



# The Daily Star

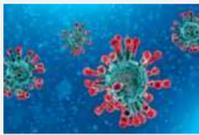


REGD. No. DA 781 | Vol. XXX No. 98 | BAISHAKH 9, 1427 BS | **Your Right to Know** | SHABAN 27, 1441 HJRI | 12 PAGES PRICE: Tk 12.00

**BANGLADESH UPDATE** **434** New cases in 24hrs **3,382** Total cases **110** Deaths **87** Recoveries **GLOBAL UPDATE** **171,810** Deaths **2,501,156** Total cases

## Make people stay at home

Police asked at high-profile meeting; shutdown may be extended by at least a week



- Bangladesh won't allow any Rohingya in
- No retail sales at Karwan Bazar
- Undocumented workers to be brought back in phases
- 250 beds ready at private hospitals for coronavirus patients

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHERJEE and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Amid a sharp spike in coronavirus cases, the government may extend the ongoing shutdown by at least another week as part of its efforts to contain the outbreak. If extended, the shutdown will then end on May 2. It would be the fourth extension since the government first announced the closure of all public and private offices from March 26 to April 4. The matter was discussed at a high-profile meeting at the Cabinet Division yesterday. At the meeting, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said people have to stay home at any cost, and law enforcers have to be as tough as needed to

ensure the shutdown, meeting sources said. Presided over by Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque, the meeting was attended also by the information and foreign ministers, and state ministers for disaster management and relief, and labour and employment. The inspector general of police and cabinet secretary were also present. Officials of the Prime Minister's Office and the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) joined via video conferencing, the sources added. "All the decisions [taken at the meeting] would be compiled now, and the health minister will communicate those to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her approval." SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



The fish market in Gazipur's Abdullahpur is an example of how to violate social distancing guidelines during the ongoing coronavirus outbreak. Along with Dhaka and Narayanganj, Gazipur is one of the worst-affected areas in the country, but despite police officials being present and loud speakers communicating the need to maintain distance, the buyers and sellers paid no heed yesterday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

### 4 die after showing Covid-19 symptoms

STAR REPORT  
At least four people died in four districts with coronavirus symptoms yesterday. Officials are testing their samples for Covid-19 and have placed their homes under lockdown. In Khulna's Rupsha upazila, a 43-year-old man died yesterday morning after suffering from fever, cold, cough and breathing problems for five days, our district correspondent reported. The man was brought to Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) around 7:45am. He died on the way to the hospital, said Dr Ashikur Rahman, emergency medical officer of KMCH. We collected his sample for coronavirus test, the doctor said. He was involved in SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Outbreak may be approaching peak

Hint experts, suggest rigorous testing, contact-tracing and isolation efforts  
MOUIDUD AHMED SUJAN and WASIM BIN HABIB  
As the country continues to grapple with coronavirus crisis amid a surge in deaths and infections, experts hint that the outbreak is gradually approaching its peak. The authorities yesterday said nine more people died and 434 new cases of infection were detected in 24 hours till 2:30pm. With this, the death toll hit 110 and the total number of cases jumped to 3,382, according to data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). A total of 2,974 samples were tested in those 24 hours. The number is seven percent higher than that of the previous day, shows the data. Speaking on the rising trend, experts warned that the coronavirus situation was likely to worsen further. They, however, suggested increasing the number of Covid-19 tests, ramping up contact tracing and enforcing lockdown more strictly to get "good results". "We need more rigorous programmes -- rigorous testing, rigorous contact tracing and isolation efforts. These should end within two weeks. None should be allowed to move anywhere during this period. Only then, we will get good results," said Prof Ridwanur Rahman, a renowned medicine and infectious disease specialist. Things will take a turn for the worse if these measures are not ensured strictly, he told The Daily Star yesterday. "Every [Covid-19] patient represents a cluster of around 20 people. Have we traced all the contacts for each patient?" he asked. Prof Ridwanur said the outbreak was gaining pace. Replying to a query, he said, "Under the current situation, it's difficult to say when the outbreak SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

### 31 Gazipur policemen infected

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur  
At least 31 police personnel have been infected with coronavirus in Gazipur. Twenty-four of them work at Gacha Police Station under Gazipur Metropolitan Police (GMP) while the rest at Kaliganj Police Station under district police. Of the infected, one tested positive on April 13, three on April 16 and the rest tested positive yesterday, said Khairuzzaman, civil surgeon of the district. Health workers are collecting samples of other police personnel who came into contact with the infected ones. The samples will be sent to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) for tests, he added. Of the 24 in GMP, 21 are men and have been kept in isolation inside Gacha Police Station. Three female officers have been SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

## Farmers upbeat on bumper Boro yield

HAOR AREAS IN SYLHET DIVISION  
MINTU DESHWARA and DWOHA CHOWDHURY  
Amid the coronavirus scare and threat of impending flash flood, farmers in the haor region of Sylhet Division are expecting a bumper Boro harvest this time. Many of the farmers, who have been busy harvesting Boro paddy over the last one week, said they were happy with the market prices for their produce. They, however, said a shortage of farm labourers made it difficult for them to harvest Boro, the main crop in the region. According to the Department of Agriculture Extension, Boro has been cultivated on 447,195 hectares of land in Sylhet Division with a production target of 23.71 lakh tonnes. Srinibash Debnath, additional director of the department in Sylhet, said, "This year, the harvest seems very good. No disease hit the paddy. We are expecting a very good yield." Till yesterday, 31 percent of the produce was harvested in the haor areas against 21 percent in the whole division, he mentioned, adding that the progress was satisfactory. The official, however, voiced worry that flash flood may hit the region any time. According to the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre of Bangladesh Water Development Board, flash flood may hit the haor region at the end of the week due to excessive rainfall in the north-eastern part of the SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



### 5,400 schools to stay open for harvesters

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR  
The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) has kept open over 5,400 primary schools in haor areas to accommodate labourers harvesting paddy. Officials said doors of around 5,041 primary schools in four districts of Sylhet division and another 400 in Kishoreganj and 16 in Netrokona are open to the labourers. Farmers grow paddy on the low-lying wetlands in those districts only once a year. But flashfloods during this period of the year damage crops at times. Meanwhile, only about 10 percent of paddy harvesting was done in Sylhet division until Sunday, according to an estimate of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in the division. Farmers have been complaining about a shortage of harvesting SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

### HSC exams may begin in late May

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR  
The postponed Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and its equivalent examinations may begin at the end of next month. The exams slated for April 1 were postponed on March 22 in fear of coronavirus spread. "We are considering to hold the HSC exams after Eid-ul-Fitr," Chairman of Dhaka Education Board Prof Ziaul Haque told The Daily Star yesterday. He made the comments after all board chairmen and exam controllers held a virtual meeting with Mahbub Hossain, secondary and higher education division secretary. Eid-ul-Fitr will be celebrated on May 24 or 25, said officials. A board chairman, who was present at the meeting, said they discussed beginning of the HSC exams from May 31. Over a million students are expected to sit for SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Workers setting up a 2,000-bed hospital at the International Convention City Bashundhara, which will be dedicated to treating Covid-19 patients. The hospital is expected to open by April 25. Inset, some beds for the hospital. This photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Antibody tests can be key

Some experts say it can paint a better picture; WHO warns it does not confirm immunity

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

As the country has been in the third stage of coronavirus transmission when the virus spreads quickly within the community, experts have called for the immediate launch of widespread antibody tests to clearly understand the extent of infection. The government is also considering initiating the method. It is taking opinions from health experts and reviewing the outcomes in other countries who have already used antibody tests for Covid-19 diagnosis. Several government officials said there were questions over the accuracy of this method which cast doubt over its usefulness. Experts, on the flip side, said the error margin of this method was still not evident and many developed countries were using it for wide-scale testing. The point on which both the parties seemed to have agreed is that the method is cheap, quick and easily accessible. It would also help to detect those who are asymptomatic -- people who carry the virus but never develop any symptom. Prof ABM Abdullah, the personal physician of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, said, "I think we should go for the antibody tests." He said other countries have started it and pointed out that there was nothing to lose. The experts said widespread antibody testing can be useful in identifying those who have recovered or become SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Singapore shelves virus superheroes after backlash

AFP, Singapore

A band of Singapore superheroes created to help in the coronavirus fight has been shelved after internet users criticised the campaign for being too light-hearted and for mocking Liverpool football club.

The "Virus Vanguard" featured comic-book characters including "Dr Disinfecto", "Fake News Buster", and "Must Always Walk Alone (MAWA) Man" -- a jibe referring to the English Premier League side's anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone".

The initiative devised by the government and local artists was aimed at encouraging people to follow rules to combat a worsening virus outbreak, but social media quickly lit up with mockery and anger.

Late Monday, the government

announced on its Facebook page the campaign was under review, while a picture of the characters disappeared and was replaced by their silhouettes.

"We have received quite a lot of feedback on the characters and we will be reviewing them. We are sorry if we offended anyone," the post said.

One user described the outfit as "too light-hearted and frivolous -- perhaps tone deaf even", while another described the characters as "offensive".

The band first appeared Monday, the same day Singapore reported a record jump in virus cases that took its total to over 8,000.

Fake News Buster, who according to local news website CNA "wields the Mallet of Truth" in his battle against fake news, came in for special mockery.

## Farmers upbeat

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country and in the Indian states of Assam and Meghalaya.

Shyamal Sarkar, a farmer of Bagbari village of Dharmapasha upazila in Sunamganj, said, "The weather is still favourable and the Khurma river is flowing below the danger mark. We hope to finish harvest before the flash flood hits the area."

Upesh Sutradhar, a marginal farmer of Mahdi village in Chhatak upazila, said he had already harvested paddy on one acre of his three-acre land and was happy with the produce.

"I have already harvested around 30 maunds of paddy and sold those for Tk 650 a maund. I am happy with the harvest and the price," he said.

Last year farmers sold Boro paddy for around Tk 400 a maund.

This time, farmers are happy with the prices ranging from Tk 650 to Tk 750 per maund.

Many of them said they were facing a shortage of farm labourers. But thankfully, idle labourers of different

sectors joined them to harvest paddy.

Tamij Uddin is one such labourer from Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila. He along with his brother is now harvesting paddy in Hakaluki Haor area.

Ekhlashur Rahman, a labourer of Chanpur village in Chhatak upazila, said, "There is a bit of crisis of farm labourers, but the wages of labourers have not gone up that much".

However, Abdur Razzak, a farmer from Dugnoi village in Dharmapasha upazila, said, "A farm labourer is now charging Tk 700 a day. The amount usually hovers around Tk 500."

"The virus scare and a lack of transport are deterring labourers of other districts from coming here," he mentioned.

Another Farmer, Shyamal Sarkar, in the same upazila, said, "There are different ways to pay a labourer. Some labourers take one of every seven sacks of paddy they harvest, while some charge Tk 1,800 to 2,000 per kiyar (37 decimals)."

## 4 die after showing Covid-19

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mobile servicing work and worked in different areas, relatives of the deceased said.

A 65-year-old died at Patuakhali General Hospital within an hour after admission yesterday morning.

The man had been suffering from cough and breathing problems since long and his condition got worse after developing fever since yesterday, said Dr Mohammad Abdul Baten, superintendent of the hospital.

He was brought to the hospital around 7:00am yesterday and died after a while, the doctor said.

"We have collected his samples for coronavirus test," he added.

House of the deceased and some neighbours have been locked down after his death, Mohammad Jahangir Alam, civil surgeon of Patuakhali said.

He would be buried following the Covid-19 protocols, he added.

In Bogura, a 28-year-old man died in 250 bedded Mohammad Ali Hospital, dedicated for corona patients, with Covid-19 syndromes yesterday afternoon around 2:00pm.

The dead, a resident of Bogura Sadar upazila, was admitted to the hospital on April 18 with cough and

breathing problems, Shafique Amin Kajal, residential medical officer of the hospital, said.

