



The Daily Star



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WASIM BIN HABIB and MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

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Experts attributed the rise in cases to the availability of testing facilities, but pointed out that it might still not be the whole picture.

The authorities were testing only those who were showing symptoms, they said, adding that asymptomatic cases from different areas should also be tested.

"Although the number of tests has increased, it's still not adequate. The authorities are still not collecting samples from across the country," Ridwanur Rahman, a medicine and infectious disease specialist, told The Daily Star.

Currently, coronavirus tests in Bangladesh is concentrated in five clusters. "Given the number of test samples, it's not possible to say that the transmission is limited to clusters only. The more tests we conduct, the more we will be able to understand the extent of the transmission," he told The Daily Star.

The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control, and Research (IEDCR) started testing suspected cases on January 28, at a time when the coronavirus was taking a toll on China.

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COVID-19 SYMPTOMS 10 more die in 7 districts

STAR REPORT

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Health officials of respective districts said they collected samples of the victims to test whether they were infected with Coronavirus.

In Narayanganj, a 30-year-old man died of fever, cough, cold and breathing issues at his residence in the town's Deobhoga area early yesterday. The sample collected from his body was sent to IEDCR for tests.

Besides, a 55-year-old man of Chashara area in Narayanganj died at a hospital in Dhaka early yesterday. He was tested positive for Covid-19.

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Incentives for doctors, other health staff

Announces PM, blasts those evading their responsibilities

UNB, Dhaka

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"I want to reward those who are directly engaged in the fight against Covid-19 since March," she said.

The PM was addressing the public representatives and officials from 15 districts of Chattogram and Sylhet divisions through videoconferencing from the Gono Bhaban.

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Mentioning that April is a crucial month regarding the Covid-19 outbreak, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said anybody with symptoms of coronavirus infection must see a doctor and must not hide symptoms.

"Please don't conceal the disease and you may infect others if you hide it and it's not a matter of shame ... we've made all kinds of arrangements for the treatment and we've also taken steps for protecting those who will provide treatment to the Covid-19 patients," she said.

She said this while discussing the outbreak with public representatives and officials of the 15 districts of Chattogram and Sylhet divisions via video conference from the Gono Bhaban.

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China sees no Covid-19 deaths for first time

Reports drop in new cases; UK PM stable in ICU; Japan declares emergency

AGENCIES

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The upheaval of Johnson's personal battle with the virus has shaken the government just as the UK enters what scientists say will be the deadliest phase of the pandemic, which has killed 5,373 people in Britain and 70,000 worldwide.

In the mainland China, the National Health Commission said yesterday it had 32 confirmed cases, down from 39 on Monday. For the first time since the commission

began publishing nationwide data in late January, Hubei's provincial capital of Wuhan saw no new deaths, joining the rest of mainland China, which has recorded none since March 31.

Wuhan, a city of 11 million that reported only two new infections in the past fortnight is due to allow residents to leave the city today, for the first time since it was locked down on January 23 to curb the spread of the virus.

With mainland China well past February's peak of infections, authorities have turned their attention to imported cases and asymptomatic patients, who show no symptoms but can still pass on the virus.

Total infections in mainland China stood at 81,740 on Monday with 3,331 deaths, the commission said. It reported 30 new asymptomatic cases, nine involving incoming travellers. Of the new asymptomatic cases, 18 were in Hubei.

By the end of Monday, 1,033 asymptomatic patients were under medical observation.

TIGHTER LAND BORDERS
Overseas arrivals made up all 32 of the new cases with symptoms, down from 38 a day

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Blood banks may run dry

Voluntary organisations see sharp fall in donation amid virus outbreak

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and RASHIDUL HASAN

The blood donations different voluntary organisations and blood banks receive have decreased sharply amid the outbreak of novel coronavirus, raising fears that many patients in need would not get the blood.

With the Ramadan starting late this month, when donations usually dip, getting blood for thalassemia and cancer patients and those requiring regular dialysis would be challenging if the shutdown continued for a long time, the organisations said.

The organisations requested eligible people to donate blood and save lives.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, Bangladesh needs between 10 and 11 lakh bags of blood every year.

Voluntary organisations deliver around 30 percent of the total demand while the rest comes from direct donations, Sheikh Daud Adnan, programme manager of Hospital Services Management of DGHS, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BRCS), Quantum Foundation, Sandhani, Badhan, and Police Blood Bank are among the prominent voluntary blood donors' organisations and banks.

Daud said they collected 8.38 lakh bags last year directly from donors at different hospitals and different voluntary organisations. This does not include blood collected by different army hospitals and other blood banks.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

TOURISM SECTOR Operators incur loss of Tk 1,500cr

RASHIDUL HASAN

Covid-19 related loss to the country's tour operators in the last three months has been around Tk 1500 crore and is likely to shoot up to Tk 6000 crore by the end of this year, said Tour Operator Association of Bangladesh (Toab).

The estimates were presented yesterday in a report titled "Impacts on Bangladesh Tourism and TOAB due to COVID-19", which was later sent to the Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB).

Toab, a platform of around 700 tour operators of the country, also revealed that they have already been forced to cut 5000 jobs in the last three months since January.

The report was prepared on the basis of a questionnaire answered by its members regarding inbound, outbound and domestic tour package losses, office rent expenses, staff salaries and other expenses.

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Cargo boats lie idle on the Balu river in Purbachal area on the outskirts of the capital yesterday as the country is on shutdown over coronavirus. The vessels are used to carry sand to different areas.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

BANGABANDHU KILLING

Convicted killer held, sent to jail

He was holed up in Kolkata for 23 years, got back home last month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hours after his arrest, a Dhaka court yesterday sent Capt Abdul Majed, convicted killer of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj.

A team of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police detained him from the capital's Mirpur, CTTC chief Monirul Islam told The Daily Star.

Hemayet Uddin Khan, assistant public prosecutor of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka, told The Daily Star, "Majed returned to the country on March 15 or 16 from Kolkata. He claimed that he had been hiding there for about 23 years."

The lawyer talked to Majed before the court proceedings began.

A CTTC high official, requesting anonymity, said during primary interrogation, Majed, the self-declared killer of Bangabandhu, told them that after returning home, he stayed in different houses, but had communications with his family.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate of Dhaka AM Zulfikar Hayat sent him to jail after he was produced before the court.

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TRANQUILLITY.. Amidst the ravages of a virtual lockdown, a semblance of serenity has come upon the streets of Dhaka. The pandemonium of traffic, air pollution and twenty million people pushing and shoving ahead of one another has been replaced with an unfamiliar stillness, with the rustling of fallen leaves blowing in the wind often the only whisper on the once-chaotic thoroughfares. The photo was taken recently from in front of the High Court premises.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Help Bangladesh meet demand for ventilators' during pandemic

Save the Children calls for int'l assistance

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Save the Children has made an urgent call for international assistance to help Bangladesh meet a surge in demand for ventilator machines to cope with the Covid-19 outbreak, and to help avert a humanitarian disaster in the country.

The call comes at a time when a total of 164 confirmed coronavirus cases have been reported in the country, including 17 deaths, raising fears that the number would go up in the coming days.

In a statement, Save the Children Australia yesterday said most of the country's intensive care beds and ventilators are installed at hospitals in major urban centres including the capital Dhaka, making it difficult for remote communities to access those.

There are reportedly 1,769 ventilators in Bangladesh at this moment or in the pipeline, which means an average of

one ventilator available for every 93,273 persons.

The international rights organisation also expressed concerns for the estimated 3.3 million people who live in the southwestern district of Cox's Bazar, one million of whom are Rohingya refugees living in cramped conditions with limited access to hygiene and health facilities.

"The acute scarcity of ventilators in the district means lives will be lost when Covid-19 starts to spread more widely in the community," it said.

Save the Children is calling for a single global plan to help confront one of the biggest threats to global health and security in modern times, the statement said.

"This plan must be underpinned by debt relief, increased financing for public health, liquidity and safety nets for the most vulnerable, and effective coordination.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Urge anti-tobacco organisations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty anti-tobacco organisations yesterday urged the government to temporarily ban the sale of cigarettes during the coronavirus pandemic.

In a press release they demanded the withdrawal of a directive on cigarette sale and manufacturing which was issued by Ministry of Industries (MoI) recently.

"Two multinational tobacco companies have been allowed to continue cigarette manufacturing, marketing and purchasing tobacco leaves amid the worsening pandemic situation," said the press release. They claimed that this decision will undoubtedly create frustration among the public.

Anti-tobacco organisations said, after World Health Organization (WHO) expressed concern that smokers are likely to be more vulnerable to Covid-19, South Africa imposed ban on the sale of cigarettes and alcohol. In the Philippines, one local government has temporarily banned cigarette sales.

"In Bangladesh, 37.8 million adults use tobacco and 41 million people fall victim to secondhand smoke in their own homes. They are all currently at grave risk of severe

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

'Dial 333 for food assistance'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has launched a national hotline, 333, for providing humanitarian assistance and food to the needy during the nationwide shutdown amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The service was launched on April 5. The hotline has already received over 5,000 calls in the last two days, said Anir Chowdhury, policy adviser to the Access to Information (a2i) Programme of the Prime Minister's Office.

He made the comments while attending an online discussion, "E-commerce calls in the service of humanity", organised by the E-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (e-CAB) yesterday to celebrate E-commerce Day.

Earlier, the government used the short code to disseminate necessary information among people.

"After the inception of the short code, we began receiving calls from people who had no food. Immediately, the calls were transferred to the respective upazila nirbahi officers who took immediate steps to send them relief," said Chowdhury.

Without any publicity, the short code

is getting huge response while local administrations are addressing the callers' needs, he said.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, Post and Telecommunication Minister Mustafa Jabbar, ICT secretary NM Zeaul Alam, among others, also took part in yesterday's discussion.

"We are in a tough situation in terms of running trade and commerce as coronavirus has put a restriction on everything. E-commerce can play a vital role in this regard," said the commerce minister.

Meanwhile, the Access to Information (a2i) programme under the ICT division has identified 3.70 lakh unique callers who have queried on different hotline numbers about Covid-19 and can use the data to find out how many people are at risk, said Anir Chowdhury, at a press conference on April 2.

In the last couple of weeks, people have called either 333, 16263 or relied on the government's *3332# hotlines to know about the coronavirus and now the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) is analysing the data gained,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Anchored to an unknown port



PHOTO: TITU DAS

Kalu passed his days content from the money he made selling bottled water at Barishal Launch Ghat. But just like everything else, the novel coronavirus changed this too. Now the boy spends most of his time sitting around the ghat.

SUSHANTA GHOSH

His Friday mornings are spent looking at the Kirtankhola river, sitting along Barishal Launch Ghat pontoon, waiting for launches to arrive, with a weariness on his face. The moment one arrives, he will hop on-board or wait near the exit to sell water bottles to passengers.

Before the coronavirus pandemic hit, selling water would suffice for him to get through the day. Back during normal times, he would have no time to sit on the pontoon as launches kept arriving and departing all day.

His name is Kalu; just Kalu, nothing before or after. He looks like he's 10 to 12 years of age. This guess is all that this correspondent could muster, for the boy has no idea about the time or place of his birth.

Kalu could only vaguely offer some details of his parents. His mother had died several years ago and the last time they saw each other, his father was a rickshaw-puller in Brahmanbaria.

The boy made his way to the banks of Kirtankhola around a year ago, and somewhat completely by chance. One day, a friend wanted to go to Dhaka's Sadarghat from Brahmanbaria and Kalu just went along with him. From there, they boarded a Barishal-bound launch and that was that.

From then, he has been living at the ghat -- no house, no address, nothing. "I live here and sleep on the pontoon," Kalu said. Anyone who comes to the

ghat regularly has probably seen Kalu going up and down the place all day.

"What about food?" this

correspondent asked.

"If I get food, I eat. If not, I don't," Kalu answered.

Asked about his father Kalu said he has no information on him but knows that he's not looking for him.

Somewhat bizarrely, the boy who sleeps on a pontoon has somehow made a name for himself as a cook among his peers. Sometimes, he will cook whatever he can and share it with his fellows at the ghat. Though the menu may not be full of delicacies, the occasions surely bring some joy to the children from nowhere.

And Kalu likes living like this too. He boldly told this correspondent about his love for the river, launches and how he would rather not be anywhere else.

Though he doesn't know letters, he knows the names of all the launches and their routes -- a little out of necessity, and a little out of affection.

"I want to stay here -- it makes me happy," he said, somewhat emphatically.

This correspondent could only make the time to talk to Kalu, and look at all the stories that came out of this one conversation.

With around 200 street children living at the launch ghat, imagine how many more stories wander through the place every day.

Ctg General Hospital gets 10 ventilators, ICU beds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

With the coronavirus situation taking a turn for the worse in the country, a sigh of relief has come to port city residents, as Chattogram General Hospital (CGH), the oldest and second-largest government hospital in the city, is getting ready to open an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) soon.

Authorities of the hospital received 10 ventilators and 10 ICU beds from the health ministry yesterday afternoon.

CGH is one of three hospitals in Chattogram that have been designated by the government for treating Covid-19 patients, and a 100-bed isolation ward has been opened at the hospital. A confirmed coronavirus-positive patient has been undergoing treatment at the hospital since Thursday.

"A technical team from Dhaka would come to the hospital soon to set up the instruments and logistic facilities including central oxygen supply system and negative air pressure," Dr Asim Kumar Nath, superintendent of CGH, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mamunur Rashid, an associate professor of Clinical Tropical Medicine at Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID), told The Daily Star that most Covid-19 patients die due to respiratory failure, and a hospital designated for treating such patients should have ICU facility.

Among the government hospitals in Chattogram, at present only Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) has a 12-bed ICU.

