



The poor looking down the barrel

Govt's promised support yet to reach many; efforts not well-coordinated

SOHEL PARVEZ

Over a week into the stay-home order across the country, hungry and half-fed faces have started to grow in a huge number.

With their meagre earnings already spent and the shutdown extended further by a week, 5.17 crore people in the informal sector are now staring down the barrel as the government's promised support for the poor and vulnerable failed to reach many of them.

The government allocation and efforts are also short of requirement and less coordinated, find The Daily Star correspondents talking to the people in need of help, and representatives of local government and local administration of nearly three dozen districts.

Take the example of Harun-ur-Rashid, one of around 4,000 transport workers living in areas adjacent to Sonadanga bus terminal in Khulna. He was yet to get any support till Wednesday.

"Where is my allotted 10kg rice?" asked Harun, who feeds a six-member family, after returning empty-handed from the office of a ward councillor.

"No one came to us to give any assistance until now."

Similar complaints and allegations have been common in the capital, port city Chattogram, divisional cities and other parts of the country where day labourers, rickshaw pullers, transport workers and construction workers are going through hard times.

The Daily Star talked to sufferers, and representatives of local government and local administration of nearly three dozen districts, and found that the government allocation of food falls short of requirement.

The workforce in the informal sector accounts for 85 percent of the total employed population of 6.08 crore, according to the Labour Force Survey 2017 by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Informal jobs generally lack basic social or legal protections or employment benefits.

Economists say apart from the poor who make up 20.5 percent of the total population of 16.56 crore, the consequences of the ongoing shutdown would be for informal workers, many of whom represent lower income groups.

According to a rough estimate, based on official data of average household size of 4.2 persons, the Covid-19 crisis has put livelihoods and food security of nearly one crore families at stake.

These families were above the national poverty line before the Covid-19 pandemic caused massive disruption to economic activities in Bangladesh. An increase in the number of poor people will erode the gains in poverty reduction that the country achieved over the last three decades.

Yet, the support from the state coffers has been less than the demand for impoverished people, according to our district correspondents.

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Unable to find work in the almost deserted kitchen market, a porter sits idly under a foot bridge at the capital's Karwan Bazar. Sellers and store keepers taking a nap, left, as there are hardly any shoppers at the market. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON, AMRAN HOSSAIN

Thirteen more Bangladeshis die in NY, New Jersey

Death toll now 50 in the US

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirteen more Bangladeshis died of coronavirus in New York and New Jersey in 15 hours, from 7:00am (NY time) yesterday, according to a local journalist.

So far, at least 50 people died from Covid-19 in the two cities, Zakaria Masud, editor of local weekly Ajjal and former president of Jackson Heights Bangladesh Business Association, told The Daily Star.

Several Bangladeshis Uber and taxi drivers have tested positive, the journalist said when he was asked about the Bangladesh community affected by the virus.

Seeking anonymity, a Bangladesh policeman working for NY Police Department said Bangladeshis living in New York are not taking the lockdown seriously. They are roaming around even if they have no emergency, he said.

According to the New York Times, the number of virus-related deaths in New York was 1,374, till yesterday.

Still jittery, fewer doctors on duty

MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

At least a dozen people with different illnesses died in Dhaka and other places after they were refused treatment by doctors since March 8 when the first case of coronavirus was reported in the country.

Experts said a sense of insecurity caused by the persisting shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) among healthcare professionals should be blamed for the situation.

Besides, the lack of well-prepared facilities for Covid-19 patients left healthcare professionals exposed to the risk of getting infected, they said.

The health ministry on March 25 warned doctors of punishment if they did not treat patients. The ministry ordered doctors to treat patients with Covid-19-like symptoms even if they didn't have the PPEs. The ministry withdrew the notice on March 27 amid widespread criticism.

Doctors have been working sincerely since the government started supplying PPEs to different hospitals across the country, according to representatives of healthcare professionals.

The attendance, however, is still low and the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has no data because it suspended the finger print-based office attendance monitoring recently, insiders said.

Only 15 of 573 government hospitals are sending attendance data to the DGHS, officials said.

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All play, no school, Arhaans bored witless

RASHIDIUL HASAN and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Stuck at home for the past two weeks, Arhaan Habib, a kindergarten student, looks dejected. As he cannot go out amid the nationwide shutdown, he spends most of his time playing with toys and watching YouTube videos on mobile phone. He finds it extremely hard to concentrate on his studies.

The daily life of the seven-and-a-half-year-old boy has changed drastically since the government shut down schools to contain the spread of coronavirus.