"We have collected his samples on April 18 and sent it to the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital lab for coronavirus test. However, we haven't yet got the result", the doctor said.

We have also collected his samples yesterday, said the RMO, adding that the youth was a street food vendor by profession.

In Feni General Hospital, a muezzin died with Covid-19 symptoms yesterday morning.

The 68-year-old muezzin hailed from Joylaskar union in Feni's Daganbhuyan upazila, a correspondent from Feni reported.

The man was suffering from fever, cough and breathing problems for last few days and undergoing treatment at Feni General Hospital, Robayat Karim, upazila health officer of Daganbhuyan, said.

His samples have been sent to Chattogram for Covid-19 test and he was buried at his village following proper procedures, the doctor said.

House of the dead and of other four neighbours have been locked down since noon, Rabiul Hasan, UNO of the upazila said.

## Antibody tests can be key

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immune to the virus. This could be useful for plasma therapy in future as well.

The World Health Organisation has cautioned that there's no evidence that serological tests can show whether a person has immunity or is no longer at risk of becoming reinfected.

The current method of testing, although useful, only detects people who are currently infected with the coronavirus but not who have already recovered.

Experts said antibody tests take only 15-20 minutes to produce results whereas PCR tests take at least four hours.

Md Nazmul Hasan, assistant professor of internal medicine at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical

University, said though there was confusion over the accuracy of this method, it was not proved utterly incorrect.

Many countries, including the US, South Korea, and India, are conducting antibody tests to bring more people under screening facilities.

Abul Kalam Azad, director general of Directorate General of Health Services, told The Daily Star they would go for the method once they get recommendations from experts.

Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research adviser Mostaq Hossain said, "This test method should be applied only where there is community transmission."

Widespread use of this test may provide us with misleading results, he said.

added.

For the first time in the last eight years, the government will not be able to publish results 60 days within completing of a public exam.

This year, the SSC exams began on February 3, with the theoretical and practical tests ending on February 27 and on March 6 respectively.

Some 20,47, 779 students took part in the SSC and its equivalent examinations held at 3,512 centres.

A board chairman said they also talked about shortening of Eid-ul-Azha, Durga Puja and winter vacations and increasing of the duration of classes to make up the loss due to educational institutions closure.

According to this year's academic calendar, there are 16 days of Eid-ul-Azha vacation from July 20 and seven days of Durga Puja vacation from October 22 and 13 days of winter vacation from December 15.

"We have discussed the matter as an alternative to making up the loss. But no decision was made," Prof Ziaul said.

## HSC exams

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HSC and its equivalent exams, which are expected to be held at over 9,000 educational institutions under eight general, one madrasa, and one technical education boards.

On March 16, the government closed down all educational institutions from March 17 to 31. The shutdown was eventually extended until April 25.

This means schools and colleges will remain closed until May 31 for the Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr vacation, if the government does not cancel or shorten the vacation.

Prof Ziaul, who is also the head of the inter-board coordination committee, said they were planning to publish the results of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and its equivalent exams 15 days after the relaxation of ban on public transport movement.

"Evaluation of exam papers is almost complete. We now need to collect OMR [Optical Mark Reader] sheets of the courses," he said.

The government earlier planned to publish the results on May 7, he



Soldiers stopping cars at a checkpoint in Dhanmondi yesterday. Despite the countrywide shutdown to curb the spread of coronavirus, the number of vehicles on streets of the capital has increased over the last few days.

## Make people stay at home

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one of the ministers who participated at the meeting told The Daily Star.

The meeting decided that law enforcers have to take tougher measures in the worst-hit areas, including Dhaka, amid reports of people coming out of their homes without specific reasons and ultimately increasing the risk of further spread.

Earlier yesterday, DGHS announced that nine people died of the coronavirus infection in the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 110. Besides, 434 people tested positive during the same period, raising the total number of infected people to 3,382.

Bangladesh reported its first Covid-19 case on March 8 and the first death on March 18. On March 23, the government announced the shutdown of all public and private offices from March 26 to April 4 as a measure to slow the contagion.

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

The following day, the government decided to suspend all public transport services, inching closer to enforcing a lockdown. Later, the government extended the shutdown till April in three phases.

Although, law enforcers and even the Bangladesh Army are on the field to ensure social distancing to prevent Covid-19 from spreading, many people are coming out of their homes. While many poor people had to take to the streets to find relief or some work, many others are roaming the streets with either an unimportant or no purpose.

**DISCUSSIONS AT THE MEETING**  
Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said that even during the pandemic some Rohingyas have crossed into Bangladesh, and the authorities concerned must ensure that none can enter the country at this time.

He also mentioned that many

countries are putting pressure on Dhaka to bring back undocumented Bangladeshis working there. Meanwhile, some 1,200 to 1,300 Bangladeshis are now stranded in many countries, including India and Singapore, Momen told the meeting.

In this regard, a minister told this newspaper that the meeting decided to bring all those undocumented Bangladeshis back but in phases if they bring documents from those countries, which can certify that they tested negative for coronavirus.

Once here, they would be home-quarantined or sent into institutional quarantine, the minister said, preferring anonymity.

The meeting also talked about the measures taken to protect doctors, nurses and other health workers, who are now on the frontlines in the fight against Covid-19.

They discussed whether there were any lapses in the measures, the minister said, adding that the safety of law enforcers and government officials on the field were also discussed.

At least 205 doctors have been infected with coronavirus till yesterday, while around 130 nurses and other health workers have also gotten infected mainly due to the "poor quality" of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), community transmission and many patients' tendency to hide symptoms of the disease, according to Bangladesh Doctors' Foundation.

The minister said the meeting also discussed the possibility of opening factories and other economic activities where the infection rate is still low.

The government would request private hospitals and private practitioners to open their hospitals and chambers to join the battle against the pandemic, he said.

"At least they [can] provide telemedicine in this crisis," he added.

The health secretary said 250 beds have been readied at two private hospitals in the capital to treat

males and four females.

Age-wise, three of the dead were above 60 years, three between 51 and 60 years and three between 40 and 50 years, she said.

Meanwhile, two more patients recovered in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, taking the total number of recovery cases to 87.

Besides, 89 people were put under isolation in those 24 hours across the country, she said.

Prof Nasima said the number of people in quarantine now stands at 83,802, including 77,931 in home quarantine and 5,874 in institutional quarantine.

Dhaka district remains to be the worst affected region. As many as 1,174 of the total coronavirus cases until Monday were reported in the capital alone.

Speaking on the situation in Dhaka, Prof Nazrul Islam, a virologist and former vice chancellor at

Covid-19 patients. Of them, 200 beds are at Anwar Khan Modern Medical College Hospital and 50 at Universal Medical College & Hospital Ltd.

Speaking to the Daily Star, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said extension of the ongoing shutdown, preparation of hospitals to treat coronavirus patients, and harsher measures to make people stay at home were discussed.

The meeting recommended waiving restrictions of the shutdown first in those areas where people are not infected with coronavirus, he added.

He also said the meeting elaborately discussed the grave situation in Dhaka after the coronavirus outbreak. "We have discussed our capabilities in case the situation deteriorates further, as people are playing hide and seek to avoid shutdown."

Meanwhile, the authorities have decided to keep Karwan Bazar, one of the biggest kitchen markets in Dhaka city, closed for retail sales from yesterday, as a measure to contain the spread of the virus.

Only wholesalers can trade at the market following a new schedule. However, the retailers will now sit on the road in front of the Government Science College.

Rubaiyet Zaman, additional deputy commissioner (Tejgaon division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said the decision was taken to ensure social distancing as a number of the traders and workers have tested positive for Covid-19.

As per the new schedule, vegetable and food wholesalers will have to do trading between 9:00pm and 2:00am, while the fishermen will trade between 4:00am and 9:00am.

All vehicles will enter the market on the lane beside the CA building, the lanes in front of the Wasa Building and Hotel La Vinci, and will leave the market through the roads in front of Petrobangla and TCB Building.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), said the authorities on Monday reported the highest number of new cases for a single day: 492.

Of them, Dhaka city alone saw 200 cases while Dhaka division reported 211.

He said analysing the data it could be said that the transmission of coronavirus has not slowed down in Dhaka city expectedly. "It appears that the outbreak in the city is heading towards its peak."

About the low number of new cases detected outside Dhaka, Prof Nazrul, also a member of the government's newly formed national technical advisory committee on the Covid-19 control programme, said, "Sample collection is still low."

He suggested fixing a strategy on testing and contract tracing of all new cases to contain the spread of Covid-19.

## Lanka falls silent for victims on Easter attacks

### anniv

AFP, Colombo

Survivors of last year's devastating Islamist suicide bombings in Sri Lanka held a private anniversary service yesterday because of a coronavirus lockdown as the nation paid tribute with a two-minute silence.

The pandemic forced the Roman Catholic leadership to call off elaborate services to honour the 279 people killed at hotels and churches in the Easter Sunday attacks.

## Strict isolation

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complicated cases.

"The new born babies and mothers should be isolated and one of the family members will be designated to come close to them, others will not be allowed," she said.

The newborn babies should not be handled by people this time and guests should not be allowed at home.

"It may sounds odd but we have to be straightforward during this time to keep mothers and babies safe," she said.

## Bogura man

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in absence of his wife and other family members.

As the victim started screaming, he beat her up, threatened her with dire consequences, and asked her to leave.

Police, on information, arrested the accused and produced him before court. He was then sent to jail, the OC said.

The victim was sent to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College and Hospital for treatment and medical tests, the OC said.

## 5,400 schools

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workers due to the nationwide Covid-19 shutdown.

AKM Shafayet Alam, DPE deputy director in Sylhet division, said they were ready to accommodate labourers at all schools in haor areas.

He said they took the decision following an order by Primary and Mass Education Secretary Akram-Al-Hossain.

Shafayet said early rainfall coupled with possible flash floods, forecasted by the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), was another reason for keeping the schools open to workers.

On April 13, the BWDB forecasted that flash floods might hit the haor areas of Sunamganj and Sylhet as India's meteorological department predicted excessive rainfall in its bordering areas and in the north-eastern part of Bangladesh.

Taking the forecast in consideration, district officials issued a notice asking farmers to harvest boro paddy as soon as possible.

In a move to slow down the spread of coronavirus, the government initially closed all educational institutions from March 17-31. Later, the closure was extended to April 25.

The closure till April 25 means schools and colleges will remain shut until May 31 as they would have holidays for the Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr, if the government does not cancel or cut those.

District primary education officers in Kishoreganj and Netrakona said they instructed all teachers to talk to farmers and local public representatives to inform them that they could accommodate harvesting labourers at schools.

Speaking to The Daily Star on Sunday, DAE Additional Director (Sylhet division) Srinibas Debnath said paddy was cultivated on 474,195 hectares of land in the division this year.

The boro harvest season began last week and it would probably continue until the first week of next month, he added.

## 31 Gazipur

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sent into home-quarantine, said Anwar Hossain, GMP commissioner.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Gacha Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Ismail Hossain said a man at a building adjacent to the police station had tested positive for coronavirus.

The authorities concerned locked down the building and collected samples of all the residents. A GMP official also lived in that building and tested positive, he added.

Then the 23 police personnel, who came into contact with the policeman from the building, were infected gradually, added OC Ismail.

He also said some other buildings adjacent to the police station were also locked down. Gacha Police Station is now functioning with the help of other stations.

Meanwhile, the seven policemen from Kaliganj Police Station used to be on-duty at a check post on the edge of the area bordering with Narayanganj district, one of the worst-hit districts.

Kaliganj OC Mizanul Haque said that since the coronavirus infection rate in Narayanganj is very high, the seven may have been infected at the check post.

They had to go to hospitals for different purposes, so they might have even contracted the disease from hospitals, he added.

The infected ones have been kept in isolation in the station, added the OC.

AFP, Paris

Whether it came from a bat or a pangolin is not certain, but one thing is: the coronavirus outbreak that has killed tens of thousands and turned the world upside down comes from the animal world.