Prof Dr Masood Ahmed, former head of ICU at CMCH, told this newspaper that an ICU in a government hospital

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A cow quenches his thirst from a makeshift water tank, originally meant for handwashing. The photo was taken at Barishal city's Sadar Road recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

TENURE OF LIFE IMPRISONMENT

Over 5,000 prisoners' fate in the balance

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Around 5,000 prisoners, who have been convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment, are yet to know how long they will have to serve in jails, as the Supreme Court has not delivered its verdict on the long pending review petition involving the dispute over the tenure of life imprisonment.

The dispute has been created after a bench of the SC's Appellate Division headed by the then Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha in a verdict on February 14, 2017 had ruled that life imprisonment means jail sentence until natural death of the convict.

But Ataur Mridha, a prisoner whose death sentence was commuted by the SC to life imprisonment, challenged the apex court verdict delivered by Justice Sinha-led bench through filing a review petition with the same court.

In the review petition, he said under Section 57 of the Penal Code, life sentence refers to 30 years' prison term, which becomes 22.5 years after the seven-and-a-half years' remission.

On July 11 last year, a seven-member

bench of Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain concluded hearing arguments on the review petition of Mridha, and said that it will deliver its verdict any day on the matter.

The same day, the apex court bench kept the review petition as "curia advisari vult", meaning the verdict will be delivered any day.

The Appellate Division bench is yet to deliver its verdict on the review petition. Meantime, one of the seven judges of the bench has retired.

Contacted, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star on March 30 that the SC has not yet delivered its judgement on the petition relating to the dispute over the meaning and tenure of a convict's life imprisonment.

"I had argued before the Appellate Division that the life imprisonment means the imprisonment till rest of life of such a convict.

The court will decide whether it will deliver the verdict and then it will be known how long prisoners, who have been convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment, will have to serve in jails," he said.

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PREVENTING SPREAD OF COVID-19

Youths leading the fight in Ctg

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Ctg

As life has almost come to a halt due to shutdowns triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, lower income people across the country are left to languish.

In such dire circumstances, several youth organisations in Chattogram are coming forward like rays of hope. They are raising funds, running awareness programmes and disinfecting poverty-stricken areas to help out those in need as much as they can.

The activities are being carried out all across port city. For example, distribution of relief and hygiene items by youth organisations has been seen at Kazir Dewri, Alonkar Mor, Agrabad, Bakalia and Bayazid areas.

Sajid Kabir Saji, an organiser of youth platform "SomeWhereInEarth", said the organisation made 1,000 hand sanitiser bottles and masks for lower income groups to help them stay safe from the virus.

"We distributed these items over the last three days (near the end of March) and tried to raise awareness over the risk of going outside unless it's absolutely necessary," he said.

Amin Munna, a social worker who has been carrying out disinfection work along with other volunteers, said



Youths spraying disinfectant in port city's Bakalia area.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

he and 40 others have joined hands to sanitise their Dakshin Madarsa area by spraying antivirus liquid daily.

What's more heartening is that the equipment that the band of youth are using for the disinfection work are provided by locals, who lent them their mobile irrigation machines. Munna and team use the machines to spray antivirus liquid made of bleaching powder all over the locality.

Other than them, at least 50 other youths were seen disinfecting streets and vehicles across Bakalia, Rahattarpul, Chawkbazar and Boro Mia Masjid areas by spraying similar kinds of chemical solutions.

Md Munir Uddin Chowdhury, organiser of the initiative, said they were disinfecting one area each day and handing over masks to rickshaw pullers and auto rickshaw drivers.

Extend lockdown beyond April 14

India's state govts urge Centre as 354 cases reported in last 24 hrs

PTI, New Delhi

A lot of state governments as well as experts are requesting the Central government to extend the nationwide coronavirus lockdown beyond April 14, and the Centre is thinking in this direction, government sources said yesterday.

However, sources did not indicate if a final decision has been taken on the matter.

India is currently under the 21-day lockdown since March 25, with only essential services exempted, to contain the fast-spreading virus, which has claimed more than 75,800 lives and afflicted over 13.5 lakh people across 183 countries.

As per ministry of health and family welfare data yesterday, India recorded 354 confirmed cases of Covid-19 taking the total number of cases in the country to 4,421.

"A lot of state governments as well as experts are requesting Central Government to extend the lockdown. The Central government is thinking in this direction," a source said.

The development comes a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked countrymen to be ready for a long battle against the coronavirus pandemic, and exhorted people to not feel tired or defeated while expressing confidence the country will emerge victorious in its fight.

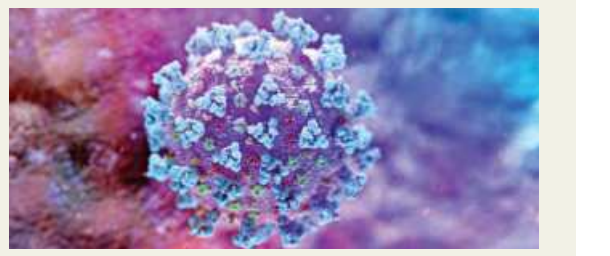
Meanwhile, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has shot off letters to chief ministers of Delhi and Maharashtra to ensure the safety of nurses hailing from Kerala working in these states following reports of para-medical staff being affected with Covid-19. Vijayan had said 46 nurses from Kerala in Mumbai have been infected by the virus and more than 150 nurses were under observation there.



Volunteers throw a mixture of water, neem herb and turmeric as an alleged natural disinfectant on a street in a residential area in Chennai, India yesterday during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the coronavirus.

PHOTO: AFP

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC LATEST UPDATES



S KOREANS RECOVER AFTER PLASMA THERAPY Two elderly South Korean coronavirus patients recovered from severe pneumonia after being treated with plasma from survivors, researchers said yesterday, offering hope in the face of the global pandemic.

NEWBORNS CONTRACT VIRUS IN ROMANIA A Romanian maternity unit was being investigated yesterday after 10 newborns tested positive for the novel coronavirus, with the suspicion they contracted the virus from healthcare staff.

INDIA EASES MALARIA DRUG EXPORT BAN India yesterday announced a partial lifting of a fresh export ban on a malaria drug seen as a potential coronavirus treatment, after US President Donald Trump hinted at "retaliation".

DOZENS CONTRACT VIRUS AT PAK JAIL Dozens of prisoners in a Pakistani jail have contracted the novel coronavirus, officials have said, with more than 150 additional inmates potentially infected as cases of Covid-19 continue to soar in the impoverished country.

FRANCE REPORTS 'AGRICULTURAL ARMY' CANDIDATES More than 200,000 people have answered France's call for idled workers to help crop and livestock farmers desperate for extra hands as summer approaches.

IRAN VIRUS DEATHS RISE 133 TO 3,872 Iran yesterday reported 133 new deaths from the novel coronavirus, bringing the total number of officially confirmed fatalities to 3,872.

EU ANNOUNCES 15B EUROS TO FIGHT VIRUS The European Union is to put up 15 billion euros (\$16.4 billion) to help poor countries fight the coronavirus epidemic, the bloc's chief announced yesterday.

SAUDI EXPECTS 200,000 CASES WITHIN WEEKS Saudi Arabia's health minister yesterday warned of a huge spike in coronavirus cases of up to 200,000 within the coming weeks, state media reported.

WORKERS FACING WORST CRISIS: UN Some 1.25 billion workers are seeing their livelihoods threatened by the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Nations said yesterday, warning it was the "worst global crisis" since World War II.

SOURCE: AFP

US death toll nears 11,000

Outbreak shows signs of levelling off in New York, New Jersey, but vigilance urged

AGENCIES

The governors of New York, New Jersey and Louisiana pointed to tentative signs on Monday that the coronavirus outbreak may be starting to plateau in their states but warned against complacency as the death toll nationwide approached 11,000.

Although coronavirus cases and deaths continued to mount, the governors cited data suggesting the rates of growth and hospitalisations were slowing, possibly signalling a peak was at hand in three US epicentres of the pandemic.

More than 90% of Americans were under statewide stay-at-home orders issued in recent weeks, with South Carolina joining on Monday.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said state-wide deaths from Covid-19, the highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the virus, were up 599 from Sunday, on par with an increase of 594 during the previous 24 hours and 630 on Friday.

The state's overall tally of confirmed cases grew by 7% from the previous day to 130,680. But hospitalisations, admissions to intensive care units and the number of patients put on ventilator machines to keep



NY governor warns against complacency

US begins blood tests for immunity: reports

90% of Americans ordered to stay home

them breathing had all declined, Cuomo said.

"While none of this is good news, the possible flattening of the curve is better than the increases that we have seen," Cuomo told a daily briefing, referring to the trend line formed when infections, deaths and other data are plotted on a graph. "If we are plateauing, we are plateauing at a high level."

For doctors, nurses and emergency

personnel in the trenches of the unprecedented public health crisis - many still coping with scarcities of protective garments and other supplies - the pace of their work remained unrelenting.

New York City accounts for two thirds of nearly 4,800 deaths in New York state, which in turn represents about 45% of the nation's total loss of life to date.

In neighbouring New Jersey, the state with the second-highest number of cases and deaths, Governor Phil Murphy cited a 12% day-to-day growth rate in confirmed positive cases on Monday, half the rate from March 30.

The US has begun taking blood samples from across the country to determine the true number of people infected with the coronavirus, using a test that works retrospectively, according to reports.

The new tests are based on serological surveys, which differ from the nasal swabs used to determine if someone currently has the virus, reports AFP.

Instead, they look for whether certain antibodies are present in the blood which shows that the person fought and then recovered from the illness - even if they never showed symptoms.

World short of six million nurses

Says WHO, warns against easing lockdown measures too early

AGENCIES

As Covid-19 captures global headlines, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned yesterday that the world needs nearly six million nurses.

The UN's health agency along with partners Nursing Now and the International Council of Nurses (ICN) underscored in a report the crucial role played by nurses, who make up more than half of all health workers worldwide.

"Nurses are the backbone of any health system," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement.

"Today, many nurses find themselves on the frontline in the battle against Covid-19," he noted, adding that it was vital they "get the support they need to keep the world healthy."

The report said that there are just under 28 million nurses on the planet. In the five years leading up to 2018, the number grew by 4.7 million, reports AFP.

"But this still leaves a global shortfall of 5.9 million," the WHO said, pointing out that the greatest gaps were in poorer countries in Africa, southeast Asia, the Middle East and parts of South America.

The report urged countries to identify gaps in their nursing workforce and invest in nursing education, jobs and leadership.

Meanwhile, a spokesman said yesterday World Health Organization has no blanket recommendation for countries and regions for easing measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, but urged them not to lift them too early, reports Reuters.

"One of the most important parts is not to let go of the measures too early in order not to have a fall back again," said WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier in a virtual briefing.

Britain set for 66,000 deaths, most in Europe: study

AFP, Paris

Britain could see as many as 66,000 Covid-19 deaths during the first wave of the current pandemic, new research showed yesterday, making the outbreak there by far the deadliest in Europe.

Modelling conducted by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington's School of Medicine showed that approximately 151,680 people were likely to die from the virus across the continent.

While the novel coronavirus emerged in China and was initially focussed in east Asia, the World Health Organization now says the pandemic is centred in western Europe, with Spain, Italy and France experiencing devastating death tolls.

Most European nations have introduced strict social distancing measures to try to stem the virus spread. More than 5,000 people have died from

Covid-19 in Britain, fewer than in Spain, Italy and France.

But Britain's epidemic lags behind the rest of the continent by several days, and its death toll trajectory is already steeper than other nations.

Using local and international data on case numbers, as well as age mortality breakdowns from Italy, China and the US, the team at IHME modelled the expected death toll on a country-by-country basis.

A key consideration was an individual nation's intensive care bed capacity.

It found that Britain could experience 66,000 Covid-19 deaths by July, far more than Italy, the next most severely impacted, with around 20,000.

Spain and France were next, with 19,000 and 15,000 predicted deaths, respectively.

"We are expecting a foreboding few weeks for people in many parts of Europe," said IHME Director Christopher Murray.



'I've been an idiot'

NZ's health minister apologises after breaking lockdown

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

New Zealand's health minister has described himself as an "idiot" after he flouted his country's lockdown measures to go on a trip to the beach with his family.

David Clark drove his family 12 miles to the beach in late March during the early stages of the lockdown.

In a statement, Clark, who offered to resign for breaching the restrictions, said: "I've been an idiot, and I understand why people will be angry with me."

He had earlier admitted to driving his van to a park near his home to go mountain biking.

Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand's prime minister, said yesterday that she had not accepted Clark's resignation offer because it would jeopardise the

country's coronavirus response.

Ardern said: "Under normal conditions I would sack the minister of health. What he did was wrong, and there are no excuses."

"I expect better, and so does New Zealand," she added.

As a result of his actions, Clark has been demoted to the lowest cabinet ranking and has lost his additional role as associate finance minister.

He is not the only senior official to fall foul of new coronavirus-related restrictions. On Sunday, Scotland's chief medical officer resigned for breaching the UK's measures by visiting her second lockdown home twice.

New Zealand's lockdown measures came into force in late March and will last at least four weeks.



Trump press secretary Grisham steps down

President Donald Trump's chief spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham, who never held a single press briefing in a White House where Trump runs much of the communications himself, stepped down yesterday. The White House said Grisham would now become spokeswoman and chief of staff for Trump's wife Melania.

UN refrains from blaming Russia for Syria attacks

A UN board of inquiry investigating attacks on civilian establishments in Syria, including hospitals, has refrained from directly holding Russia responsible, according to a summary of its report published Monday. The coordinates of the sites had been communicated to the belligerents by the United Nations to protect them from air strikes.

