the misuse of wearing a mask properly or fitting it properly," Dr. Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO health emergencies program, said at a media briefing in Geneva, Switzerland, on Monday. "There also is the issue that we have a massive global shortage," Ryan said about masks and other medical supplies. "Right now the people most at risk from this virus are frontline health workers who are exposed to the virus every second of every day. The thought of them not having masks is horrific." World Health Organization officials warned at a media briefing last week that globally there is a "significant shortage" of medical supplies, including personal protective gear or PPE, for doctors. "We need to be clear," Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, an infectious disease epidemiologist with the WHO, said last week. "The world is facing a significant shortage of PPE for our frontline workers -- including masks and gloves and gowns and face shields -- and protecting our health care workers must be the top priority for use of this PPE."

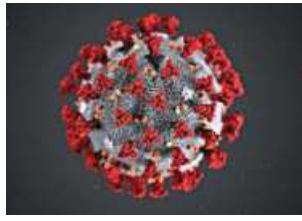
## 'We're living on a prayer'

Indian doctors fight coronavirus with raincoats, helmets

REUTERS, New Delhi

Shortages of protective health gear in India are forcing some doctors to use raincoats and motorbike helmets while fighting the coronavirus, exposing the weak state of the public health system ahead of an anticipated surge in COVID-19 cases. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government said India was trying to get personal protective equipment in bulk domestically and from South Korea and China to meet the shortages. More than a dozen doctors battling the outbreak, which has so far infected 1,251 people and killed 32, told Reuters they were concerned that without this proper gear, they could become carriers of the disease. In Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, drivers of around 4,700 ambulances that mainly serve government hospitals went on strike yesterday, demanding proper safety gear and health insurance. According to one projection, more than 100,000 people could be infected by mid-May, putting India's underfunded health system and scarce doctors under severe strain. In the eastern city of Kolkata, junior doctors at the major coronavirus treatment facility - Beliaghata Infectious Disease Hospital - were given

plastic raincoats to examine patients last week, according to two doctors there and photographs reviewed by Reuters. In northern Haryana state near New Delhi, Dr Sandeep Garg of ESI Hospital said he had been using a motorbike helmet because he didn't have any N95 masks, which offer significant protection against virus particles. The plight of doctors in the pandemic has cast a light on a dilapidated and overburdened public health system that has for years been starved of funds and an overhaul. India spends about 1.3% of its GDP on public health, among the lowest in the world. "We are living on a prayer, it's not that we can save ourselves by relying on the health system," said a senior federal government official in New Delhi. In a state-run hospital in the city of Rohtak in Haryana, several junior doctors have been declining to treat patients unless they have adequate safety equipment. They also established an informal COVID-19 fund, to which each doctor contributed 1,000 rupees (\$13.27) to buy masks and other face coverings, one of the doctors said. "Everybody is scared," the doctor said. "Nobody wants to work without protection."



## 'Tsunami is coming'

New York governor begs for help

New York's governor put out an urgent plea for medical volunteers, and a Navy hospital ship pulled into port as coronavirus deaths in the city mounted and hospitals buckled in what authorities say could be a preview of what other communities across the United States could soon face. "Please come help us in New York now. We need relief," Governor Andrew Cuomo pleaded as the number of dead in New York State climbed past 1,200, with most of those victims dying in New York City. A US Navy hospital ship with 1,000 beds arrived in port in New York on Monday to help relieve the crisis gripping the city. The USNS Comfort - also sent to New York City after 9/11 - will be used to treat non-coronavirus patients while packed hospitals deal with those with COVID-19. Nurses and other medical professionals who volunteered to help have also begun arriving. As he announced the latest death toll, he said, "That's a lot of loss, that's a lot of pain, that's a lot of tears, that's a lot of grief that people all across this state are feeling." Criticising President Donald Trump's politicising of the crisis, Cuomo told MSNBC earlier on Monday: "The science people, the government professionals, have to stand up and look the president in the eye and say this is not a political exercise. This is not press relations. It's not optics. The tsunami is coming." The United States has the highest number of infected people with 164,610 diagnosed cases, 3,170 deaths and 5,764 recoveries.



The USNS Comfort passes the Statue of Liberty as it enters New York Harbor during the outbreak of the coronavirus disease in New York, on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

### CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

## LATEST UPDATES

**MORE THAN 790,000 CASES**  
More than 790,640 cases of infection have been recorded in 185 countries and territories since the epidemic started in China in December, according to an AFP tally compiled at 1000 GMT Tuesday based on official sources. At least 38,464 deaths have been recorded, 27,740 of those in Europe. Italy has 11,591 deaths, Spain 8,189, mainland China 3,305, the United States 3,170, France 3,024, and Iran 2,898.  
**11M ASIANS FACE POVERTY**  
The World Bank warns China's growth in 2020 could be brought to a standstill, compared to 6.1 percent growth in 2019, which was already its worst performance since 1990. The country will postpone its notoriously difficult college entrance tests from June to July. The economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic could drive an additional 11 million people into poverty in East Asia and the Pacific unless "urgent action" is taken, the World Bank warned in a report released Monday.

**RAY OF HOPE AMID RECORD DEATH TOLLS**  
Once again, Spain hit a new record with 849 coronavirus deaths in 24 hours although health chiefs said the rate of new infections was continuing its downward trend. The number of confirmed cases rose to 94,417 yesterday after another 9,222 people tested positive: a nearly 11-percent increase. This time last week, the rate of new infections stood at around 20 percent. Professionals of Italy also said the trend is slowing there despite the record death toll.

**IRAN, EUROPE TO GET MEDICAL EQUIPMENT**  
European nations deliver medical goods to Iran in the first transaction under the Instex mechanism set up in January 2019 to bypass United States sanctions on Tehran. President Donald Trump says the US will send some shipments of excess medical equipment worth around \$100 million to hard-hit Italy, and later to France and Spain.

**MORE THAN 3.6 BILLION IN LOCKDOWN**  
Panama announces strict quarantine measures that separate citizens by gender. From Wednesday for 15 days, men and women will only be able to leave their homes for two hours at a time, and on different days. On Sunday all outings are banned. Mexico extends its state of emergency to April 30, which also allows it to prolong its suspension of all non-essential activities. Guinea announces a night-time curfew between 2100-0500 GMT and restrictions on movement out of the capital. More than 3.6 billion people -- 46.5 percent of the world population -- are now either under orders or have been asked to stay home, according to an AFP database tally on Tuesday.

**SPAIN BANS FUNERAL CEREMONIALS**  
Spain banned funeral ceremonies, including vigils at home, and decreed that no more than three people could attend burials as the government struggles with thousands of fatalities from the coronavirus pandemic. Madrid announced that "religious celebrations and civilian funeral ceremonies are postponed until the end of the alert," which has been declared until at least April 11 and keeps the population confined.  
SOURCE: AFP



### Harry, Meghan quit royal life

Prince Harry and his wife Meghan formally step down as senior members of the British royal family yesterday, as they start a controversial new life in the United States. The couple have already relocated to California, according to reports, after announcing in January that they intended to quit royal life and "work to become financially independent". The decision means they will no longer carry out duties on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II and are giving up their office within the monarchy in Britain. However, they will continue to be known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, their official titles, and Harry remains sixth in line to the throne, with no change in the line of succession.

### Myanmar journalist hit with terrorism charges

A Myanmar journalist faces up to life in prison for publishing an interview with a rebel group operating in the country's restive Rakhine state a week after the insurgents were classified as a terrorist organisation. The western region has long been a tinderbox of conflict between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army (AA), a group demanding greater autonomy for the state's ethnic Rakhine people. A March 27 interview with a top-ranking AA representative published by the Mandalay-based Voice of Myanmar led to the detention of editor-in-chief Nay Myo Lin, who was brought to court on terrorism charges yesterday. The interview was published after the government declared on March 23 that the insurgents had been classified as a "terrorist group". Amnesty International's Nicholas Bequelin called for the charges to be dropped and for Nay Myo Lin's immediate release.

### US deploys Patriot air defence system to Iraq

The United States has deployed Patriot air defence batteries to Iraqi bases to protect American troops recently targeted by Iranian missiles, US and Iraqi military sources told AFP Monday. Washington and Baghdad had been negotiating the placement of the defence system since January, when Tehran fired ballistic missiles at the western Iraqi base of Ain al-Asad, which hosts American and other foreign troops. One of the Patriot batteries was deployed to Ain al-Asad last week and was being assembled, said US sources. Another battery was deployed to a base in Arbil, the capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region. Two further batteries destined for Iraq were still in Kuwait.  
SOURCE: AFP

## AI predicts which patients will get deadly 'wet lung'

AFP, Washington

Researchers in the US and China reported Monday they have developed an artificial intelligence tool that is able to accurately predict which newly infected patients with the novel coronavirus go on to develop severe lung disease. Once deployed, the algorithm could assist doctors in making choices about where to prioritize care in resource-stretched health care systems, researchers said. The tool discovered several surprising indicators that were most strongly predictive of who went on to develop so-called acute respiratory disease syndrome (ARDS), a severe complication of the COVID-19 illness that fills the lungs with fluid and kills around 50 percent of coronavirus patients who get it. The team applied a machine learning algorithm to data from 53 coronavirus patients across two hospitals in Wenzhou, China, finding that changes in three features -- levels of the liver enzyme alanine aminotransferase (ALT), reported body aches, and hemoglobin levels -- were most accurately predictive of subsequent, severe disease. Using this information along with other factors, the tool was able to predict risk of ARDS with up to 80 percent accuracy.

## World's last virus-free corners

AFP, Koror

A coronavirus-free tropical island nestled in the northern Pacific may seem the perfect place to ride out a pandemic -- but residents on Palau say life right now is far from idyllic. The microstate of 18,000 people is among a dwindling number of places on Earth that still report zero cases of COVID-19 as figures mount daily elsewhere. The disparate group also includes Samoa, Turkmenistan, North Korea and bases on the frozen continent of Antarctica. A dot in the ocean hundreds of kilometres from its nearest neighbours, Palau is surrounded by the vast Pacific, which has acted as a buffer against the virus. Along with strict travel restrictions, this seems to have kept infections at bay for a number of nations including Tonga, the Solomon Islands, the Marshall Islands and Micronesia. But remoteness is not certain to stop the relentless march of the new disease. The Northern Mariana Islands confirmed its first cases over the weekend, followed by a suspected death on Monday. Kiamiokl Tulop, a 28-year-old artist and single mum, is hopeful Palau can avoid the fate of Wuhan, New York or Madrid -- where better-resourced health services were overrun. But she describes a growing sense of dread, a fear that the virus is coming or could already be on the island undetected. Inside Australia's four remote Antarctic research

bases, around 90 people have found themselves ensconced on the only virus-free continent as they watch their old home transform beyond recognition. In some places, reporting no cases does not always mean there are no cases to report. North Korea has portrayed emergency measures as an unqualified success in keeping COVID-19 out, despite sustained epidemics in neighbouring China and South Korea. But state media also appears to have doctored images to give ordinary North Koreans face masks -- handing sceptics reason to believe the world's most secretive government may not be telling the whole truth. While Palau has no confirmed cases, it has still been gripped by the society-altering fears and economic paralysis that have affected elsewhere. Supermarket aisles in the country's largest town Koror have seen panic buying and there are shortages of hand sanitisers, masks and alcohol. The islands depend heavily on goods being shipped or flown in, meaning supplies can quickly run low. United Airlines used to fly six times a week from nearby Guam -- which has seen more than 50 cases -- but now there is just one flight a week. Residents have been practising social distancing. Doctors are waiting for test kits and the government is building five isolation rooms that will be able to hold up to 14 patients. It all feels like waiting for the inevitable.