It is human activity that enabled the virus to jump to people, and specialists are warning that if nothing changes many other pandemics of this nature will follow.

The name given to diseases transmitted from animals to humans is "zoonoses", based on the Greek words for "animal" and "sickness".

They are not new -- tuberculosis, rabies, toxoplasmosis, malaria, to name just a few, are all zoonoses.

According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), 60 percent of human infectious diseases originate

from animals.

This figure climbs to 75 percent for "emerging" diseases such as Ebola, HIV, avian flu, Zika, or SARS, another type of coronavirus. The list goes on.

"The emergence of zoonotic diseases is often associated with environmental changes or ecological disturbances, such as agricultural intensification and human settlement, or encroachments into forests and other habitats," said a 2016 UNEP report.

"Changes in the environment are usually the result of human activities, ranging from land use change to climate change."

GwenaelVourc'h of INRAE, a French public research institute, also blames human activity for the crossover between species.

"Given the growth of the human

population and its ever more intense use of planetary resources, the destruction of more and more ecosystems multiplies contacts," she says.

A key area of concern is deforestation to make way for agriculture and intensive livestock farming.

Domesticated animals are often a "bridge" between pathogens from the wild and humans. The widespread use of antibiotics in the livestock industry has also led to bacterial pathogens building up immunity to front-line drugs.

Urbanisation and habitat fragmentation are also highly disruptive of the balance between species, while global warming can push disease-carrying animals into new territory.



**OLD (DHAKA) HABITS DIE HARD ...** While the rest of the city wears a deserted look under the ominous shadow of a coronavirus outbreak, the mood at Old Dhaka seems to be a little different. Known for being social and outgoing, hundreds of 'Dhakaiyas' crowd a street in Dayaganj, albeit some wearing masks. *Top right*, hawkers sell protective clothing by the streets of Nababpur, using some creativity to put the product on display. *Bottom right*, At Gulistan, three youths are spotted getting into a CNG-run auto-rickshaw, returning from Shakhari Bazar with a haul of kites, presumably stocking up to fly during days of quarantine. The photos were taken on Monday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## 264 UK, 154 Turkey citizens leave Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 264 UK and 154 Turkey citizens left Dhaka on special flights yesterday afternoon. They had opted to return home amid the Covid-19 outbreak, for which their governments arranged their return flights home.

A special chartered flight of the British Airways carrying the UK citizens left Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) at 3:49pm, Group Captain AHM Touhid-ul Ahsan, director, HSIA, told The Daily Star.

Among the UK-bound, were 10 infants and a few Bangladeshis who are permanent residents in the UK.

Earlier in the day, a special flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines had ferried around 157 UK citizens from Sylhet to Dhaka, said the HSIA director.

Meanwhile, 154 Turkey citizens left Dhaka for Ankara on a special flight of Turkish Airlines at 1:12pm, an official of the Aviation Security (AVSEC), HSIA, told The Daily Star.

In the last 26 days since March 26, citizens of various countries including USA, Russia, Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Bhutan, Germany and several other EU countries, left Dhaka through chartered flights amid the outbreak.

Besides, sources at the airport said, the 4th chartered flight for US citizens arranged by the US Department of State and US embassy in Dhaka was also scheduled to leave HSIA last night for Washington, DC.

## Worried for families back home

70 lakh workers have next to no access to Bangladeshi TV channels in Middle East, North Africa as satellite transmission remains halted

RASHIDUL HASAN and JAMIL MAHMUD

Although the state-owned Bangladesh Television has started broadcasting in Middle East and North Africa recently on a pilot basis, private TV channels from Bangladesh are still out of reach in the regions, limiting some 70 lakh Bangladeshi migrants from knowing about their homeland's present situation amid coronavirus outbreak.

Transmission of all Bangladeshi television channels are now being ensured via Bangabandhu-1. Earlier, the channels had telecast programmes in Middle East using "free-to-air" technology through installing devices at residences, said officials.

More than 30 channels' transmissions remained stopped since December last year because Bangabandhu-1 did not cover the region yet.

Bangladesh Communication Satellite Company Limited (BCSCL) Chairman

Shahjahan Mahmood on April 12 said BTV World's experimental transmission started at 1am on April 10 to the Middle Eastern and North African countries using Bangladesh's lone satellite Bangabandhu-1.

BCSCL, assigned to operate Bangabandhu-1, has taken the initiative as almost 70 percent of the around 1 crore Bangladeshi expatriates live in the Middle Eastern and North African countries, he said.

"Initially, we are working on BTV World and based upon the outcomes, we would start the process for private TV channels," he added. Shahjahan also said a tender would be floated at that time. "We would sign an agreement with the lowest bidder."

Meanwhile amid the global coronavirus pandemic, Bangladesh missions in Middle East have found it difficult to convey messages to expatriates -- largely migrant workers -- on the evolving situation.

Finding no other way, recently Bangladesh Ambassador to Saudi Arabia

Golam Moshi sought help of Saudi state television to air his message in Bangla to convey some crucial steps -- including visa extension and treatment for both regular and undocumented migrant workers.

As authorities in different Middle Eastern countries have taken various measures including imposing curfew and countrywide shutdown, television channels have become even more important to reach information to Bangladeshi workers.

Talking to this newspaper, Ambassador Moshi said he contacted the ministers concerned including post and telecommunications minister and repeatedly requested them to take measures to start the channels' transmission in Middle East.

"However, they only assured me verbally but did not resolve the problem," he said.

Moshi, also Bangladesh's permanent representative to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, said some migrants

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

## Press Council seeks food aid for journos, media workers

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Press Council has urged deputy commissioners (DC) to look out for journalists and media workers during the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

The organisation has asked DCs of all districts to prepare lists of journalists and media workers and arrange incentives for them, a letter signed by the council's secretary M Shah Alam said. The letter was sent to all DCs of the country on Sunday.

Citing the stimulus packages for providing food assistance announced by the government, the letter said journalists and media workers at the district and upazila levels also need this aid, as they have been working to bring information to people's doorsteps risking their lives.

It urged that the list be prepared in consultation with leaders of respective press clubs and journalists' organisations.

## 10 days of food for Tk 10

Youth for Bangladesh steps forth to support middle, lower-middle class

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Youth for Bangladesh (YFB), a voluntary organisation, recently started an initiative to sell "10 days of food for Tk 10", which particularly targets middle and lower-middle class residents in Dhaka city and other districts.

The food packets they provide include rice, potato, lentil, oil, chips and chocolate for children, etc. Two teams, one for managing food and another for distribution, are working under the initiative. Food items are bought with funds collected from members of the organisation.

To inspire people to have patience in these difficult times, they also stick various inspirational messages on the packets.

A total of 250 families have so far received the food packets, and the organisation has listed another thousand families for distribution.

Ariful Rahman, founder of YFB, said, "We're aiming to help the middle and lower-middle class families who feel uncomfortable to receive relief, but nonetheless are struggling."

"We understand their predicament. People who want to receive this service are contacting us through our Facebook page," he said.

Shehanur Rahman Asif, president of YFB's central committee, said, "Even though these people are having a hard time, they are hesitant to ask for help due to social norms. It's high time to step forth and extend support."

Like this initiative, YFB is running different programmes to tackle the misfortunes brought on by the coronavirus pandemic and are helping others in whatever way they can.

## CMSD show caused over low-quality masks

UNB, Dhaka

A show-cause notice was issued to Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD) on allegation that low-quality products including N95 masks are being supplied to some government hospitals, said a press release of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

After reviewing the allegation and the supplier's response, the ministry formed a three-member investigation committee on Sunday, the release said.

The committee, headed by Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) Additional Secretary Md Saidur Rahman, was asked to submit its report within three working days.

Earlier, physicians of some government hospitals, including Mugda General Hospital, complained of receiving low-quality masks.

Bangladesh Doctors' Foundation (BDF), a forum of physicians, on Monday, said 170 doctors -- both at public and private hospitals -- have been infected with coronavirus while treating patients.



A youth scours across the street with his hands full, as a sudden bout of rain put people in a helter-skelter while buying essentials from a TCB truck at port city's Kazir Dewri Bazar. The photo was taken yesterday around noon.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## Don't discriminate while distributing relief: Quader

UNB, Dhaka

Road, Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday urged all concerned to continue relief distribution work properly, and said that no discrimination during the process will be tolerated.

Quader, also general secretary of Awami League, warned those involved in such malpractices at a press briefing at his house.

"Continue relief distribution as directed by the prime minister, but no discrimination will be tolerated in the name of relief distribution," he said.

About BNP's allegation that their relief distribution programme was foiled, the minister said it is completely baseless. "The nation is united today under the brave and tested leadership of Sheikh Hasina to face the present crisis," he added.

He reiterated that "rice thieves" will not be spared.

## 164 more return from India

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another 164 Bangladeshis, who were stranded in Chennai, India for over a month following the outbreak of coronavirus, returned home yesterday by a special flight of US-Bangla Airlines.

The chartered flight landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at around 3:05pm, said an official of the airlines.

Most of the Bangladeshis who returned yesterday had gone to India for treatment, he added.

After completion of health screening, it would be decided who will be sent to self-quarantine or to institutional quarantine, an official at the health desk of Dhaka airport told this correspondent.

Among the first 164 who returned from Chennai earlier on Monday, 142 were advised to stay in self-quarantine at home while 22 were sent to Ashkona Hajj Camp for institutional quarantine, said Md Jahirul, a doctor at the health desk.

US-Bangla is scheduled to operate four more flights from Kolkata and Chennai.

At least 2,500 Bangladeshis including students, tourists and medical treatment

seekers remained stranded in different cities of India specially in Chennai, Bangalore, Delhi and Hyderabad due to Covid-19 outbreak, the foreign ministry said in a statement on April 3.

Meanwhile, a flight of Turkish Airlines yesterday brought back 20 Bangladeshi nationals to Dhaka, who were stranded in Turkey due to outbreak of coronavirus, said officials at Dhaka airport.

**BIMAN FLIGHT FROM DELHI ON FRIDAY** Meanwhile, Biman Bangladesh Airlines will also operate a special flight from New Delhi on Friday.

"As per the government's decision, Biman will operate a special chartered flight from Delhi to bring back Bangladeshi nationals in India," Biman Managing Director and CEO Md Mokabbir Hossain told media.

He said the flight would bring back 162 Bangladeshis, and the passengers will bear the cost.

Mokabbir said Bangladeshi nationals can purchase tickets for the flight from Biman's mobile app or website from today until 2pm on April 23.

## UNDP, UECL to give food support to 5,000 women

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Enterprises & Co Ltd (UECL) have taken a joint initiative to provide food support to 5,000 poor women in Jamalpur, Kurigram and Gaibandha.

In addition to raising awareness about spread of Covid-19, UNDP, under its "Strengthening Women's Ability for Productive New Opportunities" (SWAPNO) project, has initiated food distribution in 126 unions for marginalised women.

Some 540 women received food assistance on April 20 in 15 unions of Bakshiganj and Dewanganj of Jamalpur.

"The increased risks of losing jobs and income, inability to easily access essential services are some of the hardships that will disproportionately affect the poor.

This partnership will deliver food to the poor households," said Sudipto Mukerjee, resident representative of UNDP Bangladesh, in a statement yesterday.

## ADDRESSING COVID-19 OIC to hold video conference today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) will hold an extraordinary meeting of its executive committee at the level of foreign ministers via video conferencing today as part of its efforts to address issues related to the novel coronavirus.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen will participate in the meeting, the foreign ministry said in a statement yesterday.

The meeting comes as part of a series of measures taken and campaigns launched by the OIC since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The meeting is expected to review the effects of the pandemic on member states' public health, security and financial stability.

The current OIC executive committee comprises of six member states -- Bangladesh, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, The Gambia, United Arab Emirates, and Niger.

The meeting will be chaired by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, chair of the 14th Islamic summit conference, with the presence of the foreign ministers of these six countries and OIC secretary general.