WhatsApp tightens sharing limits

WhatsApp yesterday placed new limits on message forwarding as part of an effort to curb the spread of misinformation about the coronavirus pandemic. The new policy limits users to forwarding certain messages to one "chat" at a time, aiming to limit the rapid propagation of content which is provocative but likely to be false.

SOURCE: AFP

Table with 3 columns: S.No, Description, and Remarks. It lists various government services and their status during the lockdown, such as 'মহালাল/বিভাগ' (Mahaalal/Division) and 'স্বাস্থ্য' (Health).

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
Closed	Closed	\$1,680.90 (per ounce)	\$33.80 (per barrel)	▲ 8.97%	▲ 2.01%	▲ 4.10%	▲ 2.05%	BUY TK 83.95	89.67	98.12	11.69
				30,067.21	18,950.18	2,571.89	2,820.76	SELL TK 84.95	93.47	101.92	12.29



আপনার নিরাপত্তাই আমাদের অগ্রাধিকার
ব্যাংকিং হোক ঘরে বসেই

- দ্রুত ট্রানজাকশন
- মোবাইল টপ-আপ
- ক্রেডিট কার্ডের বিল শ্রদান
- ইন্সট্যান্ট বিল শ্রদান
- ব্যাংক স্টেটমেন্ট

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TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Banks to seek help to fulfil gigantic stimulus package

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Banks have decided to call upon the central bank to take more policy measures to allow them to implement the lion's share of the government's Tk 72,500 crore bailout package efficiently amid business collapse, tight liquidity situation and higher defaulted loans.

The Association of Bankers, Bangladesh (ABB), a forum of bank managing directors, took the decision yesterday at a meeting.

The association would write a letter to the Bangladesh Bank by tomorrow to request it to cut the statutory liquidity ratio (SLR), the cash reserve ratio (CRR) and the policy rates further, said the managing directors of three banks who attended the meeting but requested anonymity due to sensitivity of the matter.

Of the rescue package, banks will have to provide Tk 50,000 crore in loans from their own resources to small, medium and large businesses.

But a majority of the banks have been hit hard by the liquidity crunch as a good number of individual and corporate clients are withdrawing funds on a regular basis due to the ongoing economic fallout from the pandemic.

"All types of businesses of banks have come to a halt. But we have to implement the financial packages using our own funds. So, we need more policy support," said one MD.

On March 23, the BB made funds cheaper for banks by reducing the policy, or repurchase agreement rate (Repo), by 25 basis points to 5.75 per cent.

It cut the CRR by 50 basis points to 5 per cent, injecting about Tk 6,400 crore into the economy.

But the policy measures are not good enough given the gravity of the ongoing situation, the MD said.

The ABB would request the BB to cut the SLR by 2



'What will I do with so many pails of milk?'

Awash with milk and no takers, dairy farmers dump milk

AHSAN HABIB

With a heavy heart, dairy farmer Mohammad Rajib on Sunday emptied the pails of milk he got from his 14 cows into a manure pit.

All the sweet shops are closed, and most of his regular household customers are declining the milk for fear of contagion of the highly contagious, lethal pathogen, which has so far infected 164 and killed 17 in Bangladesh.

"What will I do with so many pails of milk?" asked Rajib, as he stood inside his barn in Cumilla.

He is not alone. Although the demand for basic foods has surged amid the coronavirus pandemic, liquid milk is not one of the products that customers are stockpiling. As a result, more than half of the daily produce is going unsold.

Compounding the dairy farmers' problems is the closure of bulk buyers like sweet shops, restaurants, hotels and schools and countrywide movement control order -- all to flatten the curve on the novel, pneumonia-like virus -- that have left processors to cut back on their procurement.

At present, the country's daily milk production stands at about 2.20 crore litres. Of them, milk processing companies procure 14 lakh litres and the rest is sold to sweet shops and households.

Pran Ballov Mistanno Vandar, a sweet shop in Narayanganj, used to buy 400 to 420 litres of milk every day before the outbreak of coronavirus in Bangladesh.

Now, the purchase has come down to 50 litres, said Porimol Ghosh, the

owner of the shop. "As our shop is closed, why should I buy milk by the same volume?" he said.

Because of the crashing demand, some farmers are selling the milk to their neighbours at a heavily discounted rate, while some are processing milk into cream and clarified butter though the scope to store them is very limited.

And some -- like Rajib -- are just dumping the milk, said Shah Emran, secretary general of the Bangladesh Dairy Farmers Association (BDFFA).

The dairy industry's woes signal broader problems in the global food supply chain, according to farmers, agricultural economists and food distributors.

The sector got hit harder and earlier than other agricultural commodities because the products are highly perishable -- milk can't be frozen, like fish, or stuck in a silo, like grain.

But, the milk processing companies could have come to the dairy farmers' rescue amid this desperate situation as they have the opportunity to process it into powder, cream and clarified butter and have the storage capacity, Emran said.

If they process milk into powdered form, farmers would be saved and the country would preserve about Tk 20,000 crore -- spent every year on milk powder imports, he said.

Only three companies have plants to produce dried milk, with their combined daily processing capacity being 3.5 lakh litres. The processing companies procure 6 per cent to 7 per cent of the milk produced in the country.

But, the milk processing companies

are mired in problems of their own, in the form of limited storage, crashing sales and transportation disruption amid the movement control order.

"We are facing problems from field-level law enforcement agencies that the government has kept the dairy sector out of the purview of lockdown," said Kamruzzaman Kamal, director for marketing at Pran-RFL, a major agro-processor.

But, the demand for milk has plummeted overall.

Brac Dairy & Food Enterprise's sales have plummeted 50 per cent, according to its Director Mohammad Anisur Rahman.

"People are mostly buying essentials and foodstuff with longer shelf lives at this moment," he added.

But for dairy farmers like Rajib, who went to a university but has chosen farming as a profession, the longer the situation goes on, the more dire their circumstances become.

"If the current situation continues, we will have to shut the farm by selling the cows. Otherwise, how will I feed them?" asked Rajib.

In light of the struggles, the BDFFA called for short-term and long-term government measures for the farmers -- struggling to feed the cows.

Daily feeding cost is Tk 160 to Tk 250 per cow, so farmers should be lent a helping hand in these testing times.

At the same time, farmers should be given interest-free loans, the association said.

It also called for reducing the price of feed and giving protection to the local milk processing sector by imposing higher duty on the imports of powdered milk.

Bangladeshis adopting e-commerce faster than ever amid pandemic

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

With the bad comes the good as they say and this could prove true as far as the coronavirus pandemic and Bangladesh's e-commerce industry is concerned.

The outbreak of the highly contagious, lethal pathogen has created new opportunities for the country's e-commerce market, according to various speakers at an online discussion styled, 'E-commerce calls in the service of humanity', held yesterday.

"While it was unthinkable just one month ago, people now visit different sites for groceries and other essentials," said Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi who joined in the virtual discussion organised by the e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (e-CAB).

Since people currently find it challenging to participate in traditional commerce, this is an opportunity for the digital segment to thrive, he added.

However, during the discussion, a good number of e-commerce entrepreneurs raised concerns about the harassment of delivery personnel in the hands of law enforcers being out and about amidst the movement control order even though they have the government approval to continue operations.

In response, the commerce minister said the government is working on ways to remove all the obstacles e-commerce entrepreneurs are facing.

"We hope that this issue will be resolved within the next couple of days. The ministry will always stand by and support the online commerce industry," Munshi added.

After the coronavirus juggernaut reached Bangladesh people's perception of e-commerce changed totally, said Anir Chowdhury, policy adviser of the a2i programme under the Information and Communication Technology division.

Bangladesh is a huge market, so entrepreneurs should ideally have the capacity to cater to 50 lakh orders daily. However, they can currently only manage 50,000.

"Things started changing ever since the coronavirus dealt a blow to the economy. However, this has gone in



percentage points to 11 per cent and the CRR by 75 basis points to 4.25 per cent.

If both are slashed, it would free up more than Tk 3,000 crore.

The ABB will also urge the BB to consider the reduction of policy rate to the maximum level.

Lenders are also in confusion over the terms and conditions of the Tk 5,000 crore bailout package for exporters, the MD said.

A large amount of provisioning would be needed if a portion of the funds becomes defaults, which will create a problem for lenders down the road.

So, the ABB would seek a clarification from the BB on whether they will have to keep provisioning against the defaulted loans.

The banking sector, which is already struggling with heaving soured loans, will face a good amount of defaulted loans in the days ahead as the capacity of many clients to pay back credits is eroding.

Defaulted loans totalled Tk 94,313 crore at the end of 2019, up 0.42 per cent year-on-year, according to data from the BB.

Both the government and the BB would have to monitor the implementation of the bailout package strictly or else the habitual defaulters with strong political links would siphon off money from the programme.

"If the habitual defaulters can't be kept in check, the banking sector and the whole economy will face a severe crisis," said the third MD.



favour of the e-commerce industry," Chowdhury said.

Since the nationwide shutdown took effect officially on March 26 with the hope of flattening the curve on the novel virus that has so far infected 164 and killed 17 in Bangladesh, the majority of the rickshaw pullers, who tend to live from hand to mouth, have seen their livelihoods disappear into thin air.

Online businesses can hire those rickshaw pullers as deliverymen and it will benefit both parties, Chowdhury added.

However, Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar emphasised on the need to ensure that only quality products are being sold. He is also in favour of christening April 7 the National E-Commerce day from next year onwards if e-CAB places a request.

Bangladesh's online business industry is already worth Tk 8,000 crore and has been growing at about 50 per cent annually, said e-CAB President Shomi Kaiser.

"We expect that after the coronavirus pandemic is over, the industry's growth rate will be much higher than what it was in the past few years," she added.

ICT Secretary NM Zeaul Alam; Postal Division Director General SS Bhadra; and Nazrul Islam Khan, advisor to e-CAB, also spoke during the session that was moderated by e-CAB General Secretary Muhammad Abdul Wahed Tomal.

At the event, e-CAB announced the formation of a charity to help the less fortunate through this difficult time. Anyone can contribute to the fund at its online portal, manobsheba.com.

More salve from BB for exporters

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The central bank yesterday cut the interest rate on its export development fund (EDF) in order to help the exporters hit hard by the economic fallout from the global coronavirus pandemic.

The exporters of the manufacturing sector will enjoy loans at 2 per cent interest from the EDF, according to a Bangladesh Bank notice.

Previously, the interest rate was six-month USD LIBOR plus 1.50 per cent. The six-month LIBOR rate is 1.17 per cent at present.

Lenders will get the fund from the central bank by giving 1 per cent interest rate and they will be allowed to charge clients a maximum of 2 per cent.

The BB also increased the volume

of the EDF to \$5 billion from the previous \$3.50 billion, as part of the government's efforts to prime the pump.

The instructions will be effective from April 1.

The initiative will help the beleaguered exporters from the manufacturing sector get funds at a cheaper rate, said a BB official requesting anonymity as he is not authorised to speak with the media.

In a separate notice, the BB instructed banks and mobile financial service providers to open accounts for workers of the export-oriented industries within April 20 for their salary disbursement from the Tk 5,000 crore bailout package announced by the prime minister on March 25.

The package is to facilitate exporters, who all on a sudden find themselves with acute cash crunch, pay their workers' wages for three months starting from April.

The wages will be provided to the workers' bank or MFS accounts. No charge will be imposed on the workers for opening the accounts.

Banks and MFS providers have so far opened 20 lakh accounts for workers of the garment sector, according to the central bank data.

The total number of workers in the country's export-oriented industries is more than 5 million.

Banks and MFS providers have already informed the central bank that they have the capacity to open accounts for the workers within the deadline, the BB official added.

SOHEL PARVEZ

The National Board of Revenue yesterday widened the scope to assess the duty of more imported items in order to ease the burden on the Chattogram port that is mired in container congestion.

Because of the relaxation almost all goods can now be cleared save for those that were brought in for trading purpose, said a senior official of the NBR.

The revenue board particularly asked its field offices to facilitate clearance of capital machinery and parts, agricultural equipment and components, ingredients of poultry and fish feeds and the goods imported under diplomatic privilege and brought into the country by public, semi-government and autonomous

organisations.

The latest directive came a week after the NBR asked the field offices to process documents for the clearance of imported industrial raw materials.

Initially, it had instructed customs offices to clear imported essential commodities, emergency medical and related products during the days of the lockdown, enforced by the government since March 26 to slow the spread of coronavirus.

The NBR will now carry out the duty assessment for more imported products following a request from the shipping ministry.

In its letter, the ministry cited rising congestion of containers at the Chattogram port and requested the NBR to take measures to facilitate the clearance of all imported goods from

the port.

The port, which releases 4,500 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of goods daily, has been delivering 1,500 TEUs since the beginning of the lockdown.

Some 45,000 TEUs of import containers are waiting at the port for duty assessment.

The number of import containers is increasing day by day, creating congestion as customs are assessing duty of certain categories of products, the shipping ministry said.

"If the trend continues it will be tough to unload and release emergency items," said the letter.

The volume of imported items would increase as the fasting month of Ramadan is set to roll later this month, it added.

NBR steps in to ease Ctg port gridlock



TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Prioritisation, selection and distribution of the stimulus package



KHONDAKER GOLAM MOAZZEM

On 5 April, the honourable prime minister has announced the second stimulus package in view of addressing the adversity of coronavirus on our economy.

This financial package along with the first one amount to be Tk 72,500 crore (\$8.54 billion), which is equivalent to 2.52 per cent of Bangladesh's gross domestic product.

The head of the government has rightly acknowledged the multidimensional challenges on the economy such as the slowing down of exports and imports, slow progress of major development works and particularly the mega projects, adverse impact on service sectors including travel and tourism and small- and medium-sized enterprises, wide gap in revenue mobilisation, fall in inward flow of remittance, weak domestic demand and weak macroeconomic stability and so on.

