

'No gloves, no masks'

Romania medical workers fear for lives in virus fight

AFP, Bucharest

"We don't have gloves, masks, anything," says one of the medical team at southeastern Romania's RamnicuSarat hospital, one of those designated to treat Covid-19 patients.

"Everything is done on the cheap," protests the staff member, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

It's a complaint echoed in other parts of the country, where doctors and nurses have begun speaking out about what they say are life-threatening shortcomings in the fight against the new coronavirus.

Feeling ill-equipped and scared, some have taken to social media or public TV to voice their concerns; dozens staged protests in the grounds of two hospitals.

Several felt so strongly that they resigned, leaving an already struggling healthcare system in one of the European Union's poorest countries even more vulnerable.

"Nobody instructed us so we're encouraged to learn from videos," the RamnicuSarat medical staff member told AFP.

"We were promised equipment, but when will it arrive?"

The hospital has been placed on a long list of "support units" selected to receive patients who have tested positive for Covid-19.

But the move has sparked fear among local residents that the virus could spread in the area and an online petition has been launched.

All play, no school

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tough time. She finds it extremely difficult to keep her two children indoors.

"They've become restless. They are not paying heed to my words," she said. "They keep asking me what they shall do."

Suravi said she was trying to spend more time with her 10-year-old daughter and six-year-old son to strengthen their mental bond.

Nusrat Tuly, mother of second grader Saiful Islam Babu, said, "My son is now going to bed and waking up late. I might find it difficult to make him habituated to the usual routine once the situation would become normal."

She said her son, 11, was spending a lot of time playing games on mobile phones and watching TV.

Sumanta Mohanta, a private service holder, is also worried about his eight-year-old daughter. He said the girl sometimes seems irritated and remains busy with mobile phones.

EXPERT'S TAKE

Speaking on the matter, Prof Shalahuddin Qusar Biplob, chairman of psychiatry department at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), said in the given situation, children were being barred from social interactions and playing sports and doing other physical activities outside home.

The situation is forcing them into a life full of monotony, he said, adding that out of that monotony, children between 12 and 15 could engage in arguments with their parents and other guardians.

Besides, their dependency on mobile phones and TV can increase as parents tend to allow their children use the devices amid the shutdown to keep them at home.

In such a situation, sleep timing and the daily routine of a child can change, he added.

"If parents fail to handle this situation properly, it may have a negative effect on children. It can create some problems when the situation will become normal."

This situation, however, has some positive aspects, noted Prof Shalahuddin.

There are some children who don't listen to their parents, are not attentive to their studies, and are irregular in school. Parents should utilise this time to develop a stronger bond with them to bring them back on the track, he said.

"Both parents and children have a lot of free time now. Parents can develop a good relationship with their children with their positive behavior."

WHAT GUARDIANS SHOULD DO

Prof Shalahuddin said guardians should keep their children busy by encouraging them to study, play sports and do other fun activities. "Everyone should participate in such indoor activities."

Parents should create a daily routine for children, including these aspects, so that they can replace it with the previous routine when situation would return to normalcy.

Prof Mahjabeen Haque, chairperson of Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology at Dhaka University, said guardians should not spread panic over coronavirus among children.

Rather, the guardians should teach them in an easy way how to adapt and deal with the shutdown, she told The Daily Star.

She said parents should handle this tough situation with calm while dealing with their children. "Guardians should give more time to their children and should not leave them on their own."

Children should be engaged in different household activities so that they stay busy during this leisurely period, she said, adding that it would be beneficial for their mental health.

Parents should not shout at their kids even if they don't listen to them, she added.



5 ways to enjoy the time

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in online courses. Many universities are trying to function entirely digitally. This may be a time to allow greater depth in our family relationships as well as trying to learn something new, such as a musical instrument or delving into an interesting topic that you did not have time for before. Maybe a short course on epidemics and public health? There is potentially much time to read and expand our knowledge base on any number of subjects. There may even be time to acquire entire diplomas or degrees if there are further extensions to lockdown policies.