# JUST teachers and officials to donate one day's salary to PM's relief fund

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Teachers, officers and employees of Jashore University of Science and Technology (JUST) will donate the amount of their one day's salaries to the Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund order to expedite the government's steps taken to fight the coronavirus, according to a press release.



As per the decision taken yesterday, the university's Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Anwar Hossain will hand over the money to PM's fund soon.

Apart from this, the teachers' association will also pay the same amount of their one day's salaries in May to help the disadvantaged and poor students of JUST, the release adds.

From the university's student welfare fund, they are also assisting five foreign students who have been stranded in the country due to coronavirus, it says further.



On a regular day, members of armed forces would be a rare sight in Satmasjid Road. But during the nationwide shutdown, the army is using roadblocks to check vehicles and make sure there is no unnecessary movement within the city.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

# Worried for families

FROM PAGE 3

live in remote areas in the vast region and reaching them with messages via television is easier than other means.

Due to air communication suspension, many Bangladeshis are stranded in some Middle Eastern countries. So, sending them message was essential for their safe repatriation, said the ambassador. He said about 45 to 50 lakh Bangladeshis currently live in different Middle Eastern countries.

Saudi authorities had asked the ambassador to prepare a list of stranded Bangladeshis so that the Gulf country could arrange a charter flight to carry them to Dhaka, he said.

Middle East is a primary destination of lower-educated Bangladeshi migrant workers who often lack sufficient communications skills in foreign languages. As a result, they largely depend on Bangla as means of their communications and entertainment.

Currently, alongside being worried about their own health safety, they are equally anxious about their dear ones back home amid a lack of reliable information.

Abdur Rahim, a chauffeur of a Dubai family, said although he is worried about Bangladesh situation, he could not get information from time to time due to absence of Bangladeshi channels.

"There are options to watch different Bangla private television channels on YouTube. But it is not affordable for many low-paid workers," said Rahim, who is from Dhaka's Keraniganj. "We are constantly worried about our families back home."

He also said information that surface on social media are not necessarily authentic all the time, urging the government to take steps for transmission of Bangladeshi channels in the Arab region.

Contacted, Post and Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar said he is aware that Bangladeshis in Middle East cannot watch Bangla channels.

He said he thanked the Bangladesh ambassador in Saudi Arabia for raising the issue before the government. The ministry has taken it seriously and already started to address the problem, he told this newspaper over phone.

However, the progress is halted because of coronavirus outbreak, the minister said.

# Virus likely of animal origin

FROM PAGE 12

President Trump ...and we will assess the situation and we will work with our partners to fill any gaps."

"It is very important to continue what we are doing not only for Covid but for many, many, many, many other health programmes," she added, referring to action against polio, HIV and malaria among other diseases.

She said that the WHO was 81 percent funded for the next two years as of the end of March, referring to its \$4.8 billion biennial budget. The United States is the Geneva-based agency's biggest donor. Other big contributors are the Gates Foundation and Britain, reports Reuters.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Monday said there were no secrets at the UN agency after being blasted by the US.

"We have been warning from day one that this is a devil that everyone should fight," Tedros told a virtual briefing in Geneva on Monday.

## IMMIGRATION BAN

Trump said Monday that he would temporarily suspend immigration to the United States because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens, I will be signing

an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United States!" he tweeted Monday night.

In hard-hit Europe, several countries are cautiously creeping out from confinement measures, buoyed by mounting signs the worst of the virus may be behind them, reports AFP.

Chancellor Angela Merkel warned Germany was "still a long way from being out of the woods," as she allowed smaller shops from florists to fashion stores to reopen.

There were also encouraging signs in other major European countries such as Italy, France and Britain, although authorities warned citizens against letting their guard down.

Ghana became the first African country to lift coronavirus restrictions, sparking a mixed reaction on streets in Accra teeming with citizens after a three-week lockdown.

But others were furious the restrictions had been lifted so early. "This is totally ridiculous. How is it possible?" asked 20-year-old student Francis Collison.

WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific Takeshi Kasai said lockdown measures have proved effective, and people must be ready for a new way of living to allow society to function while the coronavirus is being kept in check.

Governments considering lifting lockdown measures should do so carefully and in stages, and continue to monitor the epidemic situation, he said. So long as the coronavirus is circulating, no country is safe from a potentially overwhelming outbreak, he said.

Singapore yesterday extended restrictions until early June, the city-state's leader said, as cases surged past 9,000 due to a growing number of infections among migrant workers.

The virus has sent the aviation sector into a tailspin with cash-strapped Virgin Australia announcing yesterday it had entered voluntary administration -- the largest airline so far to collapse.

"I am so proud of you and everything we have achieved together," said British tycoon Richard Branson in support of Virgin Australia, in which he owns a 10-percent stake.

The UN's World Food Programme warned yesterday that the pandemic could nearly double the number of people around the world facing acute hunger.

"The number of people facing acute food insecurity stands to rise to 265 million in 2020, up by 130 million from the 135 million in 2019, as a result of the economic impact of Covid-19," the WFP said its projections had shown.

# Sampadak

FROM PAGE 12

At a time when the media along with the government is working round the clock against severe odds to fight the coronavirus pandemic, such efforts to harass and intimidate the media is highly regrettable, the statement said.

"We demand immediate withdrawal of the case against the two aforementioned editors and urge all concerned to desist from such practice of attempting to stifle the media," it added.

Earlier on Monday, rights group Ain O Salish Kendra and a faction of Dhaka Union of Journalists also demanded withdrawal of the case filed against the four persons, including the two editors.

# He was just

FROM PAGE 12

symptoms," the UNO said. He is currently being treated at the isolation unit of Bera Upazila Health Complex.

"He is suffering from fever, cough and other Covid-19-like symptoms," Sardar Milon Mahamud, medical officer of the health complex, told The Daily Star, adding that the man was suffering from chronic malnutrition due to starvation.

"We collected his samples on Monday night and sent them to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for Covid-19 test," he said, adding that the person would be sent to Dhaka if he tested positive.

# AL man held

FROM PAGE 12

to media reports. In Jamalpur's Baksiganj upazila, Rab recovered 710 kg of the government's "rice at Tk 10 per kg" programme meant for the poor from a house at Battajor Natun Bazar on Monday evening.

Abdul Munnaf, general secretary of Battajor union unit AL, was appointed by the government to sell the rice in the union at Tk 10 a kg.

But he sold the rice on the black market. Abul Kalam, ward-6 councillor of Baksiganj municipality, purchased the rice, said Shafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Baksiganj Police Station.

A case was filed against the two, the OC said, adding that Munnaf was arrested yesterday.

In another incident, police seized 3.35 tonnes of such rice from a shop at Bhutiarkona Bazar in Mymensingh's Gouripur on Monday night.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided the shop around 11:00pm and recovered the rice. But the shop owner managed to flee, said Borhan Uddin Khan, OC of Gouripur Police Station.

Our Mymensingh and Jamalpur correspondents contributed to this report.

# Preparation lapses can be deadly

FROM PAGE 12

impacted by the suspension of disaster risk reduction efforts. Similarly, the relocation of refugees living in areas at high risk of flooding and landslides has also been delayed. Delivery of supplies has also been challenging, as the Covid-19 related "lockdown" has impacted road transport.

While humanitarian operations in the camps have been scaled back to only the most critical activities, the distribution of "tie-down kits" that reinforce refugee shelters against high winds continues.

The Bangladesh government, UNHCR, and partners have launched construction of isolation and treatment facilities, while information

campaign has been launched on hygiene and health.

"While it is vital to prioritise public health-related preparations in the camps at this time, cyclone and monsoon preparedness activities must also continue. Both together will ensure that refugees have safe and sanitary living conditions in an additional, potential public health emergency," said Maheic.

To ensure preparedness measures can proceed safely, personal protective equipment (PPE) is desperately needed, given the magnitude of the increased demands. The large-scale procurement and distribution of PPE is vital to ensure that Covid-19 does not take hold and spread rapidly, he

said.

Overall, the 2020 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis sought some \$877 million to meet the most critical needs before the Covid-19 pandemic began. To date, the JRP is only 16 percent funded.

"We must make every effort to ensure that the possible spread of the virus and the coming monsoon season do not exacerbate the already highly vulnerable situation of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh," Maheic said.

The UNHCR is urging the international community to stand in solidarity with refugees and IDPs to avert a looming mix of natural and public health disaster.

# Facebook powered virus 'heat map'

FROM PAGE 12

their societies, it's critical to have a clear understanding of how the disease is spreading," Zuckerberg wrote on his Facebook page and in the Washington Post.

"With a community of billions of people globally, Facebook can uniquely help researchers and health authorities get the information they need to respond to the outbreak and start planning for the recovery."

Carnegie Mellon researchers said they are receiving about one million responses per week from Facebook

users, and have also gotten some 600,000 from Google users.

"Using these and other unique data sources, the CMU researchers will monitor changes over time, enabling them to forecast Covid-19 activity several weeks into the future," the research team said.

The research uses responses to Facebook surveys about symptoms people are experiencing, with data controlled by university team and not shared with the social network.

The scientists also rely on anonymized data from Google and

other partners on symptoms and search queries.

"The survey asked people if they have symptoms such as fevers, coughing, shortness of breath or loss of smell that are associated with Covid-19," Zuckerberg said.

"Since experiencing symptoms is a precursor to becoming more seriously ill, this survey can help forecast how many cases hospitals will see in the days ahead and provide an early indicator of where the outbreak is growing and where the curve is being successfully flattened."

# Bangabandhu pays homage

FROM PAGE 12

of the valiant Jalalabad fighters who took up arms against the British Army on April 22, 1930 under the leadership of Masterda Surja Sen. Bangabandhu in a message on the occasion of Jalalabad Day hopes that this historic day will be an event of inspiration for all times to come for each and every Bangalee.

## INDIAN TRADE PROCEDURE WITH BANGLADESH

A government of India gazette extraordinary and a notification published today in New Delhi lays down details of the procedure of export and import trade between Bangladesh and India. The trade will mostly flow at state level through government agencies, although a limited scope has been left for persons who are eligible to import and export goods as the case may be.

Private trade on items like books, periodicals, baby food, machinery and spares will be allowed to be handled by licensed authorised parties. But big items like cement, cotton, textile

goods, jute, newsprint etc. will be traded strictly at the state level. Despite publication of this trade procedural pattern, the total absence of any facility of remitting funds from one country to another continues to hamper bilateral trade initiatives at a private level.

## \$45 MILLION CIDA GRANTS

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has offered 45 million dollars in grants to Bangladesh to be spent in 1972-73. According to CIDA, the grants will be used mostly in importing food grains, essential spare parts and chemicals.

## HIGH PRICES OF ESSENTIALS PERSIST

High prices of essential commodities including rice, pulses, edible oil and some spices have been persisting in the city markets. The price of rice has remained almost static for the last three weeks. Today, the lowest price is Tk 55 a maund. The varieties which are sold at that price are Iri and Nazirshail.

SOURCES: April 23, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Ittefaq

# UK parliament returns with virtual virus measures

AFP, London

The British parliament returned from an extended Easter break, with MPs encouraged to attend via videolink for the first time as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

Social distancing rules demanding people stay two metres apart mean only 50 MPs will be able to sit in the 650-strong lower House of Commons at any one time.

They are instead being asked to call in via Zoom, an internet video conferencing service, in a first for the 700-year-old parliament.