Taking those into account, the package has targeted four-pronged activities: a) increase public expenditure (for employment generation); b) introduce fiscal packages; c) expand social safety net programmes; and d) increase money supply.

Given the different levels of adversity to different sectors as well as their different levels of risk coping capacities, it is important to undertake important activities before disbursement of the stimulus package.

These activities include: a) setting priorities in terms of demand for different target groups; b) selecting target groups by maintaining transparency, efficiency and inclusivity; and c) distributing the support to the target groups by ensuring accountability at all levels.

The package-related activities will be implemented in three phases: immediate, short and long terms.

Hence, it is important to identify which activities should be carried out at which periods and under which mechanism priority groups will be identified, target groups will be selected and the package support will be distributed.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

The immediate actions under the package must be to ensure food security of the marginalised and low-income people.

As per plan, this would be done through expanding the safety net programmes by including people who live below the poverty line, day labourers and workers involved in the informal sector.

Ensuring maximum coverage of these target groups without leaving anyone behind is highly important.

Hence, the selection process of target people under the safety net programmes should be transparent and free from political influence.

There is a list already available under the safety programmes. But that needs to be made more comprehensive now.

This list should be prepared immediately and should be made public at all levels, particularly through social welfare offices, so that people who are eligible will get assistance.

A major mode of support will be providing subsidised food such as rice at Tk 10 per kilogram and other essentials such as lentil, soybean oil, potato and onion and so on at fair price.

In view of rising demand for rice and other essential food items for open market sales, vulnerable group development and vulnerable group feeding of the safety net programmes, it is important to increase the domestic food



SK ENAMUL HAQ

stock for the next four months.

If required, the stock could be increased by importing a part of essential food products from other countries immediately.

There is another important target group who might be missed out from the current approach of identification and selection of needy people: those who do not earn less than the poverty line (\$1.9 per day) but live by a daily earning of \$1.9 to \$3.8.

These fixed income earners need to be identified as a sub-group under the social safety net programmes and could be partially supported in cash payment from there.

A large section of workers who work in formal and informal sectors need immediate support.

However, these workers often work with or without formal contracts -- usually on a daily or contractual basis.

These workers are in trouble without any wage or payment since shutting down of factories or businesses.

There is little chance for these workers to get back to their work until factories or businesses commence operations.

A part of the package for working capital financing for SMEs, cottage and other industries and services could be used for providing workers' wages.

Since workers' wage is an element of working capital, particularly for domestic industries, the finance ministry may consider

allocating a part of the working capital for meeting wage related costs.

The rate of interest of such working capital would be 2 per cent, like that in export-oriented enterprises, while the remaining part of the working capital could be credited at the rate of 4-4.5 per cent.

The selected employers should apply through their respective associations with necessary documents, such as workers' employment record, salary sheet, bank account or mobile financial service account of workers and mobile number of workers and so on to the finance ministry.

After getting the approval from the ministry, the banks may disburse working capital to be used for workers' wages on an immediate basis.

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

In this rapidly dynamic situation of outbreak of coronavirus, the short-term period is assumed to be for next three months, that is until June.

A major prioritisation in this period should be identification of priority groups in businesses and industries and process of selecting them.

Given the nature of quick outbreak so far and possible rise in the future, it would be difficult for most of the businesses to start their operation in near future beyond limited scale.

Hence, both demand for credit from the

businesses/industries/SMEs and possible supply of credit in the form of working capital by the commercial banks would not be even at 'sub-optimal' level.

In case of identification of enterprises, the broader distinction made between large scale and service-oriented enterprises in one group and SMEs, cottage and other small-scale enterprises in another group is appropriate.

However, further categorisation of the two groups of enterprises will be required in order to ensure transparency in the selection process.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the country's apex trade body, should go for detailed consultation (online) with each of the business bodies (big and small) seeking lists of affected enterprises and the amount of working capital support required for each.

Since small, medium and sub-contracting enterprises have limited contingency plan to cope up with the risks, these enterprises should get priority in getting the support.

Often, the big groups of companies and influential trade bodies try to take the major portion of such benefits -- depriving the neediest ones.

It is expected that after primary selection, the FBCCI should disclose information of the selected enterprises through their website. The lists would be vetted and approved by the finance ministry.

Afterwards, the commercial banks would be

allowed to disburse credit under the package support programme.

It is important to ensure that no commercial bank is allowed to disburse loan under the stimulus package other than the approved list of enterprises.

Despite the announcement of such broad-based stimulus package, a section of entrepreneurs would find it difficult to get access to low-cost credit facility.

These are enterprises that are not mostly unbanked and operate informally without having formal legal documents, such as retail traders, street vendors, fruit sellers, fish traders, small tea shops, small restaurants, petty traders and so on.

These enterprises comprise a large section of economic establishments that have no formal trade licences. They need to be prioritised for supporting under working capital financing.

However, it would be difficult to cover them under the stimulus package that are mainly targeted to formal sector enterprises.

Hence, a special package needs to be developed for these informal small-scale enterprises.

These enterprises could be supported through the non-governmental enterprises and other specialised financing institutions who have information and data about them.

The selection of these enterprises could be done by using various information available to different public and private agencies such as membership records of various associations, cooperatives, welfare associations, personal business records at union, thana and district level administrations, database of micro-enterprises of different NGOs, census data for different target groups available to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), database of different specialised commercial banks working with SMEs.

MEDIUM TO LONG TERM ACTIONS

The medium to long term period indicates between the months of June and December and beyond.

During this period, the major actions will focus on disbursement of working capital for the most-affected enterprises of different sectors.

It is expected that enterprises will be able to repay their loan in a short grace period (three months) and complete their dues in nine months.

An early repayment of loans will help enterprises to get loans again from this refinancing scheme.

Given the weak state of loanable fund in a large section of commercial banks, it is expected that the government or the central bank will facilitate injecting fund from other sources.

Since the government is negotiating with multilateral agencies and bilateral development partners about possible future support, a part of the funds would be made available by June, which could be used for providing working capital to the affected enterprises.

As the national budget for the next fiscal year is approaching, it is expected that the government will announce some fiscal stimulus package targeting both individuals, private sector and agriculture sectors in the forms of value-added tax waiver, deferred payment of advance income tax, payment of corporate tax by instalments, raising the tax-free income for low-income people and raising tax-free limit for SMEs.

Overall, it is expected that a transparent, efficient and inclusive mechanism in the process of identification and selection of target groups and distribution of support from the stimulus package would address the demands of the most affected and most needy sections of the society during this severe economic crisis.

The writer is the research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue

Govt to buy 50pc more paddy to feed the poor

SOHEL PARVEZ

The government will purchase 50 per cent more paddy from farmers in the Boro harvesting season that begins from the latter half of this month with the view to encouraging farmers and for distribution to those who saw their livelihoods evaporate for the outbreak of coronavirus in Bangladesh.

Some six lakh tonnes of paddy would be purchased as well as 10 lakh tonnes of parboiled rice and 1.50 lakh tonnes of un-boiled grain from millers in the ensuing season, which yields more than half of the total annual rice output.

The government, however, has kept purchase prices unchanged: Tk 26 for each kilogram of paddy and Tk 36 for a kg of rice, according to an announcement by food ministry on its website.

The procurement price of un-boiled rice has been fixed at Tk 35 per kg.

The disclosure comes at a time when the government has ramped up distribution and sales of the cereal to cut the risk of hunger among the poor and low-income people, whose income has dried up for the countrywide shutdown enforced on March 26 with the hope of flattening the curve on the deadly pathogen.

At the time of writing, the lethal, pneumonia-like virus has infected 164 and claimed the lives of 17. Bangladesh appears to be just ascending the epidemiological curve, so the movement control order is likely to be extended beyond April 14.

Since March 26, the disaster management ministry distributed 56,500 tonnes of rice for distribution among the poor and the vulnerable; it sought allocation of an additional three lakh tonnes of the staple grain from the finance ministry.

Until Monday, the disaster management ministry got consent for one lakh tonnes of

rice, said an official. Besides, the Directorate General of Food has started selling rice at Tk 10 a kg under a special open market sale scheme designed to help the urban poor get the staple at one-fourth the market price.

The government had 16.95 lakh tonnes of food grains, including 13.87 lakh tonnes of rice, in its stock until March 24, according to data from the food ministry.

"We have decided to purchase increased quantity of rice to build a good food stock to enhance overall food security," said Food Secretary Mosammat Nazmanara Khanum.

The purchase decision and prices, which have been fixed based on discussions with the food and agriculture ministers as well as the cabinet secretary, come amid the higher production target of rice.

"Coronavirus is also a factor," Khanum said. Preliminary data from the Department

of Agricultural Extension showed that farmers planted rice on 47.54 lakh hectares during the current boro season, which is marginally lower than last year's actual acreage, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Matindra Sarker, a farmer in the northeastern district of Netrakona, praised the government's decision to buy good increased amount of paddy and called for a fair and transparent procurement system.

"The crop looks good so far. Now the question remains whether we will get profitable prices," he said over phone.

In addition to buying rice, the food ministry also plans to buy 70 per cent higher wheat than last season at 75,000 tonnes this year.

The government would buy the grain at Tk 28 a kg. Wheat procurement will begin from next week, according to the food ministry notice.



Mostafa Kamal, chairman of Meghna Group of Industries, hands over a cheque of Tk 5 crore to Ahmad Kaikaus, principal secretary, as donation to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund on Sunday to fight coronavirus. MEGHNA GROUP



Wan Yanchao, project manager of China Harbour Engineering Company, hands over food items, soap and surgical masks to the officials of Mirsharai upazila in Chittagong on Sunday to combat coronavirus. CHEC

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FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Losses should never be weighed against human life

Pay the workers, close the factories

At least 25 people were injured during clashes between police and garment workers on April 6 in Mymensingh's Bhaluka upazila after workers started demonstrating for their salaries for the month of March. According to some workers, outsiders loyal to the factory authorities and security men also attacked them using bamboo sticks. Despite the unsavoury nature of the incident, we must ask, why weren't the workers paid for the month of March when we are now well into the month of April? Clearly all this could have been avoided had they been paid.

We are now in a time of national, if not global, crisis. Economists, governments and others are scrambling to figure out how to deal with the immense fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, especially on low wage earners. When it is known that people are desperately struggling to make ends meet, why did the garment authorities not pay the workers their due wage? It is inhumane and condemnable.

Meanwhile, it is shocking that during this moment of crisis more than 100 garment units were open in Savar and Ashulia despite repeated calls for factories to remain closed. While it is most unfortunate that garment factories are losing orders and facing pressure from buyers for delivery of orders, it must also be understood that we are not in a normal situation right now. And these extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. If any worker gets infected, not only will they risk their own wellbeing, but also the wellbeing of their community and perhaps even beyond. Should something like that happen, it will inflict immense costs to the nation. It is due to such considerations that factories must remain closed.

And it is to that end that the government should give strict orders to all factories to pay their workers immediately and remain closed. Vague instructions and "advice" clearly won't suffice. It is useless for some to maintain social distancing, but not others. The nation cannot afford garment workers to get infected and risk the health of entire communities simply because of the greed of some factory owners.

Need for a well-defined action plan to defeat Covid-19

Experts' suggestions have merit

While there is unanimity that community transmission is happening only in clusters, experts differ with the administration that there should be no cause for concern. According to them, unless the government draws up an all-inclusive plan to fight the pandemic, which includes ensuring the virus is kept confined within that particular community or area, the situation will remain worrisome. We believe that complacency should have no room in our minds. There is little comfort one should take from the fact that the virus in Bangladesh has been confined in pockets in various parts of the country. If we take the data available, the curve will show an exponential rise in the number of confirmed cases of people infected. The aggregate figure may not appear alarming, but the rate of rise in infected cases suggests a leap that should offer a pointer to the administration, particularly the fact that 41 have proved positive in one single day only.

It may be appropriate to remind ourselves that what we are faced with is a warlike situation and calls for a warlike approach to defeat it. And there is only one way of fighting the pandemic. As experience has shown in the last eight weeks, unless the spread is thwarted, the system is likely to be overwhelmed completely. And the only way that can be possible is physical distancing and quarantine—self or imposed. It is good that the PM has ordered lockdown of certain areas. However, we believe that government efforts would be more effective if the fight against the virus follows a well-conceived strategy.

There is plenty of merit in the suggestion that an operational plan, and defining priority areas by studying the model of the growth and spread, will help identify the priority areas and help allocation of resources to those particular spots. That will economise the use of resources, efforts and time, and hopefully spare us the trauma that some countries are facing.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Policy for distribution of aid crucial

The other day, I noticed from my balcony an SUV approaching the corner of a road. It was full of essentials to be distributed amongst the destitute who wait by the roadsides helplessly in hope of alms. In a split second, the scene turned chaotic. Groups of people surrounded the car as a man got down and handed out the bags. Soon, they were fighting each other trying to snatch the bags while some were trying to take them directly from the vehicle. The man immediately got in and began to drive away, but three others jumped on his rear bumper and somehow opened the trunk and began looting. Their condition is dire and these people are becoming more helpless everyday. The government should urgently intervene and devise a way to provide for them appropriately.

Izaz Haq, Dhaka

Corona is only as cruel as capitalism's weakest link

THE SOUND & THE FURY



SUSHMITA S. PREETHA

THAT capitalism is cruel should come as no surprise to those who understand either the meaning of cruelty or the logic of capitalism. And yet, nothing quite prepares even the harshest critic of capitalism for the tragic sight of tens of thousands of workers trekking for hundreds of kilometres during an unofficial lockdown, forsaking all considerations of "social distancing", because they are afraid they would lose their jobs. Many used the last of their meagre savings to hitchhike to the industrial belts, hoping that they would at least be paid the next day. But to add to sore limbs and empty pockets, when they finally arrived at the factory gates, they were told to go away and come back to collect their payment when the factory reopened on April 11—or at any rate, when the lockdown ended.