### 30 Albanian doctors help virus-hit Italy

AFP, Brescia

About 30 doctors from Albania, one of Europe's poorest countries, were at work in northern Italy on Monday helping overwhelmed hospitals at the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic. One of the doctors said he was simply following the Hippocratic Oath that medics have taken through the ages vowing to help their colleagues in need. The doctors arrived Monday in Brescia, a city whose COVID-19 death and infection rates have been among the highest in the world for the past month.

### Saudi-led raids hit Yemen's Sanaa

AFP, Riyadh

The Saudi-led military coalition on Monday carried out multiple air strikes on Yemen's rebel-held capital Sanaa in retaliation for missile strikes on Riyadh. Residents in Sanaa reported multiple explosions after the bombing raids began, in a new escalation despite UN calls for a ceasefire to protect Yemeni civilians from the coronavirus pandemic. The operation comes after Saudi air defences intercepted Houthi ballistic missiles over Riyadh and the border city of Jizan late Saturday.

### At least 19 killed in China forest fire

AFP, Beijing

Eighteen firefighters and one forestry guide died while fighting a huge forest fire in southwestern China, the local government said yesterday. State television footage showed large flames shooting into the sky from the mountains above the city of Xichang in Sichuan province, turning the sky orange. More than 1,200 local people have been evacuated from the worst-hit areas.

## Middle-age patients too at high risk

AFP, Paris

Middle-aged people, and not just the elderly, have a dramatically higher risk of dying or developing serious illness from COVID-19, new research from Britain showed yesterday. The findings came in a new comprehensive analysis of virus cases in mainland China. Researchers from Britain analysed more than 3,600 confirmed COVID-19 cases as well as data from hundreds of passengers repatriated from the outbreak city of Wuhan. They found that age was a key determining factor in serious infections, with nearly one in five over-80s requiring hospitalisation, compared to around 1 percent among people under 30. Taking into account estimates of the number of cases that may not have been clinically confirmed -- that is, mild or asymptomatic infections -- the data showed the hospitalisation rate of patients in their fifties was 8.2 percent. The study, published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases journal, estimated that the mortality rate from confirmed COVID-19 cases in mainland China

was 1.38 percent. If unconfirmed cases were taken into account, the death rate dropped to 0.66 percent. The authors of the research said that while this was significantly lower than previous estimates, COVID-19 is still several times deadlier than previous pandemic viruses, such as H1N1. "Our estimates can be applied to any country to inform decisions around the best containment policies for COVID-19," said Azra Ghani, a study co-author from Imperial College London. "There might be outlying cases that

### HOSPITALIZATION IN CHINA

- 18.4 percent of patients in their 80s
- 4.3 percent patients between 40 to 49
- Only 1 percent patients under 30



get a lot of media attention, but our analysis very clearly shows that at aged 50 and over, hospitalisation is much more likely than in those under 50, and a greater proportion of cases are likely to be fatal." Billions of people have been confined to their homes around the world as governments desperately try to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus. As of 1900 GMT Monday the virus had killed 38,466 people out of more than 791,000 cases globally. That would mean 4.8 percent of all confirmed COVID-19 infections have

been proven deadly. But experts stress that without widespread testing it is impossible to know how many people may have become infected and recovered. This means the true mortality rate is likely much lower, in line with The Lancet study and previous research from China. The Lancet study showed that 18.4 percent of patients in their 80s were hospitalised in China. This compared to 4.3 percent for 40 to 49-year-olds and roughly 1 percent for people in their 20s.

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
Closed	Closed	\$1,597.10 (per ounce)	\$23.46 (per barrel)	3.01%	0.88%	2.69%	0.11%	BUY TK 83.95	89.67	98.12	11.69
				29,468.49	18,917.01	2,481.23	2,750.00	SELL TK 84.95	93.47	101.92	12.29

আপনার নিরাপত্তাই  
আমাদের অগ্রাধিকার

ব্যাংকিং হোক ঘরে বসেই

- ফরাক ট্রান্সফার
- মোবাইল টপ-আপ
- ক্রেডিট কার্ডের বিল প্রদান
- ইউটিলিটি বিল প্রদান
- ব্যাংক স্টেটমেন্ট

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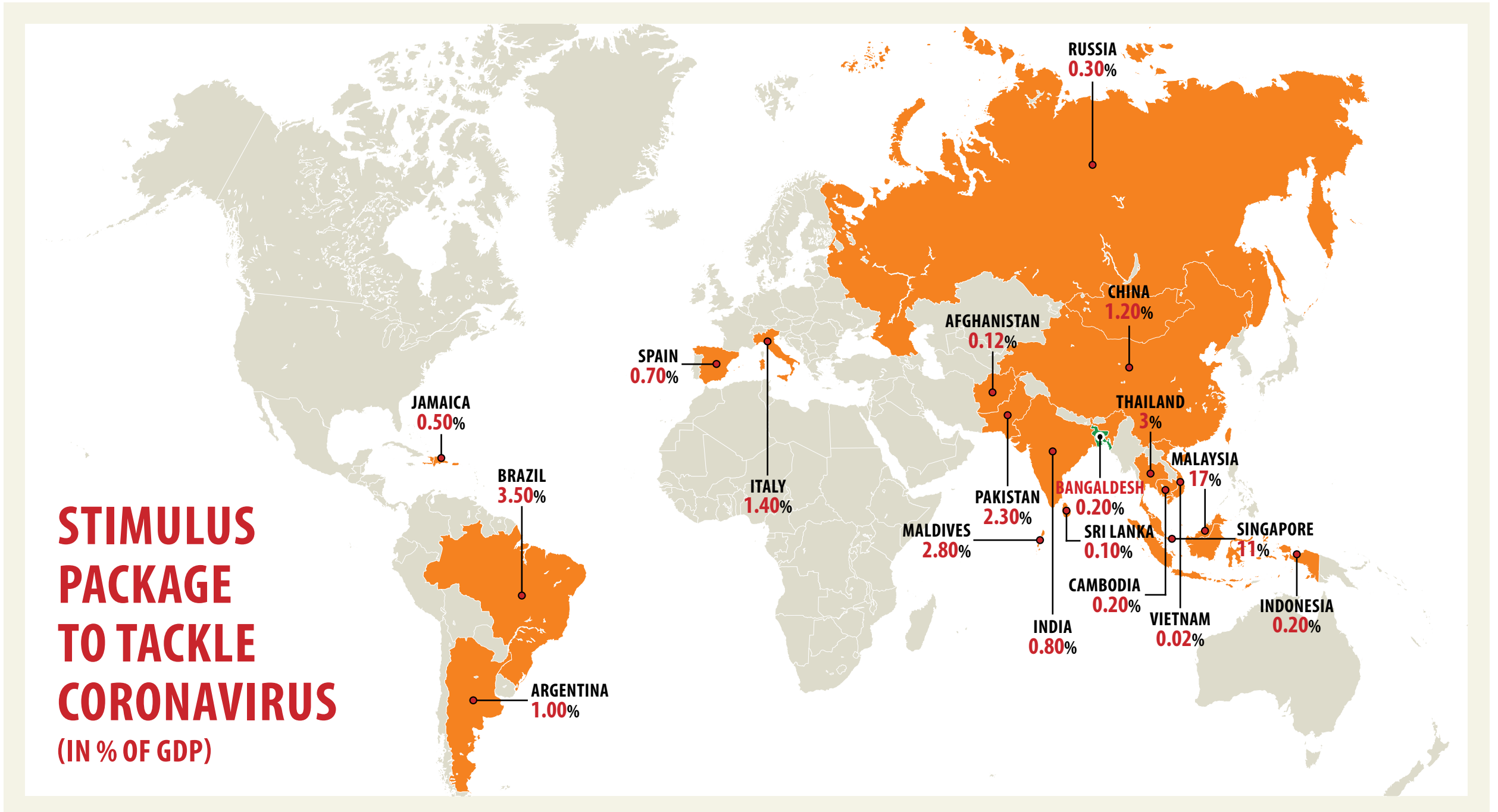
# BUSINESS

DHAKA WEDNESDAY APRIL 1, 2020, CHAITRA 18, 1426 BS starbusiness@thedailystar.net



## TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

# Bigger relief package needed to make up for lost economic activities



REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh has announced one of the lowest stimulus packages among South Asian and Asian peers in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) to counteract the impact of the coronavirus pandemic that is on course to bringing about an economic recession.

Last week, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced a Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package, which is equivalent to 0.2 per cent of fiscal 2018-19's GDP, to extend wage support to workers in the export-oriented industries.

If compared with a set of countries, Bangladesh is only ahead of Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, lags behind India, Pakistan, the Maldives, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia and is at par with Cambodia and Indonesia.

The stimulus package came after Bangladesh reported its maiden cases of coronavirus infections on March 8.

Since then, the deadly virus has infected 51 people and was linked to death of five, according to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research.

In order to face expected increased demand for healthcare spending, the finance division of Bangladesh is preparing a revised budget for the fiscal year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on its website. It already

allocated an additional Tk 250 crore to the health services division.

The government is also considering measures to cushion the impact of the crisis on the economy, including the expansion of existing transfer programmes that benefit the more vulnerable households, as well as mechanisms to support exporting industries.

Increased allocation has been made to the Open Market Sale (OMS) programme to ensure adequate food supply for lower-income class households, particularly those dependent on daily wages.

The National Board of Revenue has suspended temporarily duties and taxes on imports of medical supplies, including protective equipment and test kits.

"The recent announced fiscal response in Bangladesh is in the right direction, though far from adequate," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

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

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

Manufacturers and Exporters Association probably pays an amount very similar.

Then there are the others: leather, footwear, furniture, ceramics and so on. Most are demanding more than a month's basic pay. Rationing is inevitable since the total is well short of the wage bill in the exports sector, the economist said in a write up.

In order to pool resources, the government is seeking \$750 million from the IMF.

The government wrote to the crisis lender on Sunday asking for the fund, said a finance ministry official.

The IMF has made available about \$50 billion through its rapid-disbursing emergency financing facilities for low-income and emerging market countries that could potentially seek support.

Initially, officials had said that the government was seeking \$200 million from the World Bank: \$100 million for the health sector and \$100 million in budget support.

Now, the government would like to get \$500 million from the Washington-based development lender, said one official of the finance ministry.

The Asian Development Bank may provide \$500 million to Bangladesh initially as budget support in order to help the country improve its health system and assist the vulnerable groups. It has already provided \$300,000.

The coronavirus may wipe 1.1 per cent off the GDP of Bangladesh as per a projection of the ADB.

"Many people have lost jobs because of the coronavirus. We have to stand by them," said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her address to the nation on March 25.

Assistance would be extended to the low-income people in their respective villages under the Ghore Fera Kormosuchi, a programme of the government. Homeless and landless people would be given homes, food for six months and cash, she said.

The Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), one of the largest safety net programmes, the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme, which provides food transfers to the poor during disasters and major religious festivals, and the initiative to sell rice at Tk 10 a kg would continue, she said.

On March 23, the government declared a general holiday from March 26 to April 4. The holidays were extended to April 11.

Government offices, private offices and courts have been closed. Commercial banks are operating shorter hours. Individuals have been requested not to leave their homes except to collect daily necessities and emergency supplies.

Beyond the domestic impact of the health crisis, the two main channels through which

the Bangladesh economy will be impacted are remittances and exports of garments, said the IMF on its website.

Remittances represent more than 5 per cent of GDP (close to \$17 billion in fiscal 2018-19), and a majority of the migrant workers are based in Gulf countries that are affected by the abrupt decline in oil prices.

Close to half a million migrant workers have returned since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The garment sector accounts for more than 80 per cent of the country's exports. The industry has been hit by the cancellation of \$2.90 billion in garment orders from major retailers in advanced countries, affecting 1,059 factories and 21 lakh workers, according to data compiled by the BGMEA.