Screens will be placed around the chamber so that those physically present -- themselves separated by tape and signs on the green benches -- can see their colleagues dialling in.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Directorate General of Family Planning Mohammadpur Fertility Services & Training Centre and 100 Bedded MCH Hospital Aurangzeb Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207 Ref. No. DGPFMFSTC/PP(REV)-1143/2019-2020/982 Dated: 21/04/2020						
<b>Invitation for Tenders (Goods)</b>						
Sealed tenders are hereby invited as per "PPR-2008" from the eligible tenderers as defined in the tender document for the undermentioned goods as per items and conditions stated below:						
1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.				
2	Agency	Mohammadpur Fertility Services & Training Centre and 100 Bedded MCH Hospital, DGFP.				
3	Procuring entity name	Director, Mohammadpur Fertility Services & Training Centre and 100 Bedded MCH Hospital, DGFP.				
4	Procuring entity code	N/A.				
5	Procuring entity district	Dhaka.				
6	Invitation for	1. Supply of Diet for Patients (lot-1) under package 1 for the year 2020-2021. 2. Washing & Ironing of Dirty Clothes (lot-1) under package 2 for the year 2020-2021. 3. Supply of MSS (lot-1: Lab, Lot-2: Infusion) under package 3 for the year 2019-2020. 4. Supply of Stationery (lot-1) under package 4 for the year 2019-2020				
7	Invitation Ref No.	No. 982				
8	Date	21 April 2020.				
9	Procurement method	OTM.				
10	Budget and source of funds	Revenue Budget (GOB) as per released fund.				
11	Development partner	N/A.				
12	Project/programme code	N/A.				
13	Project/programme name	N/A.				
14	Tender package No.	1. DGPFMFSTC/01/2020-21/ 2. DGPFMFSTC/02/2020-21/ 3. DGPFMFSTC/04/2019-20/ 4. DGPFMFSTC/08/2019-20/				
15	Tender package name	1. Supply of Diet for Patients (lot-1) under package 1. 2. Washing & Ironing of Dirty Clothes (lot-1) under package 2. 3. Supply of MSS (lot-1: Lab, Lot-2: Infusion) under package 3. 4. Supply of Stationery (lot-1) under package 4.				
16	Tender publication date	21-April-2020.				
17	Tender last selling date	17-May-2020.				
18	Tender closing date and time	18-May-2020 at 1:00pm.				
19	Tender opening date and time	18-May-2020 at 1:45pm.				
20	Name & addresses of the offices	<b>Selling &amp; receiving tender document</b> 1. At the Office of the Director, Mohammadpur Fertility Services & Training Centre and 100 Bedded MCH Hospital, Aurangzeb Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207. 2. At the Office of the Line Director, CCSDP Unit (12th Floor), Directorate General of Family Planning, 6, Kawan Bazar, Dhaka-1215. <b>Opening tender document</b> 1. At the Office of the Director, Mohammadpur Fertility Services & Training Centre and 100 Bedded MCH Hospital, Aurangzeb Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207.				
21	Brief eligibility & qualification of tenderer	The tenderer shall have a minimum of 5 (five) years of overall experience in the supply of goods and related services. The tenderer shall have successfully completed minimum 1 (one) number of supply contract of similar goods and related services within last 3 (three) years i.e. years counting backward from the date of publication of IFT in the newspaper and also as described in tender document.				
22	Brief description of goods	1. Supply of Diet for Patients (lot-1) under package 1. 2. Washing & Ironing of Dirty Clothes (lot-1) under package 2. 3. Supply of MSS (lot-1: Lab, Lot-2: Infusion) under package 3, and 4. Supply of Stationery (lot-1) under package 4 (detailed in tender schedule).				
23	Brief description of related services	1 (one) year warranty of goods as described in tender document.				
24	Price of tender document	Tk 1000/- (Tk one thousand) for each tender (per package) should be paid in Bangladesh Bank through Treasury Chalan in Code No. 1-2781-0000-2366 in favour of Director General, DGFP, 6, Kawan Bazar, Dhaka-1215 and online verification copy must be submitted.				
25	Pkg. No.	Identification	Location	Tender security amount (Tk)	Completion time in weeks	Remarks
1.	DGFP/ MFSTC/01/ 2020-21/	1. Supply of Diet for Patients (lot-1) under package 1	At MFSTC, Mohammadpur, Dhaka.	10,000/- (Ten thousand per lot)	4 weeks after the signing of the contract	* Tender security for each lot should be submitted in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order from any scheduled Bank of Bangladesh in favour of Director, Mohammadpur Fertility Services & Training Centre, Aurangzeb Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207
2.	DGFP/ MFSTC/02/ 2020-21/	2. Washing & Ironing of Dirty Clothes (lot-1) under package 2	At MFSTC, Mohammadpur, Dhaka.	10,000/- (Ten thousand per lot)	4 weeks after the signing of the contract	
3.	DGFP/ MFSTC/03/ 2019-20/	3. Supply of MSS (lot-1: Lab, Lot-2: Infusion) under package 3	At MFSTC, Mohammadpur, Dhaka.	(i) 10,000/- (Ten thousand per lot-1) AND (ii) 10% on quoted value for lot-2	4 weeks after the signing of the contract	
4.	DGFP/ MFSTC/04/ 2019-20/	4. Supply of Stationery (lot-1) under package 4	At MFSTC, Mohammadpur, Dhaka.	10,000/- (Ten thousand per lot)	4 weeks after the signing of the contract	
26	Name of official inviting tender					
27	Designation of official inviting tender					
28	Address of official inviting tender					
29	Contact details of official inviting tender					
30	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any/all tender(s) without assigning any reason whatsoever. If schedule submission and opening is interrupted due to unavoidable circumstances, it will duly be conducted in the next working day. All other terms and conditions will remain same.					
Dr. Md. Muniuzzaman Siddiqui Director MFSTC Ph: 9113814 (Off)						
GD-749						

# Seoul plays down Kim's health report

AFP, SEOUL

South Korea yesterday played down a report that the North's leader Kim Jong Un was being treated after surgery, as speculation mounted over his absence from a key anniversary.

Pyeongyang marked the birthday of its late founder, Kim's grandfather Kim Il Sung, on April 15 -- by far the most important date in its annual political calendar -- but Kim was not seen in attendance.

Daily NK, an online media outlet run mostly by North Korean defectors, said Kim had undergone a cardiovascular procedure earlier this month and was recovering at a villa in North Phyongan province.

"Excessive smoking, obesity, and fatigue were the direct causes of Kim's urgent cardiovascular treatment," it cited an unidentified source inside the country as saying.

No confirmation of the report was immediately available.

But it triggered widespread speculation, with CNN citing a US official saying that Washington was "monitoring intelligence" that Kim was in "grave danger" after undergoing surgery.

The South's Yonhap news agency, meanwhile, cited an unnamed government official saying that reports Kim was seriously ill were "not true".

But there were no explicit denials that Kim, who is in his mid-30s, had had some kind of procedure.

Previous absences from the public eye on Kim's part have prompted speculation about his health. In 2014 he dropped out of sight for nearly six weeks before reappearing with a cane. Days later, the South's spy agency said he had undergone surgery to remove a cyst from his ankle.



A woman wearing a burqa holds her child as she waits to receive free wheat from the government emergency committee during a government-imposed lockdown on the capital city as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Kabul, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC LATEST UPDATES

### DEATH TOLL CROSSES 170,000

The worldwide death toll from the novel coronavirus pandemic rose to 171,249 yesterday, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University at 1130 GMT yesterday. More than 2,494,915 declared cases have been registered. In US, the death toll stood at 42,364 with 787,960 infections. Italy is the next most-affected country with 24,114 deaths and 181,228 confirmed infections. It is followed by Spain with 21,282 fatalities, France with 20,294 deaths and Britain with 16,550 deaths.

### GLOBAL HUNGER COULD DOUBLE

The number of people facing acute food insecurity could nearly double this year to 265 million due to the economic fallout of COVID-19, the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) said. The impact of lost tourism revenues, falling remittances and travel and other restrictions linked to the coronavirus pandemic are expected to leave some 130 million people acutely hungry this year, adding to around 135 million already in that category.

### NEW CASES IN NORTHWEST CHINA

A northwestern province on the frontline of China's coronavirus battle yesterday reported its first cases in nearly three weeks, all involving travellers from overseas, as imported infections started to level off elsewhere. The province of Shaanxi reported 21 new infections from abroad, as well as seven cases with no clinical symptoms, all travellers on a commercial flight from Moscow bound for the Chinese capital of Beijing.

### AUSTRALIA EASES RESTRICTIONS

Declaring Australia was on the road to recovery with new coronavirus infections almost stamped out, Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday said hospitals will resume many elective surgeries and schools will be re-opened for more children. As part of broad social distancing restrictions, Australia in March banned all non-emergency surgeries to free-up hospital beds amid expectations of a surge in coronavirus cases. Schools were also closed.

### ITALY EASES LOCKDOWN

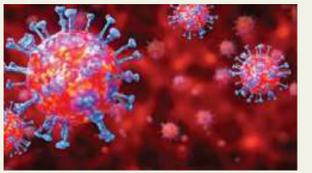
Italy has announced its plans for the gradual reopening from a lockdown imposed to fight the coronavirus emergency that will be applied starting from May 4. After the government shuttered businesses not deemed essential to the supply chain on March 22, calls have recently been growing from industry lobbies to reopen some activities to prevent an economic catastrophe.

### WHO GRADUAL LIFTING OF LOCKDOWN

The World Health Organization yesterday warned that any lifting of lockdowns to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus must be gradual, and if restrictions were to be relaxed too soon, there would be a resurgence of infections. Lockdown measures have proved effective, and people must be ready for a new way of living to allow society to function, it said.

### CORONAVIRUS 'MAP'

Researchers at the Carnegie Mellon University in the US unveil a coronavirus "heat map" powered by Facebook and Google data which is aimed at helping track the spread of the disease and plan for reopening society.



SOURCE: AFP

## HRW'S ANNUAL REPORT

# Pandemic 'amplifies press freedom threats'

AFP, PARIS

The coronavirus pandemic is exacerbating threats to press freedom around the world, with authoritarian states including China and Iran suppressing details of the outbreak, activists said on Tuesday.

Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said in its annual press freedom rankings the pandemic was "highlighting and amplifying the many crises" already casting a shadow on press freedom.

The outbreak had encouraged some regimes to "take advantage of the fact people are stunned and mobilisation has weakened to impose measures that would be impossible to adopt in normal times", RSF secretary general Christophe Deloire told AFP.

The rankings saw few major changes from last year, with Nordic countries regarded as the most free and isolated states Turkmenistan and North Korea footing the list of 180 countries.

RSF accused China and Iran -- in 177th and 173rd place respectively -- of censoring major coronavirus outbreaks.

Alluding to accusations that Beijing concealed the initial extent of the outbreak, it said China "maintains its system of information hyper-control, whose negative effects for the entire world have been seen



during the coronavirus public health crisis". Europe has also not been immune -- Hungary, under Prime Minister Viktor Orban, has passed a special law on false information which was a "completely disproportionate and coercive measure". RSF said there was a "clear correlation" between suppression of media freedom in response to the coronavirus pandemic and a country's ranking in the index.

While Norway topped the index for the fourth year in a row, Finland was again the runner-up.

North Korea took last position from Turkmenistan, and Eritrea continued to be Africa's lowest-ranked country at number 178.

Published annually by RSF since 2002, the World Press Freedom Index assesses factors such as media independence, self-censorship, the legal framework and transparency based on a questionnaire filled out by experts.

Turkey, where President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been repeatedly criticised for cracking down on press freedom, rose three places to 154th but RSF said this was because of "other countries falling" rather than positive change.

It said censorship of the media, especially online media, has been stepped up in Turkey and the country was "more authoritarian than ever."

## States at UN demand access to vaccines

AFP, UNITED NATIONS

The 193 members of the UN General Assembly on Monday adopted by consensus a resolution that calls for "equitable, efficient and timely" access to any future vaccines developed to fight coronavirus.

The resolution also highlights the "crucial leading role" played by the World Health Organization, which has faced criticism from Washington and others about its handling of the pandemic.

The resolution, which was drafted by Mexico and received US support, calls for strengthening the "scientific international cooperation necessary to combat COVID-19 and to bolster coordination," including with the private sector.