The accounts of the workers are every bit as heartbreaking as the photos, although they seem to have done little to melt the hearts of the garment owners, some of whom ask, incredulously: "Who asked these workers to leave the industrial belts in the first place?" It's difficult, I am sure, for an owner whose causal shirts or sarees costs more than a worker's monthly salary, to understand the motivations of those who live hand to mouth. Let me try to be an interlocutor between the masters and masses, then. Workers had not been paid for March when the factories closed, and many thought the villages were a safer option than the cramped and unhygienic quarters they share with countless others. More importantly, the villages were a more affordable option, given the rising cost of goods and difficulty in getting credit from stores under the circumstances. March has already come and gone, and rent of the month must be paid, whether or not factories pay wages. And then there's also the more emotional reason—a desire to be with loved ones during a break which, to workers starved of paid or unpaid leave, is a boon, no matter the situation.

Social media was rife with criticism as soon as the news of the workers' long trek broke, and thankfully public outrage resulted in the decision to keep [most] factories closed. The damage, however, was already done. When numbers of those affected by and dying from coronavirus are rising exponentially in the region, the failure of the state and owners to reach a collective decision on time has created a public health disaster and pushed an already vulnerable population beyond the margins. Who will take responsibility if, and when, workers start showcasing symptoms and the virus spreads like wildfire, given their living conditions (which, let's remember, are also of your own making)?

The BGMEA would have us believe that it was beyond its power, that it could simply "request" its members but not ask them to shut down factories. I don't know about you, but I find it difficult to imagine the BGMEA as a helpless arbiter in the negotiation tables, whose "requests", given the sensitivity of the matter both locally and internationally, can be so easily and shamelessly flouted. And even if the BGMEA's by-laws don't allow the association to shut down factories, one would at least expect a more strongly worded appeal from its

president to its members—one, at any rate, as passionate and heartfelt as her plea to international buyers—with clear directives on repercussions should factories fail to ensure safety of workers. Additionally, as the owners' association, the BGMEA should have already put in place a comprehensive safety protocol for factories and 4.1 million workers, as well as a concrete plan on paying workers on time, taking whatever steps necessary to assist struggling factories to hold up their end of the bargain. The BGMEA cannot simply shirk its responsibilities at this crucial hour, when errant owners need to be guided and held accountable.

In a talk show on April 3, the BGMEA president argued that factory owners should not compete with each other in a race to the bottom to meet unfair demands from buyers, and that BGMEA should be left to negotiate collectively on behalf of all owners. For once, we agree. If the owners' reason for wanting to keep factories open was undue pressure from

workers to pay termination/layoff benefits to, anyway!

Multiple reports quote RMG insiders as suggesting that the owners were waiting for the government to shut down factories so that they could ask for more money, disappointed as they were that the Tk 5000 crore stimulus package the Prime Minister announced was a soft loan, and not a handout, as they had initially hoped. While I remain sympathetic to the industry's vulnerability in the global supply chain—in which they too are exploited—particularly at a time when brands are cancelling orders and refusing to receive or pay for goods they have already ordered, there can be no excuse for RMG owners using their workers as pawns in negotiations. On the other hand, most workers have not yet been paid for March, even though they worked all but four days of the month—where's the humanity in that? Many have already been laid off, and some factories have closed down indefinitely, without paying

workers in the industrial belts to ensure that they can make do as living costs spiral out of their means.

And that brings us to... us, the (neo) liberal elites. Thank you for taking the time to feel dismayed and shocked at the cruelty with which our state and garment owners treat RMG workers. I must say, I didn't think we had it in us to look upon these workers as people worthy of our concern. After all, how many amongst us expressed solidarity with workers when they took to the streets demanding higher wages in 2016 and 2018? How many even know the repercussions of the last two wage movements, in which trade unions were silent and/or were silenced, and tens of thousands of workers were fired without due process, and cases were filed against thousands of named and unnamed workers to teach them a lesson for daring to be more than docile, disposable bodies? How many of us really stop to think about the



People, many of them garment workers, huddle on a ferry in Mawa ignoring a government directive to maintain physical distance, as they travel to Dhaka, on April 4, 2020.

PHOTO: STAR

buyers, I, for one, would have seen more value in collectively naming and shaming these particular brands for jeopardising workers' lives and negotiating with donor/consumer countries to bear the costs of cancelled orders, than in engaging in practices which expose to the world our own hypocrisies. I wonder how much moral high ground we'll have any more as we make pleas to buyers to save our workers when we seem to care so little about them ourselves.

The BGMEA insists that the decision to shut down factories should have come from the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE). On that, too, we can agree. Ideally, the government should be the one protecting the interests, not just of its owning class but that of its most vulnerable and valuable class—its workers. However, it has proved, time and time again, that while the sector and its earnings are important to the state, its workers are not.

It is obvious that to both the government and owners, workers are valuable in so far as they are disposable and easily replaceable, given the abundant supply of cheap labour. So, what if a few thousand workers were to die from coronavirus? It's a few less mouths to feed in the coming months and a few less

workers their dues. In this economy, where are they supposed to go now? It goes without saying that the meagre income these workers earn—still among the lowest in the world—is barely enough for them to sustain themselves for a month, much less during a pandemic. One factory has set already an example by giving workers a two-month paid leave; and top-tier factories should follow suit without delay, making use of mobile banking options to avoid large-scale worker gatherings.

With workers more vulnerable than ever, where are our labour unions anyway? Except for a handful of unions, most seem too busy appeasing the owners and the government to take a meaningful stance. On March 22, the State Minister of Labour held a meeting with 21 labour unions, in which only nine voted to keep the factories closed and 11 voted to keep them open. As the saying goes, who even needs enemies when you've got unions doing the enemies' bidding? If nothing else, these unions who voted to keep the factories open should now publicly apologise to workers for failing them when they should have collectively insisted on, among other things, paid leave for workers, job security in this time of uncertainty and crisis, and rations for

overworked, underpaid, malnourished workers on 12-hour shifts because they don't have the luxury of refusing overtime, or those routinely denied sick leave because production quotas trump health concerns? How many of us have celebrated instead the great fearless leader of the garment owners as the harbinger of feminist progress, ignoring or refusing to understand that this industry is contingent upon the constant exploitation of workers—that there is no profit without exploitation—and that only a person who truly exemplifies all that is wrong with capitalism can ever really hold power and preside over it?

The conditions the workers are in now are of our own making. We have let this go on for too long. We have turned a blind eye towards the treatment of workers, justifying to ourselves that without work, they will starve to death. We've made it okay for workers to choose between unemployment and exploitation, between starvation and everyday violences, refusing to believe in a different and just world. So now when garment owners are asking them to choose between corona and unemployment, why are we so outraged? Sushmita S Preetha is a Journalist and researcher.

Silent role of MFS to keep the economy going

SHAMSUDDIN HAIDER DALIM

WITH the advancement of the pandemic, the citizens of Bangladesh are leaning more and more towards adopting Mobile Financial Service (MFS) as their method of money transfer, buying products and services, buying mobile balance and making bill payments. To enable the customers during this crisis, the previous monthly limit of Tk 75,000 of money transfer through MFS providers has been increased to Tk 2,00,000 by the Central Bank.

Owing to Covid-19 control measures relating to restrictions on movement and closure of market places, a significant portion of the agent-base is partially operational. In order to ensure liquidity of e-money as well as cash at agent points, cash settlement at banks within limited banking hours are the major challenges faced by MFS providers in the current crisis. Yet, the MFS providers regulated by Bangladesh Bank like bKash is having approximately 5.8 million transactions every day. According to bKash officials, currently their customers are mostly availing services such as bill payments, money transfers and merchant payments for groceries and medicines. Besides cash-ins at agent points, bKash customers can directly conduct instant money transfer from their bank account, Visa and MasterCard to their bKash account at any time. Members of the Bangladeshi

diaspora working abroad are also sending inward remittance through scheduled banks directly into the bKash account of their intended beneficiaries. As a result, bKash is being able to meet the transactional needs of the people during the ongoing crisis.

Ever since March 26, the beginning of the government-declared general holiday, transactions in the MFS industry have depleted as the field operations related to e-money vis-à-vis cash liquidity at the agent points have been severely hindered by the imposition of social distancing for the wellbeing of people across the country. However, almost 150,000 customers have paid their electricity bill through bKash alone on each day since. At a time when going outside poses health risks, mobile banking is enabling customers to avail services—like bill payments of gas, electricity and water, as well as mobile recharges, sending money, adding money, bill payment of credit cards and lots of other services—directly from their home or their nearest agent points. This, of course, has added to the overhead costs of business for the MFS providers.

Following the instructions of Bangladesh Bank, MFS providers are currently not charging any fees for small scale payments of groceries and medicines. At the same time, cash-out charges upto Tk 1,000 has been kept free. It is understandable that such free of charge service provisions come at a massive revenue cut, as the scale of

transactions are very high in the MFS sector. As assessed, till April 2 this year, in bKash alone, 1,922,498 unique customers got cash out, with a contribution of Tk 31,608,003 from bKash's side. Concurrently, within the same time period, 879,656 bKash customers got the advantage of free P2P services, totalling a contribution of Tk 7,388,575 by bKash. The figures for the other MFS providers will be proportionate to their respective market share. The economic assessment by any standard is suggestive that the cumulative negative impact on the revenue earnings of MFS providers may put the mobile banking industry into jeopardy. In a situation like this, ensuring that the MFS industry can run smoothly and earn revenue through its limited operations should be given the utmost priority by the authorities. Hence, it is imperative that the Central Bank consider allocation of compensation to MFS providers in order to ensure delivery of service, as directed through the recently issued circular.

The global and regional Covid-19 situation suggests that it would take several months to be out of the danger caused by the virus. Under such circumstances, we expect to see more and more reliance on MFS for daily economic activities. An increased proportion of disbursement of salaries to garments workers is likely to take place, in line with the government decision. All the allowances of the "social safety net"

would also be best disbursed through MFS providers, who already have the experience of seamless disbursement of stipends to students. Therefore, a sustainable arrangement for the MFS providers to support the government initiative for enhanced mobile banking is most realistic under the prevailing circumstances.

The silent role of the MFS industry in keeping the economy of Bangladesh going at a critical juncture is a testimony of the farsighted vision of the government in its implementation of "Digital Bangladesh". The implementation of such ideas shall definitely reap the benefits, sooner or later. Implementation of MFS by Bangladesh Bank under the guidance of the current government was a small step for mobile banking, but a giant step for ordinary Bangladeshis.

Traditionally, the banks would make donations to the government fund in a situation like this and walk away with due applause. But, we also need to recognise the huge contribution the MFS providers are silently making on a daily basis, all the while accepting a huge cut to their revenues. It would be proper to treat the MFS providers as "unsung heroes". A prompt action by the central bank to facilitate unhindered operations of MFS is a call that needs to be heard, loud and clear.

Shamsuddin Haider Dalim is Head of Corporate Communications and PR at bKash Limited.

“Food relief should be distributed at the doorsteps”

Rizwanul Islam, an economist, is a former Special Adviser, Employment Sector, International Labour Organization (ILO). The following is a slightly modified translation of an interview originally published in Prothom Alo before the Prime Minister's announcement of a stimulus package on April 5.

In order to prevent coronavirus from spreading further, a nationwide shutdown has been declared and people have been asked to stay indoors. Daily life as we know it has come to a halt. Large numbers of impoverished people have no income. During such a crisis, what is the state's responsibility?

The health crisis created by coronavirus has turned into an economic crisis now. It is not clear to me why the “stay at home” order has been called “holiday”. These days, a lot of work can be done from home. Of course, there are those who earn from physical labour or from economic activities that cannot be done from home. The latter include those who drive rickshaws, vans and other transports, run small stores, or sell small items from the pavements. On such work depend the lives and livelihoods of crores of people of Bangladesh.

How many people belong to that category? According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), approximately two and a half crore people are dependent on wages and salaries. Among them, more than one crore labourers are employed on a daily basis. Furthermore, in the RMG sector, there are around 40 lakh workers who might not work on a daily basis, but are employed under similar conditions. In addition, there are another 50 lakh workers in other industries who are not doing much better when compared to the daily wage earners. There are also the self-employed people, many of whose situation is similar to those dependent on daily wages. Even if we exclude agricultural labourers, livelihoods of more than two crore people have become uncertain in the present situation.

What can the government do in this situation? With the economic system that is currently prevalent across the globe, individuals have to manage their own livelihoods. Despite that, responsibilities of the government cannot be denied altogether. Even in countries known as the bastions of capitalism, the respective governments are coming forward to help the citizens and businesses. Although we should have taken some immediate steps earlier, despite

being late, the government has made some announcements.

In the face of the crisis surrounding livelihoods, what should be the priorities of the government? First and foremost, the government must ensure that the poor do not suffer from starvation. We must identify their households and ensure that the food relief is distributed at their doorsteps. Asking them to come out of their homes and queue for food will make it difficult to maintain social distancing. Slum areas of various cities should be targeted first for such work. The poverty mapping that has been done will further help us identify the areas where aid is crucial.

Next, there are certain people who may not need relief in the form of food. These individuals are slightly above the poverty line and are used to earning their own means of living. What they require now is monetary assistance to tide over the difficult period, for example, to pay their rents.