2. Dress like you are going to work or school

It is important not to laze around at home in clothes wearing which you usually sleep. You are more likely to be productive if you can at least recreate the psychology of being at work. While it may not require a suit or sari, something other than casual clothing may help feel more engaged in productive activity.

My daughters are being schooled through online classes with a teacher present. The school's policy is that they

wear their school uniforms.

3. Organise meetings with others at set times

We are creatures of habit and are comforted by regular routines. One such meeting may involve meeting online with co-workers. The meeting may be formal or casual, merely to discuss mundane aspects of work.

At least once a week, make the meeting more formal with a set agenda and topics for discussion. This will help maintain discipline and morale.

Another such meeting should be organised for social reasons. While video chat and phone calls are critical to maintain contact with our friends and family, it is group socialising that is most hurt by our current circumstances. We have to be innovative with technology to coordinate such contact. All around the world artists and musicians are organising concerts or gatherings online. For Bangladeshis, it might be time to organise the online dawat dinner party equipped with adda and biryani.

Much like Europe, those skilled at singing or performance should perhaps



engage in performing from their balconies occasionally... but please only the talented ones.

4. Limit overeating

In times of stress a common way to cope is to eat sweet or fatty foods. This is known as comfort eating and is a common psychological cause for obesity. Bangladeshis already have among the sweetest teeth in the world due to our love of mishti. While it is understandable that eating tasty food makes us feel better in such challenging times, it is also important that it does not lead to a situation where we forgo our physical health.

5. Exercise to stay healthy

One of the big challenges of trying to remain physically healthy is to maintain regular exercise. This is already difficult in big cities like Dhaka or Chattogram where there are few public parks and walking spaces are limited. Many are taking to online exercise classes in their living rooms. A similarity Bangladesh has to places like Italy or Spain is that there are often accessible rooftop areas.

News pictures in Europe have shown people skipping or jogging on their

rooftops, being careful to maintain social distancing of course. A Frenchman in Paris even ran a marathon going back and forth on his seven-metre balcony. While we don't need to run marathons, this kind of exercise is feasible and recommended.

Other important strategies to minimise anxiety is keeping up to date with trustworthy information and impart this to the children. It is important to inform our loved ones that the risks are overall low if we maintain good hygiene and keep our social distance, around two metres from people other than those we live with. Conspiracy theories should be avoided as they flourish in times like these when there is a real threat, but this can be minimised through simple, factual information.

Anxiety is worse when we experience it as isolated individuals. We have never been more collectively united in our sense of threat and being stuck at home. This is currently our most important psychological resource.

The writer is a Bangladesh-born psychiatrist based in Sydney.

The poor looking down the barrel

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And amid a cry for food, instances of fraud were found.

Some unknown people distributed slips with the mobile numbers of Zila Parishad (District Council) Member Abul Bashar and Municipality Councillor Jesmin Akhter among needy people in Manikganj, saying food would be distributed among the poor. Dozens went to the spot on Wednesday to get aid but returned empty-handed.

In another case, police arrested a dealer of the food department for selling 1.2 tonnes of rice meant for a government programme in Satkhira's Asashuni area.

Until yesterday, the disaster management and relief ministry gave 48,000 tonnes of rice and Tk 16 crore to local administration, city corporations and municipalities all over the country.

It asked local administration and local government to distribute food and cash among the poor especially beggars, day labourers, rickshaw-pullers, transport and restaurant workers, hawkers and roadside tea sellers.

But there have been complaints of bias and misallocation.

"I have not yet got any support even though I have seen relatively better-off people getting rice," said Khademul Islam, a rickshaw-puller at Chirirbandar in Dinajpur.

Akram, another rickshaw-puller in the capital's Rayerbazar area, said rice was given mainly to supporters and neighbours of the ward councillor in his area.