"Nothing seems to be going right for my son. How long can you keep a child indoors?" asked Arhaan's mother Priyanka Wasim. The family lives in the capital's East Razabazar.

Priyanka said usually Arhaan wakes up around 6:30am to go to his school. But now that it's closed until April 11, he gets up around the same time only to find he has nothing to do. He loiters around for a while and then gets busy playing either with toys or his parent's mobile phones.

"I try hard, but he just can't concentrate on studies. As all his activities outside home have stopped, he seems sad and bored," Priyanka told this correspondent yesterday.

Like Arhaan, thousands of children are bearing the brunt of the current situation that arose after the coronavirus outbreak, which has apparently thrown their daily routine out of gear.

In such a situation, psychiatrists and psychologists say, if parents fail to handle the situation properly, it may have a negative impact on the children.

They suggested that the guardians should give more time to the children and make a daily routine for them, incorporating time for study, sports and other fun activities, to give them relief from monotony.

All educational institutions were declared closed on March 17.

A TOUGH TIME

"I wish I was a grown-up. At least I could go outside sometimes," said Zairaia Hasan, a grade-I student at Birshreshtha Munshi Abdur Rouf Public College in the capital.

"We are confined in our home and mother keeps telling us about the dos and don'ts all the time," she said, adding, "I really want to go out and play."

Nahid Islam Suravi, who lives with her family in Saheb Bazar area at the capital's Azimpur, said she was going through a

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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC 50,000 dead, 1m infected

Spain sees hope despite soaring deaths; Italy extends lockdown

AGENCIES

The number of new confirmed coronavirus cases crossed the grim milestone of one million and the death toll topped 50,000 yesterday.

The virus claimed thousands more lives in its relentless march across the globe, including nearly 1,000 new deaths in Spain, despite measures putting more than half of the planet on some form of lockdown.

And it continued to wreak havoc on the global economy, with the US announcing that a record 6.65 million workers filed for unemployment benefits last week and Spain reporting its biggest monthly increase in jobless claims ever.

Since emerging in China in December, COVID-19 has infected more than 10,00,000 people -- including at least 500,000 in Europe -- and claimed more than 50,000 lives, according to a tally by AFP from official sources.

The crisis has put enormous strain on national health care systems and on nurses, doctors and other medical staff working in the most difficult of circumstances.

"Every morning before I start work, I make the sign of the cross, and pray that everything will go all right," Ester Piccinini, a 27-year-old nurse at the Humanitas Gavazzeni

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COVID-19 CASES Those with no travel history outnumber returnees

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The number of confirmed cases is higher among people with no travel history than those who have come back from abroad, according to the country's coronavirus tally.

As of yesterday, the country reported 56 positive cases of coronavirus. Of them, only 16 have come back from foreign countries.

The highest numbers of overseas Covid-19 patients came from Italy followed by the USA and Saudi Arabia. Six from Italy, three from the USA and two from Saudi Arabia.

The rest were one each from Germany, Bahrain, India, Kuwait and France, according to data compiled by the Institute

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2 more cases of Covid-19 confirmed

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Another two die after showing symptoms; Govt orders 1,000 tests

STAR REPORT

Two more people tested positive for Covid-19 in the country, taking the total number to 56, the Directorate General of Health Services said yesterday.

At least 1,000 samples from suspected patients will be collected across the country by yesterday, said Habibur Rahman, director of DGHS's management information system.

The two new patients are male. One of them is aged between 30 and 40, and another between 70 and 80, he told the regular press briefing on Covid-19 via video conference from his office in the capital.

"We are investigating to know how they got infected," he added.

Seventy-eight people are now kept in isolation. Samples from 141 suspected patients were tested in the last 24 hours.

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STAY HOME, STAY WELL

PSYCHIATRIST SUGGESTS 5 ways to enjoy the time

TANVEER AHMED, from Sydney

We are not hardwired to be stuck at home for extended periods. We are social, mobile creatures. One of the worst forms of punishment for prisoners is extended periods in solitary confinement. Astronauts speak of the incredible loneliness they feel sitting in cramped quarters for months. A study of those quarantined through SARS in Canada found that almost a quarter started suffering pathological levels of anxiety, depressed mood and even symptoms of traumatic syndromes, such as nightmares.

The march of coronavirus throughout the globe has created the extraordinary situation of almost a quarter of all humanity stuck at home. The situation is especially difficult in countries with dense populations like in Bangladesh, challenged broadband connections and limited public spaces for exercise. Maintaining distance from the most vulnerable groups such as the elderly is also very difficult, given extended families often live together in small spaces.

Here are some ways to improve the experience of being at home for long periods:

1. **Learn something new**

The long periods at home has led to a boom

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