The call for cooperation comes as research laboratories and pharmaceutical manufacturers launch expensive efforts to develop vaccines and other therapeutics that could be critical in fighting the pandemic, which has already killed more than 170,000 people and sent world economies into tailspin.

## Lockdown worsens LatAm's 'domestic hell'

AFP, BUENOS AIRES

Weeks of confinement imposed by the coronavirus pandemic is taking a chilling toll on women and girls across Latin America, where the number of calls to helplines have soared, made by victims of domestic violence who cannot flee.

Appeals to help women experiencing violence in the home have doubled in recent weeks, from the United Nations to Pope Francis -- Latin America's first pontiff.

"The confinement is plunging thousands of women into hell, trapped with an attacker who they are more afraid of than the coronavirus," said Victoria Aguirre from the Argentine NGO MuMaLa, which campaigns against violence related to macho culture.

In Argentina, 18 women have been killed by their partner or ex-partners during the first 20 days of a mandatory quarantine instituted by the government from March 20. Appeals to helplines in Argentina are up nearly 40 percent.

The country is still reeling from the shocking murder of Cristina Iglesias and her seven-year-old daughter Ada, killed by her mother's partner in the early days of the lockdown. Their two bodies were found buried in the backyard of their home in a town in Buenos Aires province.

Elsewhere, police -- alerted by neighbors -- arrived in the nick of time to save a woman whose husband attacked her with a hammer.

A staggering 3,800 women were murdered in Latin America in 2019, an 8 percent increase on the previous year, according to preliminary data from the Observatory for Gender Equality at CEPAL, the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

"Unfortunately, many women and girls are particularly exposed to violence precisely where they should be protected, in their own homes," said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who issued a call for a domestic violence "ceasefire" as lockdowns extended into April.

The situation is similarly grim in Mexico, Brazil, Chile and elsewhere, where measures taken by the authorities often fall far short of properly protecting victims.

In Mexico, around 200 women have been murdered since quarantine measures began. In Sao Paulo, the epicenter of Brazil's virus outbreak, reports of domestic violence have risen by 30 percent since the state government imposed a stay-at-home order.

In Chile, which has opted for selective confinement in the most affected areas plus a nighttime curfew, complaints of domestic violence are up 500 percent in Providencia, an upper class neighborhood in the capital Santiago.

## Amnesty: Saudi carried out Record executions in 2019

Saudi Arabia executed a record 184 people last year, according to Amnesty International, which said it was the highest number the rights organisation has ever recorded in a single year in the country. In its 2019 global review of the death penalty published on Tuesday, Amnesty reported Saudi Arabia stepped up its use of the death penalty even as the rest of the world saw a decline in executions, including in the Asia-Pacific region. The majority of executions were for drug-related offences and murder. Only 20 countries are responsible for all known executions worldwide.

## Netanyahu, Gantz agree to form unity govt

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reached a historic deal Monday with one-time rival parliament speaker Benny Gantz to form a unity government, ending the country's worst-ever political crisis. The three-year agreement allows Netanyahu, 70, to stay in office for 18 months, during which he is due to stand trial on corruption charges he has long denied. Gantz, 60, will then take over as premier for the remaining 18 months as Netanyahu bows out after 12 years in office -- the longest premiership in Israeli history. Netanyahu, head of the right-wing Likud party, had squared off against Gantz in three inconclusive elections over the past year, but neither had secured enough support to form a viable governing coalition.

## Chad repays \$100m Angola debt with cattle

Angola has received a herd of more than 1,000 cattle from Chad, a government official said Monday, the latest shipment of an unusual debt repayment deal. The landlocked central African country, impoverished despite its oil revenues, contracted a \$100 million (92-million-euro) debt with Angola in 2017. As repayment, Angola agreed to take 75,000 cattle, for delivery over five years from 2020, to help it develop its beef industry. After oil, livestock is Chad's second largest source of export earnings. The deal works well for Angola, which is keen to revive its livestock farming sector as part of efforts to diversify the oil-dependent economy. The second largest crude producer in sub-Saharan Africa spends \$350 million each year to import meat for its 30 million people.

SOURCE: AFP



A woman (C) is whipped by the religious police in a public building in Banda Aceh yesterday, as punishment after he was caught in close proximity with a man who is not her husband in a hotel. PHOTO: AFP

## 'Worst yet ahead of us'

Warns WHO, urges unity, solidarity

AGENCIES

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director-general of the World Health Organization, has warned that "the worst is yet ahead of us" if the world doesn't unite to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

"Without national unity and global solidarity, trust us, the worst is yet ahead of us," he said during a press briefing.

Tedros compared the virus to the 1918 flu that killed 675,000 people in the US and tens of millions of people around the world. But he argued that the world now has the technology to prevent "that kind of crisis."

"Let's prevent this tragedy," he said. "It's a virus that many people still don't understand."

Ghebreyesus didn't explain exactly how he expects the virus' toll to intensify, but he argued that partisanship and political divisions are exacerbating the crisis.

"The cracks between people and the cracks between parties is fueling it," he said. "Don't use this virus as an opportunity to fight against each other or score political points. It's dangerous. It's like playing with fire."

Ghebreyesus said there were no secrets at the UN agency after being blasted by the United States for allegedly downplaying the initial COVID-19 outbreak in China.

The virus, which emerged late last year in the Chinese city of Wuhan, has so far infected nearly 2.5 million people globally and killed more than 170,000, according to an AFP tally.

Washington is the biggest contributor to the WHO but Trump is freezing funding, alleging that the organisation mismanaged and covered up the spread the virus.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Local Government Engineering Department  
Office of the Executive Engineer, Pirojpur  
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.7900.000.07.001.2020-809 Date: 21.04.2020

### e-Tender Notice No. 21/2019-2020 (OTM)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of works office of the undersigned.

Sl No.	Tender ID No.	Package No. & name of work	Last selling date & time	Closing date & time
1.	426733	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-02 Construction of 20.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Kadamtala UP-Durgapur UP Via Bhairampur Madrasa and Faragir Mazar Road at ch.3030km. Road ID 579803006	18.05.2020 05.00 PM	19.05.2020 01.00 PM
2.	426734	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-03 Construction of 42.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Shikder Molik UP-Kolakhal UP Upto Gajalia Lonch Ghat via Ghophat & Chalisha Hat. Road at ch.7941 km. Road ID 579803009	18.05.2020 05.00 PM	19.05.2020 01.00 PM
3.	426735	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-04 Construction of 14.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Kadamtala UP-Durgapur UP Via Bhairampur Madrasa and Faragir Mazar Road at ch.5600 km. Road ID 579803006	18.05.2020 05.00 PM	19.05.2020 01.00 PM
4.	426736	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-05 Construction of 51.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Kolakhal UP-Ranipur Ghat Via Ghophat & Tona High School Road at ch.0005 km. Road ID 579803010	02.06.2020 05.00 PM	03.06.2020 01.00 PM
5.	426737	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-06 Construction of 15.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Baitul Huda Dakhal Madrasa-Badokhal via kh Nuani Madrasa at ch.1020 km. Road ID 579805111	18.05.2020 05.00 PM	19.05.2020 01.00 PM
6.	426738	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-07 Construction of 12.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Dakhin Gazipur Custom Sikder-Bari-Malek Khalifa Bari via Morju Kha at ch.0350 km. Road ID 579805114	18.05.2020 05.00 PM	19.05.2020 01.00 PM
7.	426739	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-08 Construction of 10.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Shankarpasha Beltala R&H to Namajpur Muhuri Bari Ahsan Habib Road at ch.0750 km. Road ID 579805023	18.05.2020 05.00 PM	19.05.2020 01.00 PM
8.	426740	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-09 Construction of 18.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Vljora R&H-Namajpur Primary School-Batazore Hat at ch.0050 km. Road ID 579804024	18.05.2020 05.00 PM	19.05.2020 01.00 PM
9.	426741	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-10 Construction of 18.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Kadamtala UP-Durgapur UP Via Bhairampur Madrasa and Faragir Mazar Road at ch.4480 km. Road ID 579803006	18.05.2020 05.00 PM	19.05.2020 01.00 PM
10.	426742	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-11 Construction of 16.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Shikder Molik UP Upto Gajalia Lonch Ghat via Ghophat & Chalisha Hat Road at ch.4840 km. Road ID 579803009	18.05.2020 05.00 PM	19.05.2020 01.00 PM
11.	426743	IBRP/Piroj/Sadar/Brg-12 Construction of 16.00m Long RCC Girder Bridge on Shikder Molik UP-Kolakhal UP Upto Gajalia Lonch Ghat via Ghophat & Chalisha Hat Road at ch.6020 km. Road ID 579803009	18.05.2020 05.00 PM	19.05.2020 01.00 PM

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited through online at any branches of registered banks branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([heladesh@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:heladesh@eprocure.gov.bd))

Sushanta Ranjan Roy  
Executive Engineer  
LGED, Pirojpur  
0461-62463  
[xen.perojpur@lged.gov.bd](mailto:xen.perojpur@lged.gov.bd)

GD-748

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
Closed	Closed	\$1,676.20 (per ounce)	\$20.32 (per barrel)	3.09%	1.97%	1.77%	0.90%	BUY TK 83.95	90.08	103.20	11.69
				30,669.86	19,280.78	2,551.92	2,827.01	SELL TK 84.95	93.88	107.00	12.29



# Star BUSINESS

DHAKA WEDNESDAY APRIL 22, 2020, BAISHAKH 9, 1427 BS • starbusiness@thedailystar.net

## TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

### Companies move shareholder meetings online amid shutdown

**MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM and AHSAN HABIB**  
In a first for Bangladesh, listed companies are using virtual platforms to hold annual general meetings as part of their business continuity plans while avoiding mass gatherings and maintain social distancing in the face of coronavirus outbreak in the country.

The move to virtual platforms comes after the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) on March 24 temporarily relaxed rules on holding AGM or extraordinary general meeting (EGM) and board meetings on digital platforms to contain the spread of the

deadly bug. The companies whose record dates were after March 25 will be able to hold their AGM online, said a top official of the commission. The record date is the cut-off date established by a company to determine which shareholders are eligible for a dividend.

GlaxoSmithKline Bangladesh was the first to conduct the virtual AGM on April 16, and five days later, Grameenphone, the top-listed company, followed suit. British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATBC) will do the same today and Singer Bangladesh on May 15.

The commission issued the guideline following a proposal from BATBC, said Md Azizur Rahman, company secretary of the firm. This will ultimately be helpful to the shareholders as they will get 400 per cent cash dividend after the meeting, he said. "To us, the most important thing is that if the AGM can be held,

shareholders will get some money. This will be helpful for them amid the lockdown and will also be helpful to the economy," Rahman told The Daily Star.

BATBC has about 19,000 shareholders and the company has shared the password with them to allow them to log on the AGM platform the company's own IT team has developed.

"This is the real digitalisation as people don't need to move to participate in any programme like AGM."

The process is also easy to communicate with the shareholders, who will get an annual report through a link as part of a move that will cut paper use.

At the same time, unwanted incidents can be avoided, Rahman added.

BATBC has incorporated the voting system and the shareholders will get the opportunity to share opinions and make recommendations. Some of the directors of the company are now out of the country and they will take part in the AGM virtually.

The same happened at the AGM of Grameenphone. Some of the board members attended the meeting from Thailand and Norway. Among them were

Grameenphone Chairman Petter B Furberg and Chief Executive Officer Yasir Azman.

Grameenphone moved this year's AGM to the digital platform in compliance with the directives of the BSEC and considering the health and safety of all the shareholders, staff and others, the operator said.

Grameenphone has designed and developed the digital platform to run the 23rd AGM of the company online to provide continuous and meaningful shareholder engagement and participation, it said in a press release.

At the AGM, shareholders approved a 40 per cent cash dividend. Grameenphone has 32,000 shareholders and all of them got the password to attend the meeting and a good number of them attended.