Similar complaints were made by rickshaw-puller Habibur Rahman in Mymensingh and slum dwellers in Rajshahi.

In Rajshahi city, most of the 39,077 people in 105 slums were yet to receive government relief.

According to a research of an NGO, some 70 percent of the slum population in the city are out of social safety net.

In Gaibandha's Kuamara, Madarpur and Joyrupara villages, around 1,200 Santal and Bangalee families, most of whom now don't have any work, were still waiting for government help.

50,000 dead, 1m infected

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hospital in Bergamo, northern Italy, told AFP.

"It's not really for myself, I'm not really worried about me, since I'm so protected. But I hope everything will be all right for my patients."

Europe has been at the centre of the crisis for weeks, with at least 34,000 now dead, but there have been signs the epidemic could be approaching its peak.

Spain yesterday said it had suffered a record 950 deaths in 24 hours, bringing its total number of fatalities to 10,003.

The number of confirmed Spanish

cases passed the 110,000 mark, the government said, although the rates of both new infections and deaths continued a downward trend.

"The data show the curve has stabilised" and the epidemic has entered a "slowdown" phase, Health Minister Salvador Illa said.

Italy has also seen its infection rates slow and eyes will now be on Britain and France, which both reported their highest daily death tolls on Wednesday.

The virus has chiefly affected the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions, but recent cases have highlighted that it can kill people

of all ages. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, himself in isolation after testing positive, announced plans for a massive increase in virus testing after it emerged that just 2,000 of hundreds of thousands of staff in the state-run National Health Service (NHS) had been tested.

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin extended a period of paid non-working days until the end of April as the number of confirmed cases jumped by more than a quarter to 3,548, with 30 deaths.

Most of the Russian population is on lockdown, with Moscow in

community organisations are critical for informal workers and their families to survive this horrific health shock.

"Such measures must go beyond targeting the very poor and the unemployed to include workers in vulnerable occupations. The government has announced free food, medicine and housing for the poor. It will be critical to make sure these reach the working classes, the urban poor and migrant laborers who make the economy tick in normal times."

"The best way to find practical and appropriate interventions is for national and local leaders and decision-makers to work together on a coordinated disaster response involving grassroots community organisations and associations," he noted.

Some 55.5 percent or 8.80 crore of the country's population having daily income from \$1.90 to \$3.8 belong to the vulnerable group, Research Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue Khondaker Golam Moazzem said, citing a World Bank estimate.

"This section of population who had a reliable source of income will be more or less affected because of lack of jobs and income. Moreover, their limited savings provide less risk-coping capacity under a situation of absence of job or income for a prolonged period due to coronavirus-related shutdown."

"Economic condition of this section of people, in general, will deteriorate, and a section of them will fall below the poverty line unless they are protected," he said.

(The Daily Star senior staff correspondent Helemul Alam and correspondents from Manikganj, Mymensingh, Kishoreganj, Jamalpur, Netrakona, Sherpur, Tangail, Sylhet, Habiganj, Sunamganj, Moulvibazar, Chattogram, Noakhali, Rajshahi, Bogura, Gaibandha, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Pabna, Thakurgaon, Chapainawabganj, Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jashore, Patuakhali, Barisal, Bhola, Jhalakathi and Pirojpur contributed to this report)

particular facing tough isolation rules. Thailand became the latest country to impose strict measures with the introduction of a curfew from today, pushing the number of people in confinement to 3.9 billion, or half the world's population.

The United States, which now accounts for almost a quarter of reported global infections, saw its death toll pass 5,000 by the early hours of yesterday, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

Among the latest known US fatalities was a six-week-old baby who was taken to a Connecticut hospital late last week.

2 more cases

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Habibur said the tests would be done by today.

He added that they were trying to increase the number of tests.

The move came as health experts have been stressing the need for more tests to assess the situation as they fear the number of infected people could be higher as many carriers of the virus could be off the radar due to limited testing.