Almost all garment factories were closed yesterday. The sector employs about 41 lakh workers.

In a recent interview with The Daily Star, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, however, said more measures, short-term, mid-term and long-term, would be taken to support all the industries that have been affected by the virus pandemic.

"Once the crisis is over, we will take whatever steps we need to take so that the affected businesses and businesses can return to their pre-crisis level. No sector would be left out."

# Now more buyers assure garment suppliers of taking goods

REFAVET ULLAH MIRDHA

Many international clothing retailers are coming up with assurances to help garment suppliers by taking the shipment of goods that have already been manufactured or ordered, in a relief to the exporters reeling from the coronavirus fallout.

Since the outbreak of the deadly and highly contagious virus, many Western clothing retailers, which have been sourcing from Bangladesh for decades, have sent letters to local manufacturers asking for cancellation of current and upcoming work orders as their own stores have been closed due to demand collapse and the measures aimed at slowing the spread of the novel virus.

At the same time, there have been assurances

from the buyers when the apparel suppliers worldwide are facing the challenges of order cancellation and delayed shipments.

A few brands, including PVH, Inditex, Marks & Spencer, Kiabi and Target have come forward and have informed of their decision to take the ready goods along with the goods in production, said Rubana Huq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), in a WhatsApp message.

"We welcome their decision to support us and hope that the payment terms will remain unaffected in order to ensure liquidity flow for the factories," Huq told The Daily Star in a WhatsApp message.

This comes after the Swedish retail giant H&M on Sunday assured its garment suppliers

of taking shipment of goods that have already been manufactured.

Spanish retailer Inditex has confirmed it would not stop taking goods in seas or in production lines, according to the BGMEA chief.

"Similarly, French Kiabi would take all the products that are ready and all the products whose work is in progress."

Target of the US has confirmed with full assurance that it would be taking all the orders in hand and take full responsibility and come up with solutions on work orders, Huq said.

"Target also reiterated that it would work as partners to come out of the crisis and has no intention to cancel any order. The list is getting long," Huq said.

French buyer Kiabi told Rising Group during a video-conferencing on Monday that it would

take the old orders worth nearly \$14 million, according to Mahmud Hasan Khan Babu, managing director of the garment exporter.

He has been supplying knitwear items like T-shirts to Kiabi for more than nine years. He supplies garment items worth \$120 million to the French company every year.

Kiabi has been directly sourcing garment items worth \$700 million from Bangladesh every year over the last 20 years, the entrepreneur said.

As of yesterday, \$2.90 billion worth of garment export orders were cancelled by international retailers, according to data compiled by the BGMEA.

Some 1,059 garment factories reported a loss of 920.36 million units of work orders. The cancellation will affect 2.10 million workers.

More than 3,079 woven, knit and textile factories were closed yesterday as the government is enforcing a nationwide lockdown. However, nearly 60 factories were open, according to sources in the industrial police.

The worst-affected countries such as Italy, the UK, the US, France, Spain and Germany are the prime destinations of Bangladesh garment items.

The US is the largest export destination for Bangladesh and takes apparel items worth \$6 billion a year. Germany also sources almost the same amount of garment items.

Bangladesh exports nearly \$3 billion worth of garment items to Italy and more than \$2.5 billion to Spain and France. The UK imports more than \$3 billion worth of garment items.

**TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE**

**Homegrown ventilator goes on clinical testing next week**

*Walton to manufacture the critical respiratory machines*

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST), an engineering university run by the Bangladesh Armed Forces, has designed a ventilator, in the most positive development for the nation panicking from the coronavirus pandemic.

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. And Bangladesh, a nation of more than 16 crore, has only 1,250 ventilators.

MIST has received the certification of the design of the ventilator from a body of the World Health Organisation and is scheduled to go for a clinical testing from April 4 at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka.

Syed Mahfuzur Rahman, head of biomedical engineering department of MIST, shared the development during a virtual press conference organised by Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for the ICT division.

In another development, Bangladesh yesterday received the patent, design and source code of the PB 560 model ventilator of Medtronic, a global medical device manufacturer, Palak said.

The government plans to go for local manufacturing of the highly technical medical equipment that are desperately in short supply worldwide.

MIST will go for stimulation from today, Rahman told The Daily Star after the media briefing.

"We are maintaining very close contact with the ICU department of the CMH and after completion of the simulation we will go for clinical testing."

And if any suggestion comes from the ICU team, those will be accommodated before applying to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

MIST informed the DGHS about the development. The state agency has assured the university of all kinds of support to expedite approval from local and international bodies, he added.

Local technology company Walton is also maintaining contact with MIST. If the ventilator design gets approval, Walton will start manufacturing it.

"We have already suggested Walton to started to work on hardware assembling and it is doing its part," Rahman added.

Meanwhile, ICT Division will sit today with the research and development team of Medtronic's Hyderabad office. Interested local technology companies will also attend the meeting, Palak said.

"We are not sure how long it will take to develop



ventilators in the country, but once the first device is manufactured, the process will be easier and bulk manufacturing will begin."

It might take a few weeks to complete the whole process and the price will be much lower than the imported ones, he said.

In order to manufacture, Medtronic's technological support will be required at least for the first batch of products as it will not be easy for the local talent to produce them by only just following the source code and design.

Walton has showed interest in manufacturing the Medtronic ventilators, too. Some other local technology companies are also keen to join in the effort, Palak added.

If the local technology companies can manufacture the device, its price will be within Tk 2 lakh, said an official of the ICT Division.

It costs at least Tk 7 lakh if the device is imported from China and Tk 18 lakh to Tk 20 lakh if it comes from Europe.

Walton is ready to go for the manufacturing of the device and would be happy to produce it for local patients, said Liakat Ali, chief executive officer of the group's computer division, while attending the video-conferencing.

Even if Bangladesh does not get the expected success from the initiative, it will give a huge boost to the country's technological sector and help them do better in the coming days, said Anir Chowdhury, policy adviser of the Access to Information (a2i) project under the ICT Division.

Medtronic is sharing design specifications for a basic ventilator model with any company that wants to help produce them for hospitals racing to treat coronavirus patients.

The Dublin-based company on Monday posted specifications for its PB 560 ventilator "to enable participants across industries to evaluate options for rapid ventilator manufacturing to help doctors and patients dealing with COVID-19".

Software and other information for the compact model, on the market since 2010 and sold in 35 countries, will also be added for download soon, Medtronic said.

American electric vehicle and clean energy company Tesla has taken up on this opportunity: it would be manufacturing the model in its solar panel production facility.



**Social Islami Bank hands over medical equipment to Regent Hospital in Uttara for protecting the healthcare personnel treating COVID-19 patients. Md. Sirajul Hoque, the bank's deputy managing director, handed over the items to Md. Mizanur Rahman, MD of Regent Hospital.**



**An almost deserted Shapla Square in Motijheel yesterday. The outsize sculpture near the centre of Dhaka typically sees hubbub of activities in normal times.** FIROZ AHMED

**Govt needs to do more for SMEs, domestic industries**

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

There is no question that the export-oriented sectors, particularly garment, have been dealt a cruel blow by the global coronavirus pandemic. Which is why, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on March 25 have rolled out a Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package for them.

But there is a vast swathe of domestic industries and small-and medium-sized enterprises that has been hit, arguably, just as hard. But they remain criminally neglected thus far.

An assistance of sorts was offered to them on March 19, when the Bangladesh Bank (BB) asked banks not to consider borrowers as defaulters if they fail to repay instalments until June 30 this year.

But, their accounts will still continue accrue interest during

the period, so this begs the question: could this move from BB be of genuine help to them?

When economic activities have been close to standstill for a good one month now and with no signs of things getting back to normal in the near future, is it rational to assume that they would be able to service the loan accounts complete with the accrued interest in two months' time?

Banks are unable to waive the interest payment for entrepreneurs as they now face a wide range of financial problems of their own due to the ongoing crisis, said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank.

"But, it is undeniable that the SMEs will have to be protected from the economic fallout in the interest of the country's GDP growth."

One way the government can help them in this dark hour

by offering to pay their interest amount, said Rahman, also an immediate past chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh a forum of managing directors of banks.

"It must only be the regular, upright borrowers who are given this relief -- the habitual defaulters must be left out of this facility, come what may," he added.

Salehuddin Ahmed, a former governor of the central bank, recommended outsourcing the task of separating the good borrowers and entrepreneurs from the bad ones to banks.

"The government should address the issue promptly, or else a large number of local manufacturers will be forced to wrap up their businesses," he added.

Banks do not have any strength to waive the interest as they have to provide interest to depositors

as well, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

The lenders are now burdened with the financial packages declared by the government.

For instance, lenders will not be allowed to realise any instalment from borrowers until June but that has put pressure on their funds.

Besides, the central bank asked mobile financial services not to impose any charge on deposits amounting to Tk 1,000 per day, as a result of which the vendors are losing money.

"The government should be providing funds to banks and MFS vendors. The other countries have also followed the model," said Mansur, also the chairman of Brac Bank.

The authority concern has yet to take any genuine rescue measures: the buck has been passed on to

the banks and the MFS players. "And regrettably, the government has not taken any measure to shield the small entrepreneurs, when they are the one of the driving forces of the economy."

The SMEs generate employment and keeps the economic growth rolling in, said Mansur, also a former official of the International Monetary Fund.

Rahman, Mansur and Ahmed went on to urge the central bank to form a special refinance schemes for the SME sector such that they can get loans at a discounted rate than the existing market rate for a soft landing to this drop in economic activities.

As of September last year, banks and non-bank financial institutions gave out Tk 205,491 crore to SMEs, which is about 20 per cent of their total outstanding loans, according to data from the central bank.

**Flower industry wilting**

SOHEL PARVEZ

If you happen to be in the southwest village Godkhali or its neighbourhood Panisara, you will find there is no dearth of colours from the stretches of rose, tuberose, marigold, gerbera and gladiolus gardens.

But the blooming beauties are now being discarded -- instead of being cherished.

The demand for flowers has screeched to a halt amid the ongoing countrywide shutdown to prevent the spread of the deadly coronavirus that has claimed upwards of 38,000 lives thus far globally, including five in Bangladesh.

The usual scenes of cascading garlands of flowers, busy florists and salesmen attending to flower lovers in the capital's Shahbagh area have been absent since March 26, when the government's movement control order took effect.

"We could sell even during hartals and violent political unrests. But we have never witnessed such a situation," said Md Rafiqul Islam, who has grown gerbera, gladiolus and tuberose on his 6-bigha of land.

The flower industry is only one of the many across the country facing daunting prospects as the Bangladeshi and world economies stagnate because of the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

"It is a highly uncertain situation. Only his Almighty

knows what awaits us ahead," said the 50-year farmer, who has been plucking flowers to protect the plants from pests and disease and to ensure good yields.

On average, Islam cut 2,000 sticks of gerbera daily and threw them away last week. Those would have fetched him Tk 5,000 a day.

Being a perishable item and not easy to preserve, the country's 20,000 flower farmers, including Islam, and traders, are staring at ruins.

Every day, blooms worth Tk 1.5 crore were written off since March 20, according to Babul Proshad, president of Dhaka Ful Baboshaye Kalyan Samity, an association of flower traders.

Flower cultivation first began in Bangladesh in the 80s in Panisara of Jashore district. From there, it spilled over to other districts.

Today, flowers are grown on 2,200-2300 hectares in Bangladesh, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension.

Farmers mainly cultivate nine types of flowers, including marigold, gladiolus, tuberose, rose, gerbera and chrysanthemum.