GlaxoSmithKline Bangladesh organised the event at Radisson Blu Chattogram Bay View hotel where shareholders approved a 530 per cent cash dividend for the year that ended on December 31, 2019.

Singer's AGM will be held online from Spectra Convention Centre and the board has recommended a 77 per cent cash dividend for last year.

### Now 10 more industries are seeking help

**REJAUL KARIM BYRON and AKM ZAMIR UDDIN**

At least 10 industry bodies have applied to both the finance ministry and the Bangladesh Bank to get financial support from the Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package for the export-oriented industries.

The industries are not allowed support under the guidelines of the package, said a BB official. Some local investors with no direct link with exports have also sought support from the package as they are in deep trouble now.

If all the industries' demands are to be accommodated, the size of the fund will have to be increased to Tk 10,000 crore to Tk 12,000 crore from existing Tk 5,000 crore, said two BB officials who are working on the stimulus package.

As per the regulations of the fund, only export-oriented industries can apply for loans to pay wages of their employees for April, May and June.

The local investors should be allowed to enjoy the fund as they have a strong role in keeping the wheels of the economy moving, the officials said.

The organisations that applied for the fund include the Bangladesh Garments Accessories and Packaging Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGAPMEA), the Bangladesh Local Carton Manufacturers Association (BLCMA) and the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS).

Besides, type A and type B industries of export processing and economic zones and high-tech parks have also applied for the fund.

Type A units are 100 per cent foreign-owned, including those owned by Bangladeshi nationals who reside abroad. Type B units are joint-venture projects between foreign and local entrepreneurs.

The government, however, on April 15 allowed Type C units, which are fully owned by Bangladeshi entrepreneurs and reside in the country permanently, to get financial support from the package.

The finance ministry asked the BB on April 19 to also bring the backward linkage industries of exporters under the stimulus package for the small and medium enterprise sector instead of the one for export-oriented industries.

As per the government instruction, the central bank formed a stimulus package of Tk 20,000 crore for the SME sector.

The BGAPMEA member factories will be allowed to get loans from the SME package as working capital, after which they will use the fund to pay their workers' wages, the finance ministry said.

"We export essential products to the industries that supply finished goods abroad. So, we have a direct link to the country's export programme," said BGAPMEA President Md Abdul Kader Khan.

In many cases, the member industries export a portion of the goods to foreign nations, but the factories were not considered for support from the stimulus, he added.

BASIS members are completely export-oriented enterprises, but some banks have initially refrained from entertaining their applications, said Syed Almas Kabir, the president of the organisation.

"So, we requested the central bank and the finance ministry hurriedly to resolve the problem. The higher-ups of the central bank informed BASIS that we are entitled to support from the package," he added.

Member factories of BLCMA, which manufactures carton for both the local and export-oriented industries, have also applied for the support as they are going through a difficult time due to the ongoing shutdown, said MA Bashir Patwary, president of the association.

The association has about 200 members employing more than 20,000 workers.

"Our production has now completely stopped," he said, adding that banks hardly provide finance to them.



### GP seeks extra spectrum at discounted price

**MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM**

Grameenphone has sought additional spectrum for an interim period to offer better internet services as their network has become busier for a surge in data usage amid the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

Three other operators have also sought additional spectrum from the regulator, albeit free of cost, but Grameenphone wants to either pay a discounted price or share revenue with the government.

Yasir Azman, chief executive officer of the country's leading mobile operator, expressed the intention at a recent meeting with Md Jahurul Haque, chairman of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, Hossain Sadat, head of regulatory affairs of the operator, told The Daily Star.

"We will soon send a letter to the regulator seeking the additional spectrum," he added.

If users get better service, the operators' plea can be considered as the government has a huge amount of unused spectrum, Haque said.

The BTRC has shared the operators' proposals with Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar and a decision needs to come from the government.

"The operators are helping the government combat the coronavirus pandemic, and in return, they also deserve something from us," Haque added.

Sadat said they were against the idea of free allocation of spectrum.

"We believe, this is the time we all need to come forward and join hands with

the government in its fight against the COVID-19."

Spectrum should be allocated in such a manner that all the parties are benefitted equally, he added.

"Due to the countrywide lockdown, data traffic has increased by more than 25 per cent in our network," said Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer of Robi, the country's second largest operator.

Because of the emerging situation,

service quality will be hard to ensure if the additional spectrum is not allocated.

"That's why we have requested the government to consider allocating us additional spectrum for three months without any charge."

Alam claimed that the quality of their service will improve significantly within seven days of getting the additional spectrum.

Currently, Grameenphone has 37

Megahertz (MHz) of spectrum, Robi 36.4MHz, Banglalink 30.6MHz and Teletalk 25MHz in different bands.

Earlier, Grameenphone on several occasions had sought spectrum at a reduced rate but the regulator did not pay heed to its request.

The BTRC always maintained a stance that the operators would have to pay a price per the last auction in February 2018 when Grameenphone and Banglalink had bought each MHz of the spectrum at \$31 million.

Early this month, the operators also requested the BTRC to exempt them from sharing revenue with the government at least for a couple of months so that they can tackle the crisis during the challenging business climate brought on by the coronavirus outbreak.

Mobile carriers now share 6.5 per cent of their gross revenue with the government.

The telecom sector is going through some challenges like other areas of the economy due to the pandemic, the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh had said in a statement.

Mobile carriers are already observing trends in usage patterns that may leave a dent on their overall revenue, it said.

The operators already slashed data pack tariffs following a request from the telecom regulator, which has resulted in a surge in data usage.

Although data consumption is growing rapidly, data monetisation is still low, said SM Farhad, secretary-general of the association.



### Ice cream industry melting on a rumour

**AHSAN HABIB**

Hardly anyone turns up at the National Parliament House these days to get some fresh in the evenings.

And for Md Moslem Uddin, an ice cream seller who parks his cart in front of the yards of the heritage building every day, this development, brought on by the outbreak of coronavirus in Bangladesh in March, has been particularly brutal.

On an average, he sells ice creams worth Tk 3,000 to 3,500 daily and his monthly commission ranges from Tk 12,000 to Tk 15,000.

"My van's paddle has stopped and so has my income," said Uddin, a father of two daughters.

And the blow came just when ice cream sales were about to hit peak demand with the rise in mercury in the country.

The peak season for the Tk 1,500 crore ice cream industry ranges from March to June, which are basically the scorching summer months.

The countrywide shutdown since March 26 has pounded almost all sectors of the economy more or less,

but the ice cream, it appears, has been a victim of a cruel joke on top.

A rumour was spread on social media quoting the United Nations Children's Fund that ice cream consumption would lead to catching coronavirus.

Though the United Nations agency denied it, the damage was already done, with people avoiding ice cream like plague.

"Our sales just abruptly nosedived when the propaganda was spread through social media," said GM Kamrul Hassan, chief executive officer of Igloo Ice Cream, which has a 42 per cent share of the market.

Igloo, the market leader with 42 per cent shares, lost its probable sales of about Tk 150 crore in the last few days, which is the peak season for ice cream, he said.

Then the second blow came when the government announced the shutdown because about 60 per cent of the ice cream sales take place in the streets, he said.

"These sells just stopped," he said, adding that the distribution channel is also disrupted by law and

enforcement departments.

Even when the shutdown is lifted, most likely after April 25, people may not jump back to gorging ice cream.

"The psychological damage has already been. The ice cream industry will struggle a lot," Hassan added.

Tanvir Haider Chaudhury, chief executive officer of Kazi Food Industries, whose two brands Za'n Zee and Bellissimo have cornered 12 per cent of the market, echoed the same.

"We missed the top-selling day of the year, which is Pahela Baishakh," he said, adding that his company's sales now are in the fractions.

Ice cream producers sell about 75 per cent of their products in just four months of the year, said Ahmed Rajeeb Samdani, chairman of Golden Harvest Group, which has a 15 per cent share of the ice cream market with its two brands Kwaliti and Bloop.

But this year there was hardly any sales.

"The rumour spread among schools and guardians -- and our sales were pounded."

The unsold ice cream is now being housed at the storage facility, which is

reaching full capacity.

"We are incurring electricity bills. And we don't know when the stock will be sold," he said, adding that the company lost sales of about Tk 30 crore since March 26.

Since people will not start to consuming ice cream very soon due

to the fear that came through the rumours, the raw materials will now have to be discarded as those have an expiry date.

"The ice cream industry is the highest affected among all sectors and the growing market is simply going to be destroyed by this pandemic,"



Samdani added.

According to research by LankaBangla Investments, the ice cream industry is growing at 15 per cent rate riding on rural consumers and surge in per capita income across the country.

It's the same scenario over the upscale ice cream parlours.

Kawser Zaman, operation manager of Gelatissimo, an Australian ice cream chain with five outlets in Dhaka, said their sales have hit rock-bottom.

"There are simply no people out and about. And people are not in the mood for ice cream now," he added.

Abdul Mannan, manager of Movenpick, a Swiss ice cream chain, said the rumour just killed their sales. "No country in Europe, where coronavirus is wreaking havoc, has seen such a crash in ice cream sales. But we were felled by a rumour," he added.

Rakibul Haque, assistant manager of Marble Slab Creamery, an American chain, said their in-store sales are non-existent but they are still getting some orders through Foodpanda and Uber Eats.

"But it is not significant," he added.

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

# Shippers annoyed about extra charges for port congestion

DWAIPAYAN BARIUA, Ctg

On April 5, OEL Bangladesh, a container vessel, arrived at the outer anchorage of Chattogram port bearing a multitude of import goods, including raw materials for the vital garment industry.

But thanks to the acute container congestion at the port yard, brought on by the countrywide movement control enforced on March 26 to flatten the curve on coronavirus, the vessel had to stay there for 10 days before getting any berth.

The vessel had to stay an additional day at the port jetty for the sluggish pace of discharging the import containers.

This means it took the vessel 25 days as opposed to the 14 days it usually takes for the round trip from Chattogram to Colombo.

As a result, the ship missed another voyage in a single month as it can operate two trips monthly, said Muntasir Rubayat, assistant vice-president of GBX Logistics, the local shipping agent of OEL Bangladesh.

For such additional stays, the vessel operator had to count extra duties amounting to more than \$100,000 in chartering cost, bunkering cost and the berth occupancy charge at the port, he said.

The container shipping sector, the integral part of the country's import and export activities, has been passing through hard times since the beginning of the year because of the import slowdown brought on by the coronavirus outbreak in China,



the global supplier of raw materials and finished goods alike.

Now, the sector has been receiving further blows for retraction of export cargo for the US and the EU and the container congestion at the Chattogram caused by the countrywide shutdown for the last four weeks.

Many feeder operators had already been forced to cancel weekly voyages of some of their vessels in the last couple of months.

Vessels' waiting time at the outer

anchorage has now reached 15 to 16 days since the Chattogram Port Authority (CPA) is not allowing vessels to get a berth on time due to the space shortage for storing imports.

Another vessel, OEL Shasta, arrived at the outer anchorage on April 10. The CPA yesterday said the vessel would not get a berth before April 26.

For the 16 days of idle stay, the vessel operator will have to count around

\$160,000 as chartering and bunkering costs, said Md Zakirul Islam, deputy manager of Karnaphuly, the local shipping agent of the vessel.

"If a vessel spends 20 days at Chattogram Port, how will a shipping line survive?" said Ajmir Hossain Chowdhury, assistant general manager of MSC Mediterranean Shipping Company.

The delay prompted the Bangladesh Shipping Agents Association (BSAA) on Monday to write to the shipping secretary, requesting him to review several port charges and tariffs to save shipping companies from huge losses.

The charges include pilotage fees, berth hire charge, quay gantry crane charge, storage charge for empty containers and storage rent for containers at Kamalapur Inland Container Depot in Dhaka.

Owing to the long overstay at the outer anchorage and additional stay at the jetty, vessels are counting the additional operational costs and incurring huge losses by failing to operate trips on time, said BSAA Chairman Ahsanul Haq Chowdhury.