Last but not least, there are the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) whose businesses are bearing the brunt of the shutdown. We can assist them by providing loans with flexible repayment options. Also, the SMEs should be given an opportunity to refinance their loans. Moratorium on loan repayments for six months may prove beneficial as well.

Even though our agricultural sector has not taken any major blows yet, we cannot overlook the matter as the markets for crops, vegetables, fruits, eggs, milk, etc. have been affected.

Shouldn't the government have made preparations prior to announcing the nationwide shutdown? Does it not seem that the steps were taken in a rather abrupt and unplanned manner?

As the virus began to spread in China from late December onwards, the government did indeed have the opportunity to make timely preparations. But the manner in which Covid-19 was spreading, I think the government had no other alternative but to react the way it did. This crisis has created a kind of dilemma for poor countries, including Bangladesh. The poor are saying: in order to save ourselves from corona, we are going to die of starvation.



PHOTO: PROTHOM ALO

Rizwanul Islam

How long might this situation last? Are there any chances that we may face famine to any extent?

I do not know if anyone can answer that with absolute certainty. It is difficult to say for how long we can continue under this situation. Even in the developed nations, uncertainty looms. It actually depends on the nature of the virus—its ability to multiply and transmit. In some countries, they are using various models to estimate the duration. I am not aware whether our government is taking a similar approach or making decisions simply based on assumptions. However, some research has shown the possibility of resuming livelihoods on a limited basis. But that alternative depends critically on tests. Tests not only of those affected but also on those not affected can be done to identify who are free from the virus and could be released for carrying out normal activities. Such an approach is not yet feasible for us.

Is there any fear of severe destitution or famine? In order to answer this question, I would go back to Amartya Sen's remarks.

Firstly, even when there is an abundance of food, famine can take place if those in need have no access to (entitlement, in Sen's words) food; and entitlement only comes when they have the means to purchase. Luckily, we do not have any shortage of food, but if work is not available for a long

time, the poor may soon lose their ability to purchase. Amartya Sen further opined that in a democratic system, the fear of famine is comparatively lower because the government cannot conceal information and is also under pressure to take appropriate measures.

In Bangladesh, the topic is under such scrutiny that the authorities simply cannot ignore it. The honourable Prime Minister recently announced that people will not be left to starve. The current ruling party prides itself as a people's party. I want to believe that this will be reflected in the work of the government.

In the current situation, don't you think that there is a serious problem in our economic system, that our social security system should have been larger and stronger? Shouldn't the concept of the welfare state have been emphasised more?

This is a very significant question and I totally agree with you. To measure economic growth, our main focus is on the growth of GDP. But renowned economists like Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz have opined that GDP is a tool for “mis-measuring lives”. Even though we rank amongst the lower-middle income countries, when it comes to social security, we have not progressed much. Whenever we talk about social protection, we refer to the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programmes. Although there are more than 100 social safety net schemes, we lack unemployment allowance. Not only that, instead of regarding it as an integral part of development, we look at unemployment allowance as a charitable act. You might ask, even if such an allowance is there, how do you cover those who are self-employed? Well, some countries in Europe have shown that it is possible. It is not necessary that only the government will be responsible for the allowance; employees, owners and the government can all collectively bear the cost instead. Even our neighbour India, has passed a law in parliament regarding social protection for the informal sector. But we are yet to go in that direction. We need to make a start by acknowledging that social protection for both the formal and informal sector is an integral part of development.

Do you think it was right to leave a large part of the medical sector in our country in the hands of the commercial sector, whose goal is to turn healthcare into a profitable business?

What happens when healthcare becomes overly dependent on the private sector becomes clear when one compares UK and the USA. Many hospitals in our country are not even admitting patients who are infected with coronavirus. Besides, how many have the ability to afford the expenses in a private hospital? Though some public hospitals have been directed to treat patients during the pandemic, many are not yet fully prepared. The main reason for this situation is the weakness of the public sector health service.

Should the allocation for the healthcare sector's expenditure be increased for human resource development? In terms of the number of doctors per capita, Bangladesh ranks lowest amongst the South Asian countries. What are your thoughts on that? A large proportion of our population do not have access to proper health services. Inadequacy of doctors and nurses is one of the major weaknesses of our healthcare system. For every 1,000 citizen in this country, there are only 0.5 doctors. The corresponding figures for other countries of South Asia are: Nepal 0.7, India 0.8, Pakistan 1.0 and Sri Lanka 1.0.

If we talk about the budgetary allocation for our healthcare sector, we can observe that in the last five years, the share of healthcare has not increased in the annual development programme (ADP) budget. In fact, there has been a slight decline in the share in the last few years. In Financial Year (FY) 2014-15, it was 6.72 percent, while in FY 2018-19, it was 6.52 percent. However, there were increases in the areas of transport, electricity and physical infrastructure. It is evident that we prioritise physical infrastructure over social sectors. Yes, infrastructure is crucial for economic development, but public health is equally important, if not more. With fragile health, progress remains vulnerable. We cannot afford to compromise the significance of healthcare. It reminds me of the saying, as you sow so shall you reap. The current state of our healthcare system is a reflection of that.

The old normal is ending

It can be replaced by a better new normal



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

SALEEMUL HUQ

THE Covid-19 pandemic is still having severe impacts on many countries and it is not at all clear how long it will take to play out globally. However, the scale and rapidity of the crisis has already revealed a number of aspects of the global economy and governance that we used to think were unchangeable realities. After the crisis is finally over, we will be faced with a fork in the road. One path will be to try to go back to business as usual as it was before the pandemic. The other path is an opportunity to forsake the “business as usual” model as no longer fit for purpose and move towards a completely different, and indeed much better, future. However, the decision on which path we want to choose will be made now and every decision we make is important in choosing which future pathway we will be on.

I will describe some of the things that can be described as the “old normal” and indicate the kind of decisions that can take us to the new (and better) normal.

The first major shift in global power dynamics that we can see before our eyes in real time is the transition of global leadership from USA to China. This was always expected to occur some time in the next decade or

two, but it has happened in 2020! To pick just a couple of indicators, we have seen how the US under Trump's leadership has completely cut itself off from the rest of the world and withdrawn into a fortress cut off from everyone else. At the same time, we are already seeing China emerge from its lockdown and begin to support other countries with tackling the virus as it hits them. China has sent doctors and medical teams to countries like Italy and have been sending testing kits and other necessary items to countries like Bangladesh. They have even sent equipment to the US. On this dimension alone, we are seeing the emergence of a new global leader tackling a global emergency.

Another important disruption of the old normal is our dependence on oil and other fossil fuels to provide energy to the global economy. As the global demand for oil drops drastically due to the lack of economic activity, the price war between the oil producers is removing the veil that used to protect their cartel-like collusion to keep prices higher than would be if it was a truly supply and demand market based product that it claimed to be.

This also points to what the new normal can be—when the oil and other fossil fuel companies go hat in hand to their respective governments for a massive bailout, they should be refused a single cent of subsidy from the public purse. This also applies to the airline industry, who do not deserve such

handouts as well. Any decision to provide subsidies to fossil fuel companies will lock us into the old normal, which is the wrong way to go.

The third revelation that is happening before us is the visible role of the sectors of society that have the greatest value for human survival, and it is quite clear that scientists, along with medical and health workers, are clearly much more valuable than billionaires and even millionaires. Even the hospital cleaners and supermarket shelves stockers are more important now than the richest people who are staying at home.

The fourth revelation is not exactly unknown but has become absolutely stark with each passing day; and it is that the poorest individuals and households living in the informal settlements in the world's biggest cities are amongst the most vulnerable, not just to the virus but also to the measures of social distancing being made around the world. An important observation in this respect is that the groups who are most vulnerable to coronavirus and to social distancing measures are also the same people who are amongst the most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change.

Hence in terms of next steps, we will need to put in place policies and investment strategies that support the most vulnerable communities in each and every country, whether developed or developing. This speaks to whether we genuinely agree that we are all

in this together, or we revert back to each of us looking out only for ourselves, whether as individuals or as countries.

Finally, the destruction of biodiversity and the potential of viruses to jump from animals to humans (which we had so far ignored) has revealed how shortsighted our actions have been. If we ignore this particular revelation and go back to business as usual, we will have shown that we are beyond redemption.

So what decisions are needed to change direction from the old normal towards the new (and better) normal?

Number one is for the presidents and prime ministers of each and every country to recognise that they cannot ignore scientific evidence. This has been demonstrated by the Covid-19 pandemic and will be even more true about climate change, going forward. Every leader who listened to scientists was able to reduce considerably the number of their citizens who lost their lives due to the virus.

Number two is the way that the massive economic stimulus will be allocated. This is a golden opportunity to redirect investment away from large corporations and towards people who matter, which includes smaller companies and even individuals. The time may finally be ripe for the adoption of a basic human income.

Number three is how the lessons from tackling the Covid-19 virus can be immediately applied towards meeting the even bigger threat of climate change that is

still to come. This includes a rapid shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy immediately by removing the subsidies that the fossil fuel companies have received so far.

In the context of Bangladesh, we need to take every precaution against coronavirus making a big impact on the health of our citizens, while also minimising the negative impacts on the poorest and most vulnerable from the social distancing measures that have been applied so far. While we still have many hurdles ahead, we must join together as a country where each and every one of us recognises and takes actions to help each other, not because our Prime Minister told us what to do, but out of a sense of solidarity with our fellow citizens.

I will conclude by focusing on the most important aspect of the possible new normal—which is a world where all countries and people from all walks of life, whether rich or poor, retain a sense of solidarity with each other that is many times stronger than any sense of otherness between groups, whether on grounds of religion, race or class.

Out of crisis comes the opportunity to do things differently, and making a change in our attitudes is perhaps the single most important step that each and every one of us can take in order to usher in the new normal that we all want.

Saleemul Huq is Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University Bangladesh.

QUOTABLE Quote

NGUGI WA THIONG'O
(1938-)
Kenyan writer and academic

The condition of women in a nation is the real measure of its progress.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Fancy tie
- 6 Wrong
- 11 Caller's need
- 12 Suggest
- 13 —nez
- 14 Caesar's land
- 15 Catch in a net
- 17 Objective
- 18 —loss
- 19 Modern request for contact
- 22 Director Howard
- 23 Paragons
- 24 Pay for everyone
- 25 Snaps
- 27 Merkel of movies
- 30 Comes into view

DOWN

- 1 Come into view
- 2 Japanese faith
- 3 Swindler
- 4 In the past
- 5 Popular tops
- 6 Gifted
- 7 "The Simpsons"
- 31 Checkers side
- 32 Museum focus
- 33 "What a shame!"
- 35 Barista's creation
- 38 Midwest airport
- 39 Korean or Thai
- 40 Frisco player
- 41 Ocean trenches
- 42 Takes to the sky
- 8 Jordan neighbor
- 9 Brightest star
- 10 Letter need
- 16 Lair
- 20 Recipe amounts
- 21 Yoga need
- 24 Road rescue
- 25 Sentence part
- 26 Real looker
- 27 Illinois city
- 28 Closer
- 29 Venomous vipers
- 30 Light lunch
- 34 Columbus setting
- 36 Keg need
- 37 Print units

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinon@gmail.com.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

No Baishakhi fair this year, earning eludes potters

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

The ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus has brought added worry to the potters, especially earthen toy makers in Pirojpur, as the items made for sale during the Baishakhi fair will remain largely unsold due to ban on gatherings to check the infection.

Keeping in view the traditional fair marking the Bangla New Year, potters have made different types of earthen items including toys of birds, animals and fruits and earthen pots used to keep saved money.

"Usually two months before Baishakh, we start making different earthen items including toys. After burning, we colour the toys a few days before the fair," said Shambhu Nath Paal, a potter at Palpara in Pirojpur town.

"But this time, we have piled up the burnt clay items at different places as there is no hope of selling them in coming weeks," he added.

Usually a potter can sell the products worth Tk 30,000 to Tk 50,000 this season but now they are facing a tough time.

"To manage the investment money including the cost of raw materials, many potters have to take loan from others as they make a good number of toys with hope to get better profit. This year we will have to



Earthen items are kept piled up at a spot in Palpara of Pirojpur town as there is no prospect of their sale due to suspension of the traditional Baishakhi fair marking the Bangla New Year amid the outbreak of coronavirus.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

face untold sufferings if we cannot sell the toys," said Suvash Paal, another potter of the

same area.

During this season every year, women at the

potters' houses remain busy in colouring toys till the day before Pahela Baishakh as the fair

sees huge sale of the items.

Besides, wholesale buyers from different areas come to buy the items from Palpara a few days before the festival.

But this year, no buyer has contacted them due to the adverse situation amid the outbreak of coronavirus, said local toymakers.

"With the passage of time, the taste of people has changed and demand of earthen products has decreased. During the recent years, our production cost has also increased but the prices of earthen items have not increased proportionately," said Namita Rani Paal of the area.

"Most of the potters have switched to other professions but some of the traditional potter families in our area still depend on the trade. During this time, we remain busy giving the finishing touches to the toys as people buy different earthen items during yearly Boishakhi fair. But now we are passing idle time as there will be no fair," she said.

Matilal Paal, a local at the potters' neighbourhood in Pirojpur town, has demanded that the government give compensation to the potters to help them survive during the crisis period.

COVID-19 FALLOUT

Jobless weavers facing starvation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

About 300 weavers and over a thousand of their dependents in Debiganj upazila of Panchagarh are now facing starvation due to the countrywide shutdown since last week of March.

The weavers in Sundardighi union of the upazila are going through severe hardship after five handloom factories they worked at had to be closed.

The factories -- located in Tantipara, Hajipara, Basuniapara and Bandarpara villages -- usually pay each worker between Tk 300 and Tk 350 daily.