Around 1,900 tests were done in the country from late January until yesterday.

Meanwhile, two people died after showing Covid-19-like symptoms in Sunamganj and Laxmipur since Wednesday night, while multiple houses have been locked down in different districts to slow down the transmission of the deadly virus.

In Sunamganj, a 49-year-old Oman returnee died at home in Dowerabazar upazila yesterday.

He returned from Oman on March 17 and completed his 14 day's home quarantine on March 31, said Shamsuddin Ahmed, Sunamganj civil surgeon.

He was suffering from pain in stomach since early yesterday. A quack, during a home visit, gave him medicine for stomachache around 7:00am. Later, he breathed his last around 10:00am, said the civil surgeon.

His samples were sent to IEDCR for tests, and he was buried following the WHO protocol, he added.

Following the death, the victim's house and nine other adjacent houses have been put under lockdown, and members of these families have been asked to stay indoors, said Sonia Sultana, Dowerabazar upazila nirbahi officer.

A man, who was in home quarantine, perished at Dalal Bazar in Laxmipur Sadar upazila on Wednesday night. Following his death, 15 houses, adjacent to the deceased's home, were isolated by the local administration yesterday.

The victim, 70, was suffering from fever, cough, and sore throat for the last couple of days. He died around 8:00pm on Wednesday, said Nizam Uddin, upazila health and family planning officer.

An Italy returnee recently visited his home. So, it is suspected that he contracted after coming in contact with the returnee, he said.

His samples will be sent to IEDCR for tests, said Abdul Gaffar, civil surgeon of Laxmipur.

In another development, Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID) in Chattogram tested 13 samples in the last 24 hours till yesterday afternoon, and found no Covid-19 cases, said Sheikh Fazle Rabbi, Chattogram civil surgeon.

The BITID tested 55 samples since March 25, and the results were negative, he said.

A suspected patient was undergoing treatment in the isolation unit of a hospital in Chattogram, he said.

In Cumilla's Monohorganj, the local administration yesterday isolated a house in Kharkharia village after a man of the house showed Covid-19-like symptoms. His samples were sent to IEDCR for tests.

A 35-year-old man, who died with fever in Tangail's Madhupur on Tuesday, tasted negative for coronavirus.

Our correspondents from Sylhet, Noakhali, Chattogram, Tangail, and Cumilla contributed to this report.

Those with

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of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

Officials said though it is not conclusive but the highly contagious virus spread in the country through overseas travellers. People who came in close contact with them were infected most.

Dr ASM Alamgir, principle scientific officer of IEDCR, said, "Basically, people who came into close contact with the travellers were infected. For example, we got six coronavirus positive patients from a single family. That's why non-travellers are getting infected more."

The first case of coronavirus in Bangladesh was identified on March 8 and till yesterday a total of 56 patients were identified, while six died.

Analysing the identified cases, it was seen that people aged between 31-40 years are the worst victims of the infection, as 14 infected people were in this age bracket. The next most affected age group is 41-50 years.

Out of 56 corona positive patients, 32 patients do not have any comorbidity, which means the risk of death is very low. But when it comes to fatality, all the Covid-19 patients are aged above 60, according to the data.

It has been well-publicised that Covid-19 discriminates by age and by underlying health conditions.

But it has become increasingly apparent that it also discriminates by sex, with men more likely to test positive and more likely to die from the disease.

The trend was first seen in China, where one analysis found a fatality rate of 2.8% in men compared to 1.7% in women.

Since then, the pattern has been mirrored in France, Germany, Iran, Italy, South Korea and Spain.

In Italy, men have accounted for 71% of deaths and in Spain, data released on Thursday suggests twice as many men as women have died.

The picture is also same in Bangladesh, out of 56 confirmed patients, 34 were male and the rest are female. Four deaths of coronavirus were of male patients, while two were of female patients.