The actual data on market size is not available and guesstimates of stakeholders vary between Tk 200 crore and Tk 1,500 crore annually.

The pandemic and the accompanying economic woes came at a particularly bad time for the flower industry.



Spring is a busy time of year for florists, and they depend on the revenue coming in from Valentine's Day, national days such as the International Mother Language Day on February 21 and Independence Day on March 26 and the first day of the Bangla calendar year, Pahela Boishakh, on April 14.

"Now, all of us will be in big trouble as there will be no celebrations for Pahela Boishakh," said Fazlur Rahman, a flower farmer in Kaliganj of the western district Jhenaidaha.

Flower cultivation and trade is the main livelihoods for many farmers in Jashore, Chuadanga and Jhenaidaha districts and they will lose the mental and financial capacity to continue cultivation, according to Md Abdur Rahim, president of the Bangladesh Flower Society (BFS).

In the face of closure, Afsar Uddin, who grows flowers in Dhaka's outskirts Savar, furloughed two of his permanent workers.

"There is no other way," he said, adding that he is considering giving the workers nominal wages.

Rahim urged the government to provide support to flower growers.

"Agricultural produce like fruits and vegetables are being sold. But we are shut as flowers are considered non-essential items. The government should provide low-cost loans for us to survive."

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA WEDNESDAY APRIL 1, 2020, CHAITRA 18, 1426 BS

## Averting ventilator crisis could be a game-changer

*Govt should prioritise ventilator import and production*

THE New York governor has rightly said that ventilators are to the coronavirus fight what "missiles were to WWII". Amid criticism of Bangladesh's response to the epidemic, such nuggets of wisdom are an important reminder of what can be done on a priority basis. So far, Bangladesh has been mostly focused on the expansion of testing and treatment services for coronavirus cases, without notable success. But one important aspect that remains still unaddressed is the lack of ventilators, the machines that help ICU patients with breathing. Covid-19, basically a respiratory illness caused by the virus, attacks the patients' lungs; ventilators help them breathe when they are no longer able to breathe on their own, thus increasing their chance of survival. Bangladesh has reportedly 1,250 ventilators—500 in public hospitals and 750 in private ones. That is far fewer than the amount required for a country with more than 16 crore people. According to one estimate, we might need at least 25,000 ventilators in the coming days.

We, therefore, fully support the call by experts to expand the ventilator service urgently. One of the options available to Bangladesh is to get the devices brought in from China, where the number of Covid-19 cases have dropped. Another is to make them locally. The government has already enlisted the service of local tech giant Walton to manufacture them with support from Medtronic. This is a welcome step, one that should be followed by more such initiatives. Intrinsically connected to this is the need to have professionals trained to run the devices properly. The private hospitals can be an important ally in this regard, as they can help develop necessary manpower and also expand the ventilator services by procuring and installing them on their own. While talking to *The Daily Star*, one expert said the government could provide Tk 500 crore in interest-free loans to private hospitals to install around 10,000 ventilators in two months. Such proposals deserve consideration. We need to remember that the coming months are going to be crucial, given the growing threat of a wider communal spread of the coronavirus, and we should encourage such initiatives since the private sector can play a huge role in this fight, as it has done in countries most affected by the virus.

## Launch anti-Covid campaign in Rohingya camps

*Not doing so carries grave risks*

IT is surprising that the Rohingyas have so far been left out of the ambit of effective campaigns against coronavirus. In this context, we fully endorse the call by journalists and NGOs to launch coronavirus awareness campaigns in the Rohingya refugee camps. At this point in time, to have nearly a million people outside the government's virus prevention campaign is strange. While an effective way of preventing the spread of the virus is by maintaining social distance, given the condition of the camps, where the refugees are living in cramped conditions, other measures, like making face masks, soap and water widely available, along with restricted movement, should be implemented.

Another aspect of the effort to contain the spread of the virus is a robust campaign. But unfortunately, given the limited television access because of poor and irregular electric supply, the essential messages of the government campaign are not reaching the Rohingyas. It is essential that the dos and don'ts and vital information regarding coronavirus symptoms, and necessary instructions on prevention of the spread of the virus, get to the Rohingyas. Also, what cannot be overlooked is that, notwithstanding the security needs, the ban on mobile internet facilities also adversely affect the performance of aid workers and other agencies in their coordination and quick response efforts. This situation, we fear, has the potential to affect the lives of refugees, the local communities, and healthcare workers.

And for this, it is essential for the ban on the use of internet in the refugee camps be lifted immediately. Understandably, the ban was imposed with security in mind in September last year, but at a time like this, when the country is addressing the scourge of Covid-19, the situation as it occurs today with regard to the Rohingyas, carries the risk of compounding the problems, both of security and health.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Villages still at high risk

While we are observing on the news and social media how the law enforcement agencies across the nation are monitoring the streets and asking people to stay indoors, it is indeed shocking that many villages, including mine, are least aware about the pandemic. With total disregard for social distancing, the residents, many of whom have returned from the capital and abroad, are spending time as if they are on vacation here. And I have received similar updates from my peers in their villages as well. Nobody seems to be abiding by the rules set out by IEDCR and the government, and when I try to explain the seriousness of the situation to the villagers, they pay no heed. It is shameful that they are behaving in this manner. I am extremely worried about the risky situation here and elsewhere. I believe only with strict military intervention can this be managed. I urge the authorities to pay attention to such vulnerable villages and help curb the carelessness that prevails.

Abdus Salam, Nilphamari

# Covid-19 response: What is still missing?



MANZOOR AHMED

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina has struck a bold and inspirational note, as the leader of the nation must, in her impromptu remarks on March 29 while receiving contributions

to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund to support the fight against the covid-19 pandemic. She listed quite an agenda for a wide range of actions. She had spoken in the same vein in her television speech to the nation on March 25. But are all in her administration, and society at large, hearing her message and gearing themselves up to respond?

The Prime Minister spoke of supporting the vulnerable members of society during this time, referring to social welfare programmes at the district, upazila, union and ward levels to ensure the supply of food and other essential items. She also stressed on the importance of maintaining social distance, while acknowledging the dilemma this creates in terms of livelihoods and food shortages in the absence of employment.

Do we really know where we stand today in respect of the pandemic's incidence of infection, recovery and number of deaths? What can we say about its trajectory, and the time it may take to reach its peak? Does one develop immunity against the disease by being infected, and how long does this last? When and how can the lockdown, social distancing and isolation be eased or further extended and expanded?

It is in the nature of a virulent and new viral zoonosis (diseases passed from animals to humans) that no definitive answers can be given to these questions. Countries with much greater technical capabilities and resources than ours are debating the answers.

Statistics 101 tells us that the numbers given in daily briefings every day by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) are only numbers, which do not provide any epidemiological insight. Since there is no widespread testing based on representative population samples, the number of cases of infection detected and deaths recorded are numbers which cannot be compared to a denominator, the number of potential vulnerable cases, to derive percentages or proportions.

We simply do not have the epidemiological data for infection rates in the population and other rates, such as caseload, morbidity and mortality. Many wealthier countries, notably USA, seem to be in the same boat. In the absence of the epidemiological estimates, the health experts can only speculate about the trajectory and pattern of the curve of the disease, its peak, and the wind-down.

Suggestions have been floated in international media that "herd

immunity"—enough people being exposed to the disease, developing immunity and breaking the cycle of infection—may be the answer. Herd immunity is an epidemiological concept that describes the state where a sufficient number in a population is immune through vaccination or acquiring natural immunity, and the vulnerable minority is then protected.

Experts regard this untenable as a preventive strategy because there is no vaccine yet, and it is not known yet if immunity is developed naturally against Covid-19, and if so, for how long. If immunity is acquired against the virus (a big "if"), it is estimated that at least 70 percent of a population have to be exposed to achieve herd immunity, given its person-to-person transmission

national period of "hibernation."

In all probability, the worse is to come for Bangladesh before it gets better. Intensity and scope of the crisis and uncertainty about the timeline point to the urgency of government actions on a war footing.

Should there not be a cabinet task force to oversee, guide and take policy and strategic decisions on a daily basis? And should this taskforce not be supported by two inter-ministerial technical committees for health and safety and for economic support and relief, each headed by a cabinet member? These bodies would be able to assess the situation, take necessary decisions, and inform and reassure the public in a coordinated, coherent and authoritative way on a daily basis. The attention of

and ward that need food and income support, especially in the informal sector, and this support and relief have to be delivered using existing safety nets and complementing these as needed. Can there be a moratorium on rent and utility charges for slum dwellers and low-income families? Transparency and involvement of community groups, youth and NGOs can help ensure efficiency and honesty in this effort.

Education measures: the school closure has to be prolonged. What can be done to support students, teachers and parents beyond steps initiated?

Treating infected people with compassion: deplorable behaviour towards suspected cases and burial of the dead arise from ignorance and superstition. Safety measures have to be observed, but



An aerial view of the congested Korail slum. With millions living in such slums across the city, a coronavirus outbreak could easily have severe impacts at the community level here.

STAR FILE PHOTO

rate. That is 125 million people for Bangladesh. Imagine the resulting numbers of deaths and sickness.

It is clearly both a health and economic pandemic, as the Prime Minister implied. The consequences of either can be equally devastating and the effects, unfortunately, feed on each other. The ongoing lockdown in Bangladesh has been extended by a week and may have to be extended again.

India, with its 1.3 billion people, has gone into a strict nationwide lockdown for three weeks from March 25, and in all probability this will have to be extended. USA has extended its federal lockdown to the end of April. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan said over the weekend that Japan was now at risk of an explosion of cases, with a spike in new cases in Tokyo, and a state of emergency may be in the offing. Spanish officials said that they have to impose more rigorous restrictions on residents' movements, leading to a

these bodies are needed at least in the following areas.

Medical and health service response: guidelines and rules for medical facilities, public and private, throughout the country, have to be provided in order to serve people in need of care—whether they are affected by covid-19 or other ailments. Medical personnel have to be mobilised, supported and protected and given clear ground rules. Procurement, production and distribution of supplies and protective gear have to be arranged.

Surveillance and testing: there need to be guidelines and rules for testing for diagnosis and surveillance so that reliable epidemiology can be built up. Could the Gonoshasthaya Kendra test, cheap and quick, be supported and used widely, including for national sample surveys? This can help future surveillance and containment strategies that will be needed.

Economic support and relief: lists have to be prepared in each union

surely the virus cannot jump out of the grave to infect people. More has to be done on an awareness and re-assurance campaign.

A major revision of the 2019-20 budget is in order, to redirect allocations and provide economic relief and support targeting of the most vulnerable. Many countries have designed stimulus and relief packages committing 10 percent or more of GDP. The next budget for 2020-21, in addition to a focus on restart and recovery of the economy, must have a contingency plan to continue support and relief, if elements of the crisis persist.

Control rooms have to be set up under the cabinet office and at the district levels. There has to be daily authoritative briefings for the public from the cabinet taskforce, as has been seen in many other countries. We are in a war, which must be won.

Dr Manzoor Ahmed is professor emeritus at Brac University.

# Domestic violence during the time of corona

*Let's not forget the victims*



ARPEETA SHAMS MIZAN

THE Covid-19 pandemic has opened our eyes to many vulnerabilities. With home quarantine proving to be a successful strategy, we are finally catching up and practicing

it. Bangladeshi narratives about home quarantine now discuss how home is the safest place to ensure sanitisation, hygiene and disinfection.

But what if home is where you are most unsafe? While we feel safer with home quarantine, there is one group of people who may suffer very differently and much severely from this social distancing—the victims/survivors of domestic violence and child sexual abuse.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one out of three women in the world experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, making domestic violence "the most widespread but least reported human rights abuse". With covid-19, the risk of abuse has increased. Newsweek reported that America is seeing a rise in child-abuse related injuries, often resulting from children spending more time at home with abusive parents. According to the Deputy Executive Director of United Nations Women, "the very technique we are using to protect people from the virus can perversely impact victims of domestic violence."