As almost all their income is spent on essentials every day, the craftsmen can hardly set aside any money for savings. As a result, they face extensive sufferings whenever they go out of work.

Under the circumstances, food relief needs to be sent to the area urgently to save most of the weavers and their families from starvation.

Till date, the craftsmen did not receive any food assistance from the government due to insufficient allocation of relief materials for Sundardighi union.

Paresh Chandra Roy, chairman of Sundardighi Union Parishad, told this correspondent that last week he received government relief materials for only 150 people -- an allocation that is insufficient for a large number of people who went jobless due to the shutdown in his union.

The materials have already been distributed to some of the affected people including rickshaw-van pullers, day labourers and employees of small shops.

He said if a second consignment of relief materials is allocated for the union, after distributing those to the worst affected, he might be able to distribute the same to 25 to 30 weavers.

While visiting Basuniapara area in Sundardighi union, weaver Kalpana Rani said she and her rickshaw-puller husband are struggling to feed their family of five as her husband had been staying home while her factory had been shuttered amid the nationwide

shutdown.

They did not receive any sort of assistance from anyone, she said, adding that her weekly income at a handloom factory was around Tk 2,100 a week.

Prodipta Basunia, another weaver from Bandarpara village, said his weekly income used to be Tk 2,500, with which he used to provide for his family of six members.

With no work for over a week now and no relief from anyone, he and his family members have been passing each day in immense sufferings.

Many of the weavers said work

this year, they will incur a massive loss.

Hand Touch, located in Basuniapara village, is one such factory that employs 120 weavers. Its manager, Munir Hossain, said their employees went out of work on March 24 when they closed the factory amid fear of spreading the Covid-19 pandemic.

The factory will now count huge losses due to cancellation of a large number of work orders that were made ahead of the Pahela Baishakh, he added.

Abdul Mazid, owner of another handloom factory named Touch Fashion, said he would lose Tk 8 lakh



Devoid of any weavers, a handloom factory remains shuttered in Bandarpara village of Panchagarh's Debiganj upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

orders for handloom cloth increase in the months prior to the Pahela Baishakh festivities, celebrated on April 14, when demand for local clothing items see the sharpest rise compared to their demand throughout the rest of the year.

Because the demands remain nominal through the rest of the year, this is the time of the year they look forward to for some extra earnings, they lamented.

The owners of the handloom factories echoed the same sentiment. They said the major share of their revenue is generated on the occasion of the Pahela Baishakh. But with their factories shuttered before the festivities

for cancelling deliveries intended for the Pahela Baishakh.

While he has been pondering over the ways he can stand by the weavers in their difficult time, he said he was also worried how he would repay about the same amount of money that he had loaned from different sources including several non-governmental organisations.

Asked, Debiganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Prottoy Hassan said they were following the prime minister's directives in setting priorities for sending out assistance to the people affected due to the shutdown in the upazila and eventually they will send assistance for all the jobless.



TOO CALLOUS TO CARE: A large number of people throng a marketplace in Akkelpur upazila of Joypurhat yesterday, defying the ongoing ban on all kinds of gathering aimed at checking the spread of highly contagious viral disease Covid-19. The area sees almost a similar picture daily.

PHOTO: STAR

INADEQUATE SUPPLY OF OMS RICE

Many return empty-handed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Many of the consumers, mostly from the low and fixed-income groups, have been returning home empty-handed from the Open Market Sale (OMS) outlets in Lalmonirhat town due to insufficient supply of rice against its ongoing rising demand.

A large number of people are seen standing in queues in front of the OMS outlets to buy rice at Tk 10 per kg every day.

The government started the OMS through 12 selected dealers in the town from Sunday, allocating each of the dealers a maximum of 834 kg of rice per day.

"After standing in queue for couple of hours today I had to return home empty-handed as the outlet ran out of stock very fast," said Meherun Begum, 44, wife of a rickshaw puller in College Bazar area.

Abdul Matin, an OMS dealer in

College Bazar area, said they are receiving only 834 kg of rice every day which is not sufficient.

Another OMS dealer Abdul Rahim said due to the Coronavirus pandemic they are witnessing a huge demand of OMS rice in the recent days.

Sadar Upazila Food Controller (UFC) Ayub Ali said a total of 10 tonnes of rice is being sold at 12 OMS outlets in the town every day and three days in a week.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of Upazila Health & Family Planning Officer
Sadar, Panchagarh

Memo No. 236

Date: 07/04/2020

Invitation for Tender

Sealed tenders are hereby invited from experienced Manufacturer, Suppliers to Medical & Suppliers Requisite (MSR) under the controlled office, Office of Upazila Health & Family Planning, Sadar, Panchagarh for the financial year 2019-2020 as per PPA-2006, PPR-2008. Terms and conditions are as follows:

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
2	Agency	Director General of Health Service, Dhaka-1212.
3	Procuring entity name	Office of Upazila Health & Family Planning Officer Sadar, Panchagarh.
4	Procuring entity name	Panchagarh.
5	Invitation for Tender & Package Name	MSR (Grops wise, 5 Grop) & Others.
6	Invitation Ref. No. & Date	Director General of Health Service, Dhaka-1212, Memo No. 1997 date: 25-11-2019.
7	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (OPT).
8	Budget and source of funds	GOB (Revenue & Development) with hospital service management or any other funds (Additional Budget).
9	Financial year	2019-2020.
10	Tender Package No.	Group Ka, Kha, Gha, Umo & Cha 05 (five) as below.
11	Tender start selling date	07/04/2020 (after printing paper/as per publication).
12	Last selling date	26/04/2020 at 2.30pm.
13	Tender submission date and time	27/04/2020 at 1.00pm.
14	Tender opening date and time	27/04/2020 at 12:00am (Tenderer or their authorised representative may remain present at the time of tender opening).
15	Name & address of the office(s) -Selling tender document (principal) -Receiving tender document (others) -Opening tender document	Office of Upazila Health & Family Planning Officer, Sadar, Panchagarh.
16	Brief description of goods or works	Goods of MSR (5 Group). Group Ka, Kha, Gha, Umo & Cha.
17	Description of related services	Terms & conditions as follows.

18 Price of tender document (Tk)							
Group No.	Identification of group package	Tender schedule/ document rate (TK) non-refundable	Tender security amount (Tk) refundable	Last tender schedule/ document & time	Receiving tender/document last date & time	Opening schedule date & time	Remarks
Ka	Medicine (Drugs) Out of EDCL	750/-	10,000/-	26/04/2020 at 12.00am	27/04/2020 at 12.00am	27/04/2020 at 1.00pm	
Kha	Surgical Equipment & others	750/-	5,000/-	26/04/2020 at 12.00am	27/04/2020 at 12.00am	27/04/2020 at 1.00pm	
Gha	Gauge, Bandage & Cotton	750/-	2,000/-	26/04/2020 at 12.00am	27/04/2020 at 12.00am	27/04/2020 at 1.00pm	
Umo	Chemicals & Reagent	750/-	2,000/-	26/04/2020 at 12.00am	27/04/2020 at 12.00am	27/04/2020 at 1.00pm	
Cha	MSR Furniture & Repairs	750/-	2,000/-	26/04/2020 at 12.00am	27/04/2020 at 12.00am	27/04/2020 at 1.00pm	

19 Purchase of tender document in the form of Treasury Chalan with CTR to the DAD, Barguna in favour of Upazila Health & Family Planning Officer, Sadar, Panchagarh, differently Code No. 1-2711-0000-2366 to Sonali Bank, Panchagarh Branch, Panchagarh.

20 Method of payments: To be paid by Bank Draft/Pay-Order in favour of Upazila Health & Family Planning Officer, Sadar, Panchagarh.

21 Name of official invited tender: Dr. Afroza Begum.
22 Designation of official inviting tender: Upazila Health & Family Planning Officer, Sadar, Panchagarh.
23 Address of official inviting tender: Upazila Health & Family Planning Officer, Sadar, Panchagarh. Any information regarding the concerned tenderer can be collected from office of the undersigned. Tele No. 0568-61255.

24 Eligibility of tenderer:
a) Tenderer submit the sample with tender document.
b) Terms & conditions of the tender & other information will be available with schedule (As per PPA-2006, PPR-2008).
c) Work order will be issued of the fund availability condition, no argument will be allowed.

25 The procuring entry reserves the right to delete-reject all tender: The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject in part or whole of any tender.

26 Special conditions: a) If the tenderer submits any false, incorrect or any forged certificate the tender security may be forfeited as per rules.

27 Tender schedule is to be received showing the original documents:
1. Value added tax as a supplier (VAT) registration certificate.
2. Valid trade licence (2019-2020).
3. Documentary evidence of having successfully completed at least 3 (three) contract of similar goods & related services.

Dr. Afroza Begum
Upazila Health & Family Planning Officer
Sadar, Panchagarh

GD-726

JAPAN ENDS OLYMPIC FLAME DISPLAY

The Olympic flame will be removed from display in Japan, officials said Tuesday, as the country braces for a state of emergency due to the coronavirus that also forced the historic postponement of Tokyo 2020. It had been on public display in the northeastern Fukushima region since last week to keep the Olympic spirit alive, but Japanese Olympic organisers decided to shelve it as coronavirus cases climb in the country. The raging pandemic prompted the first postponement of the Games in peace-time, with the opening ceremony now slated to take place on July 23, 2021. "Originally we wanted to hold the public display until the end of April. But considering recent developments, we decided to stop," said a Tokyo 2020 organising committee spokesman. --AGENCIES



An opportunity to reform football

SAMAMA RAHMAN

The sporting world has felt the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on an unprecedented level and responded in kind, with players raising millions and preaching safe practices while stadiums were being donated to aid in the fight against the pandemic. Events such as Wimbledon, the Indian Premier League and most of Europe's top leagues have also been postponed or cancelled to curb the spread of the virus.

Such drastic measures -- Wimbledon had not been cancelled since World War II -- were not taken lightly and they will perhaps have some far-reaching impact, particularly on the beautiful game.

Without any salary caps or prescribed limits other than UEFA's Financial Fair Play guidelines, which clubs have regularly flouted anyway, teams have been struggling for the cash to pay their players.

If the season fails to resume, both Manchester clubs and Liverpool stand to lose over €100 million from matchday revenues, broadcasting deals and commercial deals. Barcelona, who reportedly had a wage bill of €391 million this season, stand to lose just as much and have already gotten their players to agree to a wage cut of 70 per cent.

Such losses could have serious repercussions and potentially scupper plans for big-name signings in the transfer window.

"You can't predict what will happen, but I can't imagine any €100 million transfers in the near future," former Bayern Munich president Uli Hoeness told Kicker earlier this week. "The transfer fees will fall and will not be able to remain at the current level for the next two or three years. Because all countries are affected. We most



likely have a new football world in front of us."

Bayern CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge had similar thoughts, saying: "Every crisis implies a chance, though. Since a long time ago, the transfer fees and salaries have ballooned to unhealthy amounts. The coronavirus and the following worldwide crisis will at least put a stop to this 'more expensive, faster, more' tendency. Supply and demand will regulate and balance the transfer market."

European dynasties aside, smaller clubs may find themselves unable to cope with such a staggering and unforeseen fall in their revenues. They may have to resort to raising funds by selling players but the line of buyers may be far smaller than what they have been accustomed to.

There is also the issue that the transfer window is approaching fast and will perhaps need to be reworked completely or extended well past the start of the next season. Where a season ends and begins is also going to come under scrutiny as contracts usually expire at the end of a season.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino said that there would be a deal to extend all contracts automatically, but players, who are used to five- or six-figure signing bonuses, would not be in favour of such a move, especially after having lost out on wages before. Another problem would be that some teams have already inked pre-contracts effective from July 1, such as Hakim Ziyech, who is set to move from Ajax to Chelsea.

Infantino added some more

ideas to the mix in his conversations with Corriere dello Sport, although he did not elaborate far enough to paint a clear picture. "We can perhaps reform world football by taking a step back. With different formats. Less tournaments, but more interesting. Maybe fewer teams, but more balanced. Less games, to protect the health of the players, but more competitive."

Although there could be a silver lining, or so believes Everton manager Carlo Ancelotti.

"We are living through something none of us were used to and which will change us profoundly. TV money will go down, players and coaches will earn less. Tickets will cost less because people will have less money. The economy will be different and so will football. Maybe it will be better."

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 talking about our first live experience at a sports venue.

MOHAMMAD ISAM from Dhaka, 1994



The fact it is now more than 26 years ago, makes me feel old. But cricket did get me early. Playing in the park or watching highlights on

TV, I was hooked to the Australian yellow and the New Zealand cool. After carefully following Dean Jones and Martin Crowe, I decided that I wanted to be a batsman who wore a cap and not a helmet. They had to show my face on TV properly, I thought.

This nerdy madness about cricket obviously got stoked a little more

pitch, and neither could the Pakistan openers Aamer Sohail and Saeed Anwar. I remember it took ages for Bangladesh to remove them, but the fall of the first wicket meant Inzamam-ul-Haq's torment was about to begin. Back then, due to his World Cup semifinal innings, my friends and I recognised him as the big threat. He could smash Enamul Haque Moni for straight sixes at will, we reckoned.

Lo and behold, Inzamam got stumped off Moni bhai for 11. Pakistan made 272 for four in 45 overs, to which Bangladesh replied with 210-5 in 45 overs. The fact that they were not bowled out by the world champions was a big deal. Everyone except Salim



Major sporting events around the globe have already been halted in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. And even though the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi have not been in action since the upsurge of the pandemic, the duo were seen in the backdrop of a class in Dushanbe in Tajikistan. Tajikistan remains one of the few countries where the football season is being continued despite coronavirus fears. And yesterday, a two-week long coaching course for applicants of certificate "C" have started in Dushanbe. Boir Igamberdiev, an instructor of the Asian Football Confederation, is conducting the course that consists of theoretical and practical classes.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

when it came to following Dhaka Premier League scorecards in the newspapers, and hoping for a glimpse of it in the BTV news. It hardly happened. Around the time I was nine years old, I heard that Pakistan were coming to play two one-day matches in Dhaka. My life was about to get upside down.