The situation is no different in Bangladesh. According to Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA), February 2020 saw a sharp rise in rape. It is not hard to guess that unreported cases of domestic violence will be no exception. Because domestic violence happens at the hands of people

living under the same roof or sharing the same bed as the victim, it is hard to identify and hardest to prove, and these victims are the least visible in society. In the case of domestic abuse, much of it happens at the hand of family members who can abuse, assault, humiliate and torture women and children. Domestic violence can also be verbal, financial, psychological and sexual.

We now need to think carefully about how covid-19 home quarantine can accelerate these risks. Due to the countrywide lockdown and zero mobility, vulnerable women and children are trapped within the confines of their homes with their abusers 24/7. Earlier, they might have been safe for a limited time while the abusers were away for work. But now they are constantly present, with abusers having a stronger ability to control and terrify their victims.

Added to this is the fact that few Bangladeshi men share the domestic workload. With home quarantine, women are facing increased work pressure. If an exhausted wife dares to refuse husband's advances at night, she might risk receiving forced intercourse. And thanks to our colonial laws, such forced sex can't legally be considered marital rape.

Another dangerous effect of long isolation is a mental health crisis. Office going people may face reactive depression from sitting at home, which can lead to stress, frustration and anger. Stressed people often release their frustration on the weaker members of their family—children, wives and elderly parents. Instead of seeking mental health assistance, you create a suffocating environment at home by blaming everyone around you. Victim blaming is a strong weapon of domestic abuse. The abusers may threaten family members by denying necessary amenities or making them feel guilty for falling sick. In the US, cases have been reported where

perpetrators have threatened to throw "disobedient wives" out on the streets so they can catch coronavirus and suffer.

And one can't emphasize enough the risks of child abuse. Home quarantine means children are more available and closer to family members and in Bangladesh, this can include distant relatives living with them. Stressed parents may physically punish their child unduly. Children may be forced to play with these relatives or live-in domestic helpers who might be potential abusers. These children have nowhere to hide or escape, and their abuse won't be immediately identified. The psychological trauma these children would face in that situation is irreversible.

But what makes the risk greatest for children and (many) women is that they have little or zero access to information. Firstly, they may not understand that what's happening to them is domestic violence. Secondly, they may have no money. They may never have taken a rickshaw on their own before. How can they move to safety? An abused victim needing medical support won't know how to find a hospital.

Our social mindset doesn't help either. Many Bangladeshis believe domestic violence is a private affair. Even during normal times, police rarely entertain complaints of domestic violence unless it involves fatal physical injury, dowry claims etc. With the covid-19 crisis, people may even think that talking about domestic violence is a luxury. This severely affects the victims. For male victims, there is the additional stigma of *kapurushotto* (cowardice), preventing adolescent boys and adult men from speaking up. And as hospitals, medical professionals and law enforcement agencies are busy with corona detection and isolation, they may be unable/unwilling to help victims of domestic and sexual abuse.

This can make home quarantine a

double-edged sword—home quarantine increases the violence, but it is also the *only way* to contain the spread of virus. In that case, what can we do to protect the potential victims? USA and Canada have actively acknowledged the increased risks of domestic violence during isolation, and are making continuous announcements about helplines and shelter homes. Bangladesh needs to follow suit.

Print and electronic media can play a big role here. BTV and Bangladesh Betar can give announcements to raise awareness and sensitize people about the harmful effects of family abuse, as well as share information on how to contact the police and one-stop crisis centres via hotlines. The police force should be more responsive at the district and sub-district levels, as well as in the metropolitan areas. Government agencies must be careful not to dismiss complaints of abuse. Television channels can put information on scrolls. Rights based organisations and mosques can raise awareness using loudspeakers. These announcements should be in a language understandable to the general people. Telecommunication companies can send informative bulk SMS to its users. Religious leaders and even social media influencers can use digital platforms to talk about domestic violence. Social media posts mocking women or patronising angry men in isolation should be reported immediately.

During these hard times, we are slowly reviving a part of our psyche that has been asleep for quite some time—thinking about the greater good. Let us not leave anyone behind; whether they are the victims of coronavirus or survivors of domestic or child abuse, or anyone else who may become more vulnerable during this self-quarantine period.

Arpeta Shams Mizan is Assistant Professor of Law at University of Dhaka, and legal analyst (Bangladesh) at iProbono.



COVID-19

# Can this be the war to end all wars?



A CLOSER LOOK  
TASNEEM TAYEB

**W**ARS and epidemics make the perfect bedfellows. Wars create the perfect wombs where murky diseases can gestate and then combust, wiping out entire populations as they spread around the world. While infectious diseases are democratic in nature—they do not discriminate between their victims based on their social or financial status—the worst hit is usually taken by the displaced who are more susceptible to catching the attention of these grim reapers: forced to live in sub-human conditions, often without food, water and access to basic sanitation facilities—malnourished or undernourished, with their immune systems compromised.

According to a study titled, "Conflict and Emerging Infectious Diseases", authors Michelle Gayer, Dominique Legros, Pierre Formenty and Maire A Connolly argue that "Conflict may lead to the displacement of large populations into temporary settlements or camps with overcrowding and rudimentary shelters, inadequate safe water and sanitation, and increased exposure to disease vectors during the acute phase of the emergency. In protracted and post-conflict situations, populations may have high rates of illness and mortality due to breakdown of health systems, flight of trained staff, failure of existing disease control programs, and destroyed infrastructure... These conditions, which are encountered during or after war and conflict, favor emergence of infectious diseases."

At the time of writing, covid-19 has claimed 37,831 lives worldwide, according to Worldometer, and 786,459 people across 199 countries and territories continue to battle this pandemic. As per UNHCR data, there are currently 70.8 million displaced

people around the world, of whom 41.3 million are internally displaced and 25.9 million are refugees, including the 1.1 million Rohingya refugees living in Cox's Bazar.

In view of this reality, the current UN Secretary-General António Guterres' call to stop wars to fight Covid-19 together—"I am calling for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world. It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives"

The area hosts more than three million people, 1.5 of whom are estimated to be displaced, thanks to the nine-year-long bloody civil war.

The long standing war in the country has not only uprooted people; it has significantly destroyed the infrastructure of the country and damaged its public service facilities, including its healthcare system—once considered to be one of the best in the region. And things have gotten worse for the people of Idlib since fresh

especially among those living in camps. "If we face this situation here, I think it will be endless," said Mohamed Twaish, a field coordinator for Relief Experts Association, a humanitarian organisation working in Idlib province, while talking to Betsy Joles for a report published by Vox. According to Joles, "Fear that the virus is already festering has been growing for weeks among humanitarian organisations in Syria's northwest, where the capacity of health care facilities to test and monitor

alleys of war-torn Idlib, the residents can only pray that this time they will be spared the excruciating pain of death, loves lost and dreams of a better life shattered forever.

Only recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has decided to send over 2,000 test kits to Idlib, and it is the least that they can do for the helpless displaced. But the question remains, in an overcrowded area of three million people, where social distancing, let alone isolation is almost impossible, will test kits be sufficient?

The WHO has also suggested that three hospitals with intensive care units have been turned into isolation units equipped with ventilators. They have also mobilised nearly 1,000 healthcare workers and are expecting delivery of protective gear, including 10,000 surgical masks and 500 respirator masks.

With other organisations, including Early Warning and Alert Response Network (EWARN) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) sending more test kits and hygiene packages, the only consolation is that some of these ill-fated Syrians might be saved from the dark clutch of Covid-19, if not all of them. If hospitals in developed countries like the UK and US grapple to get the situation under control, one can only imagine what it would be like in Syria if there is a Covid-19 outbreak.

And then there is the irony of the UN Secretary-General's call to end wars to fight Covid-19 together. As if the world needs a disease to end all these meaningless, futile wars.

But it is amidst fire, fury and follies we live and we die, be it in sparsely planned cities or cramped camps and dark alleys. It is how it is, how it has been, and based on available objective evidence, how it will continue to be. The question: does it have to be, remains just wide-eyed naïveté.

Perhaps we do need a massive jolt to the system to break this cycle of eternal returns after all.

Tasneem Tayeb is a columnist for The Daily Star. Her Twitter handle is: @TayebTasneem.



A Syrian boy poses for a picture last week during an awareness workshop on coronavirus at a camp for displaced people in Atme town in Syria's northwestern Idlib province.

PHOTO: AAREF WATAD/AFP

—comes as no surprise. When a host is infected by a super-spreader like Covid-19, they turn into a mobile carrier of the virus, spreading it among others through various means, especially where distancing or isolation is difficult.

The north-western Syrian province of Idlib, for instance, makes for an ideal breeding for the ravaging Covid-19.

attacks by the Russian-backed Syrian government started from December 2019, in an attempt to retake control of the area from rebel forces.

With nine confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the country and one death, health workers and medical professionals working in Idlib are now more worried than ever about the potential spread of the disease,

suspected coronavirus cases is especially limited."

Caught in the middle of the infighting between Turkey-backed rebels and the Russia-backed Assad regime, and in the middle of nowhere, the prospects of Idlib residents to combat the disease look pretty grim. Amid apprehensions that the disease might already be lurking in the dark

# Homebound: The first eight days

MUSHTAQUE CHOWDHURY

**T**HE country, and the world at large, has changed at an unprecedented pace over the last eight days. All 193 of the UN member countries have reported the existence of Covid-19 within their borders. We remain homebound, along with a third of humanity. No other global crisis has reached so many countries and people in the past, not even the Spanish flu in 1918. It is levelling socioeconomic gaps. Rich, poor, the powerful and the disenfranchised – all are susceptible.

My wife and I decided to give in to the mounting pressure from our children and finally stay home from March 18, 2020—incidentally the day the first Covid-19 related death was announced in Bangladesh. At the risk of sounding insensitive, the first hit for us was in our apartment building. The caretaker left his job without notice. The cleaner became irregular. I decided to take over some of their jobs, including distributing newspapers to different apartments. As a precaution for all involved, we gave paid leave to our help.

Now that we are on our own, I'm letting the inner optimist out and approaching this from a glass half-full perspective. I finally have time to do things that I don't normally do or am not allowed to do. Yesterday, I decided to cook *bhaji* with *shalgom*. This particular winter vegetable is normally used as an ingredient with fish or meat, not as a *bhaji*. My wife appreciated my cooking with a grain of salt—"delicious but it has too much oil." I have re-taken charge of cleaning, which I used to do while abroad. Watching

movies is another popular pastime. Like many others, we re-watched the 2011 hit *Contagion*, which is very similar to what is happening in the world today. I also read Jajabor's epic *Drishtipat* after many decades.

Staying at home and the additional cleaning and apartment duties has not prevented me from my "other work". Many academics and researchers are taking the crisis as an opportunity to engage in research on the pandemic. As part of several virtual working groups, I have had the opportunity to connect with some very insightful people, which is furthering my thinking. Similarly, I am spending considerable time each day on conference calls with colleagues and friends from around the world who are concerned about the crisis and its potential responses. In one such meeting convened by a local group and attended by leading health specialists and some with close connections to the government's Covid-19 responses, it was abundantly clear that a grim future would be inevitable unless effective and decisive steps were taken without any further delay.

The additional time has allowed me to become more socially active on social media platforms as well, where my friends and I keep tabs on each other. I was recently surprised to know that some were still meeting up for breakfast and *addas*. I have recently written about this lacklustre response we are seeing to the requests of "social distancing" and how it remains "foreign" in our culture. Thinking further, I am also disturbed by the lukewarm actions taken by our mosques and the powerful Islamic Foundation in restricting congregations.