I don't know if I begged my parents a lot but before I knew it, on the morning of January 23, 1994, I was on my way to the Dhaka Stadium. It was my first time at the stadium, and entering through Gate No 21, I acted as if I had done this a million times. I had heard so many stories from my uncles about this magical place, that I just couldn't imagine not knowing the place without even being there once before.

We were part of a large group, wearing caps, packed with my mother's sandwiches and a water flask. One of my cousins, who had just broken into a Dhaka Premier League side that season, accompanied us too. I don't remember if we sat on the wooden chairs that they had in weddings in Dhaka in the 1990s, or concrete, but I was in love with the place.

I couldn't peel my eyes off the

Shahed batted reasonably well.

Bangladesh lost the next day too, by seven wickets, but my life was about to get even better. Pakistan were doing this tour on their way to a big series in New Zealand, so the day after the second game, they were off to Auckland from Dhaka, via Singapore. My parents had decided to take me to Singapore too. Coincidentally, we were on the same flight.

My mother told everyone later that I walked around the business class the entire flight, collecting autographs and my father taking my photos with the likes of Sohail, Anwar, Younis and Mushtaq Ahmed. I even have a photo with a sleeping Saleem Malik.

Fast forward to 2015, when Younis was Pakistan's head coach. At the end of the tour, my colleague Umar Farooq introduced me to him, as I wanted to take a photo with him, at the age of 31. I had carried our photo from 1994 with me. Younis took it from me, as he wanted to show his wife a reminder of his handsome youth. My first memory of live cricket came a full circle.

Mohammad Isam is ESPN/Cricinfo's Bangladesh correspondent and a former sports reporter at The Daily Star.

Burundi FA threatens action against BFF

SPORTS REPORTER



Constantin Mutima, manager of Burundi national football team, has threatened to lodge complaint to FIFA against Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) after failing to get promised prizemoney of US\$20,000 for the latest edition of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, which was completed on January 25.

Burundi finished runners-up after losing 3-1 against eventual champions Palestine in the final and they received a symbolic cheque of the aforementioned amount, but even after two and a half months, neither Burundi nor Palestine have got any prizemoney from the BFF.

Mutima contacted this reporter on Monday and alleged that the BFF officials are not even responding to their calls and that they might inform the matter to the Prime Minister's Office.

"We came to play the tournament for the first time in Bangladesh and we came second in the tournament. We were supposed to get \$20,000. Now is three months after the final. If we send message to the Bangladesh Football Federation, message is read but no answer. Now if they don't pay money by end of this month, we

are gonna take this case to the FIFA and the office of the Prime Minister (Bangladesh) because she is the one presented the trophy and prizes," said Mutima through a text message.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag, however, claimed that the file regarding the cash transfer is with the Bangladesh Bank.

"We should have sent their money by March but we could not send the money as we did not focus on this issue due to the coronavirus situation. We expect to pay the prizemoney as soon as the shutdown comes to an end," Shohag said, admitting that they have also not paid the US\$30,000 prizemoney to champions Palestine.

The BFF had earlier made similar delay in paying US\$50,000 to former champions Nepal for nearly two years before being forced to clear the amount after reports regarding the issue came out in local media.

Asked whether they have arranged for the money, Shohag said, "There are instructions to follow for all government procedures regarding sending money abroad. Money is no problem; we will send it as soon as we get permission. We have already got permission from the finance ministry and the file is with the Bangladesh Bank."

La Liga eyeing May return

AFP, Madrid

La Liga could return to action as early as next month, its president Javier Tebas said on Tuesday, as the league awaits a chance to restart following the coronavirus shutdown.

Tebas also warned Spanish clubs could lose as much as one billion euros (\$1.1 billion) if the season is not completed, pushing football bosses in the country to search for a late finish to the current campaign.

"The different scenarios we have been looking at with UEFA to go back to competing are most probably starting on the May 29 June 6-7 or June 28," Tebas said.

"We're not just looking at what happens in Spain... the job is to get all our calendars (in Europe) in line so all the competitions are able to finish together."

However Tebas said no team training could take place until after the state of emergency ends in Spain -- currently set until April 26.

Australian cricketers 'sucked up' to India: Clarke

AFP, Sydney



Australian cricketers "sucked up" to India and Virat Kohli by holding back on verbal sledging to protect lucrative Indian Premier League deals, according to former Australia captain Michael Clarke.

Clarke said players were "too scared" to play a normal game against India because of the influence of the world's wealthiest cricket tournament.

"Everybody knows how powerful India are in regards to the financial part of the game, internationally or

domestically with the IPL," Clarke said on Sky Racing television.

"I feel that Australian cricket, and probably every other team over a little period, went the opposite and actually sucked up to India. They were too scared to sledge Kohli or the other Indian players," he said, referring to the verbal sparring that often takes place on the pitch.

Australian players have attracted big money since the IPL started in 2008. Paceman Pat Cummins is the most expensive overseas star this year with Kolkata Knight Riders paying \$2.17 million.



Russia denies bribing FIFA officials

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin on Tuesday "categorically" denied allegations that Russia had bribed FIFA officials for the right to host the 2018 World Cup.

"Russia absolutely legally got the right to organise the World Cup," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

He said the decision was "not linked to any bribes, we categorically deny this." "Russia organized the best football World Cup in history. We are proud of it," he added.

According to US Justice Department documents released Monday, FIFA officials received bribes to vote in favor of awarding the 2018 World Cup to Russia and the tournament in 2022 to Qatar.

"We have read the articles in the media. We do not understand what it is about," Peskov said.

The allegations are linked to a 2015 corruption scandal that led to the downfall of then-president Sepp Blatter.

PADMA BRIDGE RAIL LINK PROJECT IS BEING BUILT WITH BSRM

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SHAH CEMENT

Private univs seek review of UGC directives

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Private universities authorities called for the review of the University Grants' Commission directives to stop assigning students' grades without holding semester finals, enrolling new students without admission tests, and holding tests online due to the coronavirus situation.

Private universities owners' association as well as top administrators said that they were just two or three weeks from finishing the spring semester and took some decisions for the crisis period so that the students don't fall into session jams.

"Authorities of many private universities were stunned seeing the UGC orders," said Sheikh Kabir Hossain, chairman of Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh (APUB).

He said most of the universities were in their final weeks of the spring semester.

"Many universities are taking online classes and they have arranged the exam. They can either welcome the directive or can be hurt from it," he said.

He said that The Private University Act 2010 does not have any clear instruction about conducting exams, or awarding grade without semester finals.

"Usually, the university's academic council or syndicate takes decisions in this regard. Many universities are awarding grades without final exams based on midterms and class assignments."

"We will request them [UGC] to review their directives and we will send a letter to them soon," Kabir said.

He said that the decision was taken without their consultation.

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The imam of Baitul Mukarram leads Jhr prayers at the national mosque in the capital yesterday, a day after the government issued a circular saying that none but employees of mosques are allowed to offer daily or Juma prayers at mosques. The move was taken to slow the spread of coronavirus.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

2 mentally challenged girls raped

Cases filed; police yet to arrest rapists

STAR REPORT

Two mentally challenged girls were raped in Bagerhat and Laxmipur on Monday.

Family members of the victims filed cases in respective police stations and police sent both the victims to hospitals for medical tests while rapists went into hiding, reported our correspondents in Bagerhat and Noakhali.

In Bagerhat, Hafizur Rahman, 45, was made an accused in the case.

The victim's mother, who filed the case, said her husband left home around 8:00am on Monday. Right after that, she went outside to buy rice. Returning home, she saw Hafizur running out of their house.

As soon as the mother entered the home, she found her daughter crying who later shared the incident with her. Later, she informed police, she added.

Mahtab Uddin, officer-in-charge of Bagerhat Model Police Station, said they visited the spot and were launching drives to arrest the accused.

In Laxmipur, the victim's brother filed a case with Laxmipur Sadar Police Station.

Quoting locals, police said Abdul Kadir, owner of a confectionery store, picked up the mentally challenged girl on Monday night and took her to his shop and raped her.

Later, the girl shared the incident with her family members.

AKM Azizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of the police station, said they sent the victim for medical tests after her brother filed a case.

"We are trying to arrest the accused," the police official added.



PRAYER TIMING APRIL 8

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

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

3 held with relief rice in Natore

AL leader among them

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Local administration arrested three people, including an Awami League leader, for misappropriating 13 sacks of rice of the government's food-friendly programme in Natore's Singra upazila.

The incident came just three days after the seizure of 5.5 tonnes of relief rice from the house of an Awami League (AL) leader in Naogaon's Raninagar upazila.

The arrestees are Shahin Shah, a local AL leader and member of Sukash union parishad, rice trader Golam Hossain, and rice dealer Md Lebu, said Nasrin Banu, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Singra.

Locals detained Shahin and Golam in Boalia Bazar area when they were returning with eight sacks of rice, each weighing 30kg, yesterday afternoon and informed the upazila administration.

A team, led by Executive Magistrate Nazmul Alam, raided the spot and arrested the two. Lebu was arrested later from the same area based on the information given by the two.

This rice is allocated for the poor and extreme poor people and sold at Tk 10 per kg as part of the government's social protection programmes.

During primary interrogation, Golam confessed that he used to sell the rice of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

Bangabandhu to continue as party chief



Bangabandhu addressing the council session of Awami League on April 8, 1972.

APRIL 8, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

AL COUNCIL RESOLUTION PASSED

Bangladesh Awami League Council today unanimously adopts a resolution requesting Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to continue as the president of the organisation till the next session of the Council. The Council also bestows upon Bangabandhu full power to form an organising committee for Bangladesh Awami League and organising committees for the districts.

Bangabandhu, however, tries to convince the councillors that he

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Forge nat'l consensus

Jatiya Oikyafront urges govt, places 5-point proposal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Putting forward a five-point proposal, Jatiya Oikyafront yesterday urged the government to forge a national consensus to tackle the coronavirus crisis.

The front in a statement also asked for the formation of an "Emergency Economic Council" based on national consensus to deal with the post-coronavirus socioeconomic situation.

It said overcoming any disaster with a "narrow and partisan" attitude was not possible.

"It is now urgently necessary for the government to ensure the essential lifesaving healthcare services to 18 crore people who are at the risk of coronavirus, and expand the coronavirus testing facilities across the country," the statement

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

STAY HOME, STAY WELL

Act wisely, responsibly

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

With the spread of coronavirus touching new heights every day, a loud and clear message to stay indoors and maintain social distancing has been sent out to the world.

Knowing that there is no vaccine or treatment available to cure the virus, it is time for every single individual to act responsibly and wisely, says Dr. Chowdhury Rehnema Tabassum, medical officer of pediatric neurology and autism at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

She said social distancing and isolation is the ideal way to go, and maintaining mental strength is the key to stay safe.

Rehnema suggested that to continue being mentally strong, one must not read news regarding the virus too frequently as people already know about the virus.

If it is possible, it is better to avoid checking on the death toll because this number may mentally weaken people. "It is not a cricket match or any sport that you have to be updated about the score or number."

Rehnema said that rumours and misinformation are the biggest enemies at the moment, as they may misguide people.

"So, keep yourself away from misinformation

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Acute food crisis hits village in Bandarban

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

Amid countrywide shutdown to prevent Covid-19, inhabitants of many remote hilly areas in several upazilas of Bandarban are facing a severe food shortage as authorities are yet to send any aid for these people.

For the last couple of years, many hill people have been facing a food crisis during April and May due to a poor harvest of Jhum cultivation (slash-and-burn agriculture) and the situation aggravated this year thanks to the shutdown.

Family of Pekru Mro, an elderly woman from remote Kapru Para area in Lama upazila, was found to have been subsisting only on potatoes for the last two weeks as they got nothing else to eat.

"We have no food in our house. Sometimes we eat potatoes found in the nearby jungle, sometimes we starve", she said.

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Pekru Mro, middle, her husband and son eat wild potatoes at their home in Kapru Para of Bandarban's Lama upazila yesterday. Locals said at least 30 families in this remote area, 47 km off Bandarban town, have been suffering from food shortages for the last two weeks as they are self-isolating to protect themselves and others from catching coronavirus. They are yet to receive any relief from the government.

PHOTO: SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

PRISONER EXCHANGE

Taliban break off talks with Afghan govt

REUTERS, Kabul

The Taliban yesterday broke off talks with the Afghan government on a prisoner exchange, a main step in peace talks being brokered by the United States after it agreed on a troop withdrawal pact with the militants.

Suhail Shaheen, a spokesman for the Islamist insurgent group's political office in Qatar, said on Twitter a technical team would not participate in "fruitless meetings" and the release of their prisoners was being "delayed under one pretext or another".

The late February pact between the United States and the Taliban, under which US-led international forces will withdraw in exchange for Taliban security guarantees, is the best chance yet of ending the 18-year war.

But peace hinges on talks between the US-backed Afghan government and the militants. A prisoner exchange is meant to build confidence on both sides for those talks.

A spokesman for the government said it would maintain its work on the prisoner release plan.

"We ask the Taliban to not sabotage the process by making excuses now," said Javid Faisal, a spokesman for the National Security Council in Kabul.

The Taliban suspension of the talks could lead to an escalation of violence, which in turn could threaten the plan to withdraw US troops, a major objective of President Donald Trump.

A three-member Taliban team arrived in Kabul last month from Qatar to begin the prisoner exchange process.

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