When mosques in most Muslim countries including Saudi Arabia have forbidden congregations, we are continuing as if nothing or very little has happened—this can be fatally sloppy, careless and irresponsible. I may not be an authority on this, but wouldn't endangering the lives of your fellow *musalli* go against the grain of Islam? In times like these, the government must effectively lead and look beyond politics to make difficult choices.

*We must also keep in mind our elders. Isolation, especially for them, can be debilitating. I have been trying to do my bit by chatting with elderly relatives and my own teachers. I recently called Professor MG Mostafa, a former Chairman of the Statistics Department of Dhaka University. His wife, also my teacher, passed away many years ago. He is alone in his apartment in Uttara, and I could sense how happy he was to receive such a call in these days of distress and uncertainties.*

Of late, the government has taken a number of positive steps. However, while the country is now in a near "lockdown" condition, why are we not calling it so? The government offices have been given *chhuti*, and to many, as we have seen, this is interpreted as "holiday". In such emergencies, it is always critical to be clear, transparent and decisive—call a spade, a spade! In such situations, it is always the poor

who suffer most, particularly those who live hand-to-mouth and depend on meagre wages. The Prime Minister, in her address to the nation, announced a package of financial assistance for those who would be hard-hit by the crisis. These include an incentive package worth Tk 5000 crore to help the export-oriented sectors. This, as she said emphatically, would be used to pay for workers' wages. She also announced a few other measures for the rural poor. However, it is not clear whether these

a new kit by Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK) was exciting. I started wondering what BRAC was doing. In any previous disasters, be it floods, cyclones, civil strife or refugee crisis, BRAC was always at the frontline. As part of this, BRAC and Channel-i have already initiated a joint communication programme on Covid-19. I understand the new Chairman of BRAC is also planning to convene a (virtual) meeting of leading NGOs to coordinate the response efforts.

The show of voluntarism across the country is also very encouraging. Many civil society groups are active in producing protective gear and creating awareness. I feel very proud that the alumni of my school in Sylhet have been extending such help to those needing them. There are many others like this.

We must also keep in mind our elders. Isolation, especially for them, can be debilitating. I have been trying to do my bit by chatting with elderly relatives and my own teachers. I recently called Professor MG Mostafa, a former Chairman of the Statistics Department of Dhaka University. His wife, also my teacher, passed away many years ago. He is alone in his apartment in Uttara, and I could sense how happy he was to receive such a call in these days of distress and uncertainties.

This is the time to stay at home, but we must remember to not shut all doors, figuratively speaking. We have to stay active and innovative and extend whatever assistance we can to face this unparalleled crisis together.

Mushtaque Chowdhury is adviser and founding Dean of James P. Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**CHINUA ACHEBE**  
(1930-2013)  
Nigerian novelist, poet, professor and critic

*While we do our good works, let us not forget that the real solution lies in a world in which charity will have become unnecessary.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Home run, in slang
- 6 Refers to
- 11 Less than right
- 12 seize by force
- 13 Satchel part
- 14 Singer Mel
- 15 Malleable metal
- 16 Francois's friend
- 18 Writer Anais
- 19 Genesis name
- 20 Scathing review
- 21 Terminus
- 22 Show shame
- 24 Mid-month time
- 25 Agony
- 27 Tennis great
- Arthur
- 29 Patriot's tune

**DOWN**

- 1 Winery worker
- 2 On the go
- 3 Made a fresh start
- 4 Seventh Greek
- 5 letter
- 33 Find a sum
- 34 Quarterback
- Manning
- 35 Ravine
- 36 Hair goo
- 37 Earth color
- 38 Make a speech
- 40 Superior group
- 42 Daughter of
- Lear
- 43 Passover meal
- 44 Skilled
- 45 Canary chow
- 23 Buck's mate
- 24 Bank acct.
- addition
- 26 Infinite
- 27 Soft yarn
- 28 Blackened
- 30 On cloud nine
- 31 Ore workers
- 33 Bond, for one
- 39 Keg need
- 41 Spike of film

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

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

S	A	D	I	E	T	A	M	P	A
I	R	O	N	Y	A	X	I	O	M
S	I	N	C	E	B	E	T	T	Y
T	H	R	I	L	L				
H	A	I	O	D	E	D	A	D	
A	L	K	A	L	I	S	O	L	O
D	O	N	T	L	O	O	K	N	O
S	H	O	E	T	R	I	T	O	N
T	A	W	B	I	D	A	N	Y	
L	E	H	A	R	A	N	K	L	E
A	M	A	Z	E	L	I	M	O	S
P	U	G	E	T	S	P	E	W	S

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott



# Expanding the frontiers of WORK

Home and work have been two separate realms ever since we stopped doing homework assigned from school. Since then, work is work, and home is for unpaid work!

The very concept of working from home has, at times, been confounding—a part of a culture alien to many, an otherworldly experience, but something not at all new. To some, it would not even constitute the definition of “work,” per se. Work, for generations, has meant having a fixed mode, place and structure—clockwork regularity in offices full of tables and later computers, and of course colleagues, alongside the exchanges of smiles, fist-bumps, hi-fives, and all the hustling-bustling-grinding which goes in-between. But still, it is a tried and tested concept, in many parts of the world, especially in the creative fields.

With the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, which has quickly engulfed the entire world, the idea of working from home has suddenly become a necessity. It has forced many companies to rethink their policies and become more flexible.

#### **DIGITISING THE WORKPLACE**

With the recent public health crisis, numerous companies in the country, and around the world, have shifted their day-to-day operations and activities to the confines of the homes of their employees. This has enabled them to create an entire digitised platform of getting messages across and delivering the services within the set period.

Abdullah Bakr, CEO of Jarvis Digital, a digital marketing and advertising agency, says, “Working from home comes with a set of challenges and perks at the same time, as we engage in automated delivery of the services and work in groups.” A cohesive digitised workplace is set up with the use of the air table, a spreadsheet-database cloud-based app, which tracks the progress of the work designated to the members, alongside the regular check-in, instant notifications, and checkouts.

“We start the day with the daily video

conferencing using Google Hangouts to get people in the mood for work, helping to enable a virtual connectivity, through which, employees will feel like they are working in unison,” remarked Abdullah, who took a couple of test trials of remote working with certain segments of the office when the initial news broke about the virus.

What is more fascinating, is the multitude of apps that have become accessible to the wider public in light of the recent events, making it easier to actually execute a home-working environment digitally conjoined to the office space. Google and Microsoft have extended their support by granting free access of Hangouts Meet, and Microsoft Teams as the coverage and scope of the meetings increase. Slack, Flock, Zoom, and Toggle are tools employed for collaborative purposes, with messaging, video conferencing, basic time tracking, and chat options available.

With the basics of a proper Wi-Fi connections set in place, and a functioning PC or laptop, one can easily set up their workstation.

#### **EXPANDING THE SCOPE**

Working from home is no longer relegated to the freelancers and has encompassed a multitude of professionals, allowing the shifting of duties and shuffling of working strategies.

Md Saiful Islam, a lecturer of Computer Science and Engineering from BRAC University, says that doing classes from home is a challenge for teachers and students alike.

“This is a completely new experience for me, with live sessions taken over the Internet with discussion forums, videos, tutorials, and assignments, all of which take place with clockwork precision in line with pre-set class schedules,” he remarked.

Universities have employed a wide variety of options to bring teaching into an online space with the help of specific learning management systems, opening up windows for online discussions as well as options to submit assignments, quizzes, and exams.

Shahriyer Shuvo, the head product designer at Gaze, an artificial intelligence start-up, says that working from home allows a balanced approach to work, as remote guidelines can be set in consultation with the management team paving the way for better time management and resource allocation from his part. Being a student, it also helps him to arrange flexible working hours and make space for both his studies and the job.

Working from home can be chaotic and blissful at the same time. In the office, where there is constant physical monitoring, there is more space for both employers and employees to expand their scope of work by allowing different strategies of work and restructure the stratification of the work processes. Tools like Trello, and Tomates for iDevices allow for the navigation of the restructuring of role and duties with a focus-based approach on the overall management of the firm, with breaks and alarms set in between.

#### **NOT ALWAYS A BED OF ROSES**

A recent graduate working as an operations analyst in an energy company finds the concept of working from home a daunting task, as there is the problem of communication permeating during times of decision making. The lack of hands-on approach at times makes it difficult to understand the workload. Real life meetings allow confidentiality and does not allow the overlapping of personal and professional worlds.

For a sizeable number of people, working from home brings a great number of challenges when it comes to proper and efficient networking due to fluctuations in Internet connectivity, alongside adjusting to the technological prowess of apps and devices. In such cases, having daily video calls becomes a hassle.

To create a more streamlined flow of work, certain firms have kept alternate days of work, allowing certain employees to work within the premises in a given timeslot, balancing the rate of the progress while at the same time, helping employees to relax into their positions. The system of responsibility sharing alternates between the employees.

The mental set-up of working from home without the presence of colleagues remains critical to carving a proper mental state, and thus many firms begin the day with an online meeting. The physical and mental preparation of working from home needs to be taken into stride to make sure the homely feel of a vacation does not become overwhelming and boundaries are set to deter any kind of discrepancies and disturbances when working.

Communication becomes a hassle, particularly when engagement of groups come into question, with more intensive and extensive networking and planning needed to be put in place, perhaps even beforehand, given there is little to no chance of a physical face to face contact.

What was considered to an obscure rarity is now developing and pushing the frontier of work, enabling greater modes of thinking and engagement amongst employees and employers alike. It has also become a necessity for now.

**By Israr Hasan**  
**Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed**

#### **KUNDALINI RISING**

BY SHAZIA OMAR  
Writer, activist and yogini  
[www.shaziaomar.com](http://www.shaziaomar.com)



## Ujjayi Breath to Boost your Immunity During Covid-19

Ujjayi breath — breath of fire — helps us burn away toxins in our system. Prana is the life force, also known as chi, ki, and the Force in various cultures. We inhale ‘prana,’ and to expand our capacity to draw in more life force we practice ‘pranayama,’ or perform breathing techniques designed to increase the flow of prana.

Pranayama is the fourth limb of yoga. We need prana to battle the darkness of the ego and illuminate our conscience for ‘samadhi,’ an eternal state of bliss.

There are numerous pranayama exercises to expand one’s prana. One breath that can be performed to improve prana is called the ‘ujjayi breath,’ meaning the breath of fire, or of victory. The ujjayi breath sounds like the breathing of Darth Vader from Star Wars, or like ocean waves, and is brought about by constricting the back of the throat to make a sound, both during inhaling and exhaling.

To practice the ujjayi breath, try fogging a mirror or glass in your hand. Try to recreate the sound that comes out with your mouth closed but your tongue down, so your mouth cavity is hollow. Practice inhaling and exhaling to a count of four each, with the mouth closed, inside hollow, making the sound. The inhale should be smooth and unhurried. The exhale should be deep and long. This is the ujjayi breath!

Using the ujjayi breath during yoga asanas helps us regulate exercise in terms of length and vigour for each asana, as we want to achieve a rhythm that matches the four-count-breath. The sound helps us stay aware of the movement of the breath so it also serves in strengthening our concentration on the meditative practice of breathing.

Ujjayi breath is both energising and relaxing. Two mindful ujjayi breaths are all it takes to draw you away from the stress of an obsessive thought to the respite of your own space.

The breath should be both ‘dirga’ (long) and ‘suksma’ (smooth), according to the yoga sutras of Patanjali. Remember to enjoy the sensation of the inhale and enjoy the sensation of the exhale, thus creating joy with each breath.

Shazia Omar is a yogini, an activist and an author. [www.shaziaomar.com](http://www.shaziaomar.com)

**Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed**



#### **THE FEARLESS OLIVE** BY REEMA ISLAM



## Food in the time of COVID-19 from around the world

As the world reels under the panic of a pandemic and our homebound lives, interjected with house work, looking after our children and working, turn haywire, it is very important to keep our spirits up in any way we can.



**Teo Asparagus with eggs! Spring comfort food!**

Food of course, is the best way to bring us together, and the joy of eating a well-cooked meal is still one of life’s best pleasures. So, I once again rallied around my friends, and this time, I got a very positive response given that everyone was looking for an option to brighten up their meal times.

I hope our contributions of staying home go a long way in fighting this pandemic. Best wishes and stay safe, everyone!

#### **MOROCCO**

My friend Wafaa Afkir from Morocco sent me some lovely images, but she has been taking these pictures of her food in any case to prove to her mother, in another city, that she is indeed eating well!

Moroccan authorities imposed a nationwide lockdown on 20 March, and citizens are only allowed to get their most urgent jobs done like getting medicines and grocery. However, they are required to carry identification and proof of residence and authorisation from their employer and Moroccan authorities in order to attend work. However, people were already quite aware of the situation and many opted to go into voluntary isolation before the authorities announced the lockdown.

#### **CANADA**

I got two enthusiastic friends from Canada, Nusrat Matin and Tahmid



**Monir bitter gourd**

Huq to share their time in quarantine, but by the looks of it, they seem to be having daily feasts!

Canada’s response has been appreciated by many, not only because Trudeau reached out to his nation on a daily basis, but because they seemed to take it as seriously as was needed. However, on a private note, I see a bright future as amateur chefs for both my friends Tahmid and Nusrat!



**Wafaa kahwa with biscuits**

#### **INDIA**

Closer to home, Albert Barton from Mumbai sent me these tantalising images of simple, yet gourmet worthy food. An avid foodie, Albert seems to be taking the sudden nationwide curfew well, and is trying to bring some life into his meals by making them as colourful as possible.

#### **AUSTRALIA**

Monir Hossain from Australia is a dear friend who is an avid photographer turned promoter of holistic wellbeing and healthy food. He took the bitter gourd or korola from his sister’s vegetable patch a week back and is properly using his time to hone his biriyani-making skills.

“I am already fed up after a week’s self-isolation. Initially, my office was expecting me at work but I had reminded them the need for me to stay back, but now, I hope my gardening, the orchids in my kitchen, and my cooking can keep me positive.”

#### **GREECE**

My friends Theodosia and Jasmine sent pictures of their meal from Greece, and a mixture of nostalgia and happiness surged through me, not just because the images reminded me of Greek food, but because Greece is doing a wonderful job of handling this pandemic. The situation is well under control, with people being allowed to walk their dogs or go running or doing

groceries. However, they need to send a message before leaving their homes about where they are going. The Citizens’ Services Centre has delegated peopl held on balconies around Italy.

“We’re all home safe and trying to stay informed and using this time to realise how our isolation helps to save other’s lives, the more fragile ones specifically. It is also a great time to meditate, spend time with your loved ones and hope for a better future,” she said.



**Andy Oyster mushrooms, fresh garlic, a little onion, and some kind of kale**

#### **USA**

Tanjina Islam is a Bangladeshi singer and a woman of many other talents from the US, among which are her culinary skills, of which I was not aware! She shared a healthy recipe for her vegan koftas, amidst USA’s initial lukewarm response for a lockdown.

#### **Ingredients**

- 2 cans chickpea
- ½ can corn
- 2 baked potatoes
- 2 packs firm tofu
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 packs firm tofu
- 1 tsp cumin power
- 1 tsp coriander powder
- ½ tsp Kashmiri chilli powder, or cayenne pepper
- 2 tsp soya sauce
- 2 tsp corn flour
- 3 tsp Italian bread crumbs
- 3 tsp olive oil salt, to taste

#### **Method**

Simply mix them all, shape them out into balls and in an oiled baking dish, bake them until they seem cooked. Andy Gladish on the other hand took this opportunity to cook himself up a spectacular meal!

“I just made a simple, hearty breakfast and everything is from local farmers, people that I know and trade with, except the goat cheese brie on top of the eggs,” he said.

**Photo courtesy: Reema Islam**

## JOGINDER HAILED BY ICC

Joginder Sharma bowled the key final over when India beat arch-rivals Pakistan in the first Twenty20 World Cup cricket final in 2007, but says he faces more pressure as a police officer making sure people stay home during the coronavirus crisis. The International Cricket Council (ICC) and others have hailed the efforts of the 36-year-old as he hits the streets of India in his role as an officer of the law. "Obviously this contribution is much bigger because people are losing their lives," Sharma told AFP from Hisar in Haryana where he is now a superintendent.



## Local forwards lack belief in their qualities: Colindres

ANISUR RAHMAN



World Cupper Daniel Colindres has become a household name in Bangladesh football after he played a key role in Bashundhara Kings' Bangladesh Premier League triumph in his debut appearance last season.

The Costa Rican was in the spotlight right after he landed here in September 2018 as he came to Bangladesh soon after representing his country in the 2018 FIFA World Cup. The now 35-year-old forward has continued displaying his talent in domestic and international circuit for the Bashundhara Kings.

Since the Bangladesh Premier League has been halted due to the outbreak of coronavirus, Colindres, like other footballers, is staying indoors, at his Bashundhara residence and continuing with a fitness regime.

"I am fine, thank God, I have a daily routine -- I get up, eat breakfast, exercise, bathe, eat lunch, read a little, have coffee in the afternoon, watch TV for a while, talk to my family, have dinner and go to bed," -- this is how Colindres explained his current routine when asked via a team official.

The captain of Bashundhara Kings is following instructions of his team's trainer to stay fit as he works out at the free space of his house. However, he is a bit anxious about his homeland Costa Rica where the number of infections is growing even though none of his family members have yet been infected by the coronavirus.

Last season, Colindres had Marcos Vinicius of Brazil as his strike partner, but this time he is missing a genuine partner upfront at the domestic circuit. At the international circuit, though Colindres found Argentine striker Hernan Barcos as his partner, and the two combined to thrash

Maldivian outfit TC Sports 5-1 in their AFC Cup debut match.

"Barcos is a great player. It is very easy to adapt with his game even for the team because he brings a lot of quality and experience," said Colindres, who was asked whether he is missing Barcos in the league.

"If much, for his qualities and leadership, but we also miss other players like Emon [Babu], Motin [Mia], [Masuk Mia] Zoni," said the 5ft 11inch forward, who scored a brace against Rahmatganj MFS to help Bashundhara Kings clinch the Federation Cup title.

Colindres believes the competition in the Bangladesh Premier League has increased, hence retaining the league title is going to be difficult. He also believes they need to fine-tune things to move up from the sixth position that the team currently lie on the 13-team table.

"We are fighting the top, but we lost last two games, we are three points away from the first-

placed teams and we must improve some details to be on top," said Colindres, who has so far scored four goals in five matches following 11 goals in the league last season.

"I hope I can see Bashundhara Kings as league champions again and fight to win the AFC cup," hoped the Costa Rican, who is happy that the foreign forwards are fulfilling the demand of the club management by scoring goals regularly.

"For foreigners it is good because they [clubs] hire us to give results. As for the local forwards, from my point of view, they lack belief in their qualities," opined the inspiration forward.

"Professionally, it seems to me that I have met expectations, together with the team we have achieved great things and will fight to put Bashundhara Kings in the international eye. Outside of the profession, I have enjoyed my experience in Bangladesh," concluded Colindres.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bashundhara Kings captain Daniel Colindres is maintaining a healthy routine to pass the days at home during these difficult times, allocating time for reading books and sipping coffee, but the Costa Rican World Cupper also takes his fitness quite seriously.

## CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN

## Mental health risks for athletes, experts warn

AFP, Hong Kong

Fear, stress and money worries: coronavirus lockdown is hard for anyone, but athletes are facing extra mental health risks as they go from highly active lifestyles to isolation and boredom, experts warn.

While some household athletes have posted upbeat videos of themselves, the stress caused by the extreme adjustment and uncertain future looks likely to take its toll.

Long-term effects on athletes after the SARS and swine flu outbreaks included anxiety, obsessive hand-washing and fear of getting close to people, Carolyn Broderick, Tennis Australia's chief medical officer, told AFP. But the impact of the current pandemic is unprecedented, with athletes sidelined worldwide.

Those affected range from well-paid superstars such as tennis's Serena Williams to journeyman pros and Olympic hopefuls whose lives have been thrown into turmoil.

Williams admitted that social distancing because of coronavirus had left her feeling "a ton of stress".

"Every little thing makes me crazy.



SERENA WILLIAMS

And by anxiety I mean I'm just on edge. Any time anyone sneezes around me or coughs I get crazy," she said on TikTok.

Concerns have been raised about Australia's swimmers and cricketers, after athletes in both sports suffered well-documented psychological problems in the past.

"The mental health thing, we talked about it in a conference call this week," said Australian men's cricket coach Justin Langer. "Particularly for any of our staff or players who are home alone basically. We have to keep an eye on those guys and girls to make sure they're OK."

## Bundesliga eyes May restart

AFP, Berlin

German Bundesliga clubs on Tuesday approved measures to suspend the season for a further four weeks due to the coronavirus crisis, amid reports that games would resume from the first weekend in May.

German Football League (DFL) directors announced plans last week to extend the current two-week suspension until April 30, a decision approved by Germany's 36 professional clubs in a video conference on Tuesday.

"The board felt a lot of support (from the clubs)," said DFL president Christian Seifert, adding that league was "sticking together".

Games had been halted since mid-March, but hopes are growing that they might resume a month from now.

Earlier Tuesday, Kicker weekly had reported that the DFL now planned to resume the season from the first weekend of May, with games to be played behind closed doors.

## Reminiscence: My first match

*In these times of social distancing, we must be safe while remembering that we do not get too used to the world being at a standstill. We were meant to go watch matches together, agree with a few of our neighbours and disagree with the rest. So, we are taking turns at The Daily Star Sport talking about our first live experience at a sports venue. AL-Amin from Madras, 1995*

For a working journalist who has been in the profession for 30 years, it is very hard to vividly recall his first assignment on a sporting event. It was in December 1995 when I was assigned by The Daily Star to cover the South Asian Federation (SAF) Games, staged in the Indian city of Madras.

It was the first overseas assignment for a TDS reporter and considering the communication and information technology available at that time -- a typewriter was the most prized possession of a reporter and the fax machine was the tool through which to transmit reports at that time -- a journey from Dhaka to the South Indian city was itself an arduous three-day venture with Coromandel Express providing

all their World Cup heroes, including stick-wizards Shabaz Khan and Tahir Zaman.

But from the start to the final whistle it was the vibrant Bangladesh players who captivated the audience with a high-octane brand of hockey that almost stunned the world champions. The match eventually ended at 3-3 thanks to a controversial ruling from Indian umpire Shakil.

Shakil awarded a penalty stroke at the fag end of the game with Bangladesh leading 3-2. The umpire later acknowledged to the devastated Bangladesh players that it was a mistake on his part, which eventually cost Bangladesh a dream final against India.

Twenty-five years have passed since then and I have witnessed some of the finest sporting moments and a few heart-stopping defeats in other fields,



PHOTO COURTESY: MAHABUB HARUN

*In that game Bangladesh's two centre-forwards, Mohammad Sadek and Mahabub Harun, were simply unstoppable. Sadek was mesmerising, his stick-work was breathtaking and his telepathic communication with Harun was amazingly precise.*

## Paine backs Smith for captaincy

AGENCIES, Sydney

A rising crop of young talent will compete with Steve Smith to be Australia's next captain, current skipper Tim Paine said on Tuesday.

Smith captained the side before Paine but was slapped with a two-year leadership ban over his part in the ball tampering scandal during a Test in Cape Town in 2018.

The ban expired this week, prompting renewed speculation that Smith could soon resume the leadership duties.

While 35-year-old Paine has acknowledged he is in the twilight of his career, the wicketkeeper said he was not yet ready to walk away from the game.

He refused to lay out a timetable for his departure, particularly with the uncertainty created by the COVID-19 shutdown, saying only that coach Justin Langer and selectors knew of his plans.

"I know what I'm thinking, in terms of how far I can play on and we're on the same page," he told reporters via video conference.

Paine said he had not spoken with Smith about the captaincy but the 30-year-old batsman would not be the only candidate for the role.

"I haven't had that conversation with Steve, I probably will at some stage no doubt," Paine said.

"It's obviously something that he loves doing ... so if Steve Smith decides that's the way he wants to go, then I will fully support him in trying to do it again."

"We've got a number of guys to choose from who can put their hand up," he added.

"There's Steve Smith, who's done it before, or the people who are developing underneath like a Travis Head or an Alex



**Obviously I've had a few conversations with people. You don't have to be Einstein to realise that it's probably unlikely, particularly in June Australia's tour of Bangladesh. Whether it's cancelled completely or it's pushed back we're not quite sure at the moment.**

**TIM PAINE**  
AUSTRALIA CAPTAIN

Carey -- Marnus Labuschagne and Pat Cummins are other ones.

"We're starting to build some real depth so that when my time's up we've got a number of options."

International cricket, like most other sports, has been shut down while the world battles the pandemic and Paine said it did not take "Einstein" to conclude that Australia's tour of Bangladesh would probably not go ahead in June.

## SHORT CORNER

### Wimbledon to be cancelled, claims German tennis official

The vice-president of the German tennis federation has predicted that Wimbledon will be cancelled on Wednesday and slammed the French Tennis Federation for moving the French Open.

Dirk Hordorff told French sports daily L'Equipe that he expects Wimbledon, scheduled for June 29-July 12, to be scrapped due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"This is not a rumour, they will announce that they are cancelling Wimbledon," he said.

In a move that surprised the tennis world, French Open organisers postponed their tournament and moved it to September 20.

"You could reorganise Roland Garros for September or October, but not Wimbledon, the grass would be too damp," Hordorff said.

Hordorff hit out at FFT president Bernard Giudicelli for his handling of the rescheduling of Roland Garros, the claycourt Grand Slam.

"What president Bernard Giudicelli did is a disgrace, for tennis and for France," Hordorff said.

The controversial switch leaves the French Open starting a week after the US Open finishes, if that event retains its original slot in New York. --AFP

### Ajax cancel Nouri's contract

Ajax Amsterdam have cancelled the contract of Abdelhak Nouri, who suffered serious and permanent brain damage after a heart attack playing for the Dutch club in a pre-season friendly in mid-2017.

Ajax continued to pay his salary but have now formally cancelled the contract, which was due to automatically renew on July 1, the Dutch media reported on Tuesday. The club are in talks with Nouri's family about a future solution for the player, who has been moved to a specially adapted room at his home after years in hospital, the daily De Telegraaf added.

There has been a lengthy dispute between Ajax and Nouri's family, who are looking for a settlement after Ajax admitted providing "inadequate" on-field medical treatment for Nouri after the midfielder collapsed during a friendly against Werder Bremen in July 2017. --REUTERS

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# No way to get home

Several thousand Bangladeshis are stuck in 9 Gulf countries with no flights to Dhaka

RASHIDUL HASAN and JAMIL MAHMUD

Several thousand Bangladeshis have been stranded in nine Middle East countries amid suspension of air communications to and from Dhaka for containing Covid-19 spread over the last two weeks.

Of them, at least 1,000 are stuck in Saudi Arabia; many of them went there to perform Umrah, said Golam Moshfi, Bangladesh ambassador in the Gulf country.

The eight other countries are Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. The Bangladeshis went there for business, travel and other purposes.

Talking to this newspaper over phone on Monday night, Moshfi said as most of these nations have imposed restrictions to different extents including lockdown, it has become very difficult to communicate with the stranded Bangladeshis.

Many of the Bangladeshis must be passing days in hardship as they are running out of money, he also said.

According to worldometers.info, the nine nations saw nearly 5,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus and 73 fatalities as of Monday.

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the authorities in the countries took some unprecedented measures to contain the virus transmission.

They include curfew, countrywide shutdown, ban on commercial passenger flights, closure of land borders,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Some 3,000 passenger boats lying idle on the bank of the Buriganga amid the 10-day countrywide shutdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus. The boatmen, whose only source of income has come to a standstill, are spending days in uncertainty. The photo was taken recently from Telghat area in capital's Keraniganj.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Four die with Covid-19-like symptoms

STAR REPORT

At least four people, including a teenage boy, died after showing Covid-19-like symptoms in four districts yesterday, while three patients exhibiting similar symptoms and fever have been kept in isolation in Chattogram.

Our correspondents from different districts reported on the deaths of people exhibiting Coronavirus-like symptoms and subsequent lockdowns at some places.

In Pirojpur, a 17-year-old boy who sat for the SSC examination this year, died yesterday after suffering with fever and cough for the last three or four days. But he did not go to hospital, said HM Jahurul Islam, Bhandaria upazila health and family planning officer.

The boy suddenly started suffering from bleeding from the mouth and nose at noon and died shortly afterwards, the health officer added.

"The body's samples have been sent to the IEDCR [Institute of Epidemiology, SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

## Three killed in 'gunfights'

STAR REPORT

Three men -- two alleged robbers and a suspected drug dealer -- were killed in "gunfights" with law enforcers in Bagerhat, Dinajpur and Pabna yesterday.

In Bagerhat, Faruque Morol, 35, was killed in a "gunfight" with Rab members in the Sundarbans area.

The man was the ringleader of a robber gang locally known as Faruque Bahini, said Rab.

Col Rawshawul Firoz, commanding officer of Rab-6, said they conducted a raid in the area around 8:00am on information. As soon as they reached there, members of the robber gang opened fire, forcing them to retaliate.

At one point, Faruque sustained bullet injuries. Rushed to the local health complex, doctors declared him dead. Two Rab officials, who also sustained injuries during the "gunfight" received primary treatment, he added.

Contacted, Maloy Mollick, doctor at Mongla Upazila Health Complex, said Rab members brought three men in the morning. One of them was dead and had bullet injuries on his body.

In Dinajpur, Ferdous Fahim, 33, of Birganj upazila, was killed in a "gunfight" with police.

The dead used to smuggle drugs from India and sell it inside Bangladesh, said

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

### 'Peace must be restored'



Bangabandhu addressing a gathering at Jessore Airport on his way to Dhaka from Khulna on April 1, 1972.

APRIL 1, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

#### MAKE OPTIMUM USE OF LAND

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today urges farmers to take to cooperative farming for the optimum use of land and increase agricultural production. Addressing a large crowd at Jessore Airport, Bangabandhu says that all properties now belong to people and the root of exploitation has already been destroyed through revolutionary measures, which include nationalisation. He suggests to the cultivators to pool their capital and start cooperative farming.

Regarding antisocial activities and dacoities in rural areas, the prime minister says that peace will be restored everywhere

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



## A prototype with huge potential

Team led by cousins build ventilator for Covid-19 patients

ZYMA ISLAM

A rough-edged black box with a plastic tube coming out of it, and a small LCD screen -- this could be the lifesaving ventilator for critical Covid-19 patients in the imminent future.

Amid scarcity of ventilators at a time when a possible coronavirus outbreak is looming over the country, a team, led by two cousins -- a doctor and engineer -- have developed the prototype of such a device.

The cousins are Baized Shuvo, chief executive officer of Axion Engineering, and Kazi Shakkher, medical officer at the capital's Rushmono Specialized Hospital.

The team also include Asif Fahad Kingshuk, a student of computer

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## STAY HOME, STAY WELL

### Protect the elderly

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

People over 60 are particularly vulnerable to severe or life-threatening symptoms if infected with coronavirus.

One of the few facts amid the uncertainty swirling around the coronavirus pandemic is: The highest rate of fatalities has been among older people, particularly those with underlying medical conditions. According to figures at worldometers.info, death rates start rising significantly above the age of 50 (1.3 percent in all cases), to 21.9 percent among those aged 80 and over in confirmed cases.

Medical experts say that even if people over 60 in good overall health are infected, they are more likely to exhibit severe, life-threatening symptoms. Keep elder people at a distance even if there is no coronavirus patient in the house, says a health expert.

"A young person can be an asymptomatic carrier but that can be fatal for elderly people. So, keep distance and, if possible, keep them in isolation," says Dr Md Nazmul Hasan, assistant professor of Department of Internal Medicine at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

He suggested it is better to keep aged people in full isolation till the situation improves and if needed elderly people can communicate with other members of the family living in the same house through phone calls.

As people get older, their immune systems weaken, so they are exposed to a greater number of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## Eight more Bangladeshis die in US

Death toll now 31

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 31 Bangladeshis died of Covid-19 in the US as of last night, according to the US authorities.

Of them, seven breathed their last in New York, which is the worst affected state, and one in Michigan in the last 24 hours.

The highest number of deaths -- 27 -- have so far been reported in New York, where a large number of Bangladeshis live.

The hospital authorities of the country confirmed the deaths to local newspapers and Bangladesh journalists living in the US.

Neher Siddique, a Bangladesh journalist residing in New York, told The Daily Star that they had to collect information from the hospitals remotely as the authorities banned all unauthorised entry there.

They are not even

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## Car crash kills 3 in Cumilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

Three people, including a young couple, were killed as a car fell into a roadside ditch in Muradnagar upazila of Cumilla yesterday.

The dead are Saddam Hossain, 27, of Brahmanbaria, his wife Parvin, 23, and the car driver Abdur Rahman, 28, of Noakhali, said police.

Quamuzzaman Talukder, officer-in-charge of Bangara Police Station, said the bodies were handed over to family members and an unnatural death case was filed in this connection.

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#### PRAYER TIMING APRIL 1

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 4-40 12-45 4-45 6-21 7-45  
JAMAT 5-15 1-15 5-00 6-24 8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



Volunteers of Bidyanondo Foundation carrying an elderly woman to Chattogram Medical College Hospital. The homeless woman was lying unconscious on the port city's KB Fazlul Kader road yesterday noon.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Bangladesh eligible for EU GSP

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh will remain an eligible country for the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) as the European Ombudsman has found no maladministration in a case filed over non-compliance of labour rights.

European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly on March 24 said she closed the case after finding no maladministration in it, according to EU website.

The case was filed by the International Trade Union Confederation, the Clean Clothes Campaign and HEC-NYU EU Public Interest Clinic in June 2018.

Rubana Huq, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), yesterday said, "It is a very good news for Bangladesh as we are sometimes blamed for bad practice of labour rights by different quarters."

With this verdict, Bangladesh was again saved from earning a bad reputation of unfair labour practices, the BGMEA chief said in an audio message.

The European Union is the largest export destination of Bangladesh. Being a least developed country, Bangladesh has been enjoying the zero-duty benefit on export to the EU under its GSP since 1971.

With the zero-duty benefit to the EU in force, Bangladesh, eventually became the second largest apparel exporter following China. It now holds 6.4 percent global market share, business analysts say.

According to data from the Export Promotion Bureau, Bangladesh exported garment items worth \$21.13 billion to the EU in 2018-19 fiscal year, up from \$19.62 billion and \$17.75 billion in the previous two fiscal years.

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