As the vessels are now staying six to seven days at the jetties from the usual three-day, the association called for waiving berth occupancy charges for the overstay and also requested discounts on storage rent for empty containers since they can't be sent on time.

"Such waiver could help shipping lines in this hard time," Chowdhury said.

# Oil crash slams stocks, dollar gains as risk sentiment rolls over

REUTERS, London

Global stocks fell on Tuesday, a day after US crude oil prices turned negative for the first time ever, as dismal corporate earnings underlined worries about economic damage from the coronavirus pandemic.

The dollar rose against a basket of other currencies as investors shunned riskier assets.

MSCI's All Country World Index, which tracks stocks across 49 countries, was down 0.9 per cent. European stock markets followed their Asian counterparts lower, with the pan-European index down over 2 per cent by midday in London.

Monday's plunge in oil, which saw some prices reach minus \$40 a barrel, resulted from growing crude stockpiles and dwindling storage space as lockdowns to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus slashed global fuel use. First-month West Texas Intermediate continued to trade in negative territory on Tuesday, at -\$7.13 a barrel.

"I have always thought of oil a little bit like a currency; it stores value, is controlled by world leaders and makes the world go round," said Gregory Perdon, Co-Chief Investment Officer at Arbuthnot Latham.

"But yesterday was a wake-up call and investors would be remiss to ignore that low oil means lower inflation, higher defaults, lower growth and more political instability as less petrodollars circulate in the system."

Signs the pandemic is taking a toll on the global economy continued to roll in.

Australia's central bank now forecasts the country's economy will shrink 10 per cent in the first half of 2020. South Korea is set for its biggest first-quarter contraction since 2008, with the latest data showing exports plunged by almost a third in the first 20 days of April.

There was a glimmer of hope in Europe: the mood among German investors improved in April as concern about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Europe's

# Local cement makers won't lay off employees despite setback

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Cement manufacturers in Bangladesh would not lay off any employees despite the collapse in demand for the key construction material and economic uncertainties brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, said industry players.

Besides, the workers' wages will be paid as usual, they added. "Manufacturers will never take a decision that could prove harmful for the workers or the industry," said Mohammad Shahidullah, managing director of Metrocem Cement.

Just a few months back, cement manufacturers found themselves in troubled waters as overproduction led to the prevalence of unhealthy competition.

Now, the industry is fighting a new challenge as the ongoing lockdown has all but dried up revenues.

Industries and businesses were initially asked to shutter their operations from March 26 until April 4 as part of the government's measures to hold down the spread of coronavirus. The shutdown has since been extended to April 25.

Considering the current economic climate, cement manufacturers would be willing to sell their products at the manufacturing cost.

Even so, the scarcity of buyers makes it next to impossible to offload the stocks.

"However, the industry is ready to accept losses for the time being since all of Bangladesh has been hurt by the virus," Shahidullah said.

The sector's confidence is still intact largely because of steadily growing demand in a country where per capita consumption is very low and there has been construction spree of large infrastructure projects before the deadly bug arrived on these shores.

To complete the Padma bridge project, it is estimated that 3 million tonnes of cement will be used, while the other mega projects require similar amounts of the binding agent.

"At best, it will take two months to regain normalcy in production and sales when the crisis ends since this is not a heavily export-oriented sector," said Mohammed Amirul Haque, managing director of Premier Cement.

Cement manufacturers are giving priority to the safety of workers, who are an integral part of the production process, he said.

Haque also echoed the sentiment that the sector is in a

vulnerable state as companies still have to pay employees while generating next to no revenue.

The cement industry creates about 60,000 direct jobs and another million indirectly at any given time, he added.

Still, manufacturers will not take the cruel decisions of furloughing or terminating workers. Instead, the companies will try to recoup losses by increasing production or availing government assistance.

However, LafargeHolcim Bangladesh, the local operations of the world's biggest cement maker, has so far been an exception.

The company has confirmed its announcement on layoff from its head office from April 12 to April 30 due to

the coronavirus pandemic.

Some employees will be laid off as sales have hit rock-bottom, said an official of the company, without giving any specific number.

Meanwhile, at least 500 lighter and a few mother vessels laden with construction materials have been stranded at river and sea ports because of the pandemic, said Muhammad Alamgir Kabir, president of the Bangladesh Cement Manufacturers Association (BCMA).

The raw materials can't be unloaded due to the barriers set by the authorities and a shortage of workers, he said.

As a result, hundreds of thousands of tonnes of the sector's raw materials have remained unprotected at the port.

The authorities should have taken the initiative to unload the vessels at an earlier date since these materials could have been used during the emergency.

Importers will now have to pay fines as per international shipping rules as long as the vessels remain grounded, said Kabir, also the managing director of Crown Cement.

Besides, since the demand for food will go up on the occasion of Ramadan, which begins within a couple of days, these vessels will be required to carry essentials.

Under the circumstances, the government should cooperate with importers and secure the raw materials from the ships, the entrepreneur added.

There are 37 active cement factories in Bangladesh and more than Tk 30,000 crore has been invested in the industry.

Manufacturers have a combined annual production capacity of 58 million tonnes against the local demand of 33 million tonnes.

In the 1990s, Bangladesh used to import 95 per cent of its demand for the key construction material. However, the country's cement requirement is now met entirely by the local industry, which has grown at a 15.6 per cent rate annually over the past decade.

Local companies dominate the market and annual sales have reached \$3 billion, according to the BCMA.

Of the consumption, individuals account for 25 per cent, real estate companies and developers 30 per cent and the public sector 45 per cent.

The per capita consumption of cement is low in Bangladesh: it stands at 181 kilograms now and is expected to reach 220 kg by 2020.

AT A GLANCE

Market size: Tk 25,500cr

Active cement factories: 37

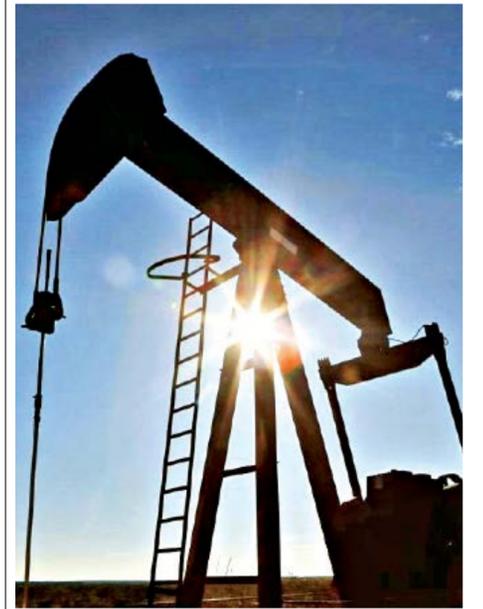
Total investment: Tk 30,000cr

Direct employment: 60,000

Indirect employment: 1,000,000

Consumption: 33m tonnes

Production capacity: 68m tonnes



REUTERS/FILE

The sun is seen behind a crude oil pump jack in the Permian Basin in Loving County, Texas, US.

largest economy seemed to ease, a survey from the ZEW research institute showed.

The euro edged lower against the dollar, and Southern European bond yields traded near recent highs before a European Union summit later this week on how the EU will try to revive an economy hit by the pandemic.

Monday's plunge in US crude came as the May contract expiry looms at the end of Tuesday's trade.

International benchmark Brent crude, more readily seaborne than its US counterpart, fell 15.7 per cent to \$21.69 per barrel.

That is still some 60 per cent below January's peak, highlighting the disruption to energy consumption and the long road back to global growth that underpins oil demand.

"This level of oil price is not sustainable for any global oil producer. Even for Saudi Arabia, which has a low cost of production, this is not viable," said Jai Malhi, global market strategist at J.P. Morgan Asset Management.

# Ceramic and steel manufacturers not far behind

JAGARAN CHAKMA

There is an Ethiopian folk tale of a man who survived a cold night naked on a mountaintop merely by staying transfixed at a distant fire.

Hope is undoubtedly a lifesaver. And Bangladesh's cement, steel and, to some extent, ceramic manufacturers have lit such a beacon.

Amidst all the apprehensions centring redundancy ringing throughout economies around the world, the former two have assured retaining jobs "at any cost" while the latter at least for two months.

This is surely a commendable move, given that these three sectors directly employ 8.6 lakh people.

To bring things into perspective, this is a fifth of those engaged in the garment industry, the country's biggest export earner.

These three major sectors play a huge role in the country's infrastructure development and in saving foreign currency by catering to domestic demand.

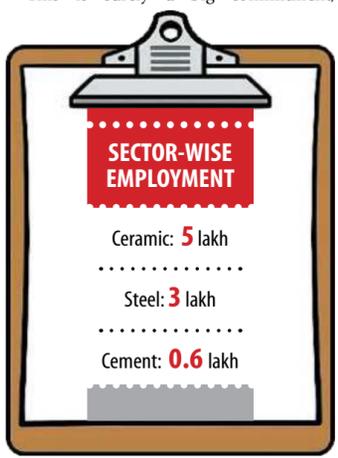
"We will not go for layoffs," said Mohammed Amirul Haque, managing director of Premier Cement.

The cement sector directly employs about

60,000 and enables indirect employment for another million.

"We will save workers and staff at any cost in the greater interest of the business," said Tanvir Ahmed, managing director of Sheltech Group.

This is surely a big commitment,



considering that the entity has recently entered the market with the "Sheltech Ceramic" brand.

The group invested about Tk 850 crore and installed fully automated European equipment with a statement to provide tiles of the highest international standard.

Ahmed said he was providing salaries diverting funds from the group's other ventures.

Under the current circumstances, financial institutions such as banks should provide interest-free capital for the next two quarters for continuity in operations of the ceramic industry.

Ahmed also proposed that the government allow deferred utility bill payment for the next one year while ensuring uninterrupted connections.

The ceramic sector has 68 active factories manufacturing sanitaryware, tableware and tiles and employing five lakh people directly, Shirajul Islam Mollah, president of the Bangladesh Ceramic Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Employees are going through uncertainties over earning their bread and butter due to a lack of sales and production.

"If we can't generate revenue and continue production, how will we provide

salaries over the months? We can provide salaries for one or two months from our personal deposits but it is not possible to continue this for long. We don't wish to terminate jobs as it is a cruel thing to do."

According to him, the sector needs at least Tk 1,000 crore in support from the government to tackle the situation.

Like ceramic and cement manufacturers, those of the steel industry are bracing for massive losses as the coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the import of raw materials and production -- a development that will also deal a blow to the real estate and infrastructure projects.

The steel sector is likely to face Tk 4,000 crore in losses, said Manwar Hossain, president of the Bangladesh Steel Mills Owners Association.

"We are accepting this loss and will keep all workers and staff in their jobs," he said.

The country has about 40 active manufacturers, who can manufacture nine million tonnes of steel a year and generated three lakh direct jobs.

Hossain believes that the government would extend cooperation in tackling the crisis.

"If that is not the case, uncertainty will befall hundreds of thousands of staff and workers along with the businesses."



Union Bank appoints new MD

STAR BUSINESS DESK

ABM Mokammel Hoque Chowdhury has recently been appointed as managing director of Union Bank.

Prior to the appointment, he served the bank as additional managing director. He also served it as a deputy managing director. He started his banking career as a probationary officer at First Security Islami Bank in 2001, according to a statement.



Meghna Bank gets new MD

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Meghna Bank has appointed Sohail RK Hussain as its managing director and CEO.

He had previously served City Bank as its managing director and CEO from 2013 to 2019, according to a statement.

Hussain also worked at Eastern Bank, Standard Chartered Grindlays Bank and ANZ Grindlays Bank.

He obtained his MBA from the Institute of Business Administration under Dhaka university.

## Remove barriers to direct rice purchase from farmers

*Govt should reform existing procurement system, eliminate middlemen*

**A**FTER last year's debacle in procuring rice from the farmers, many of whom struggled to break even after being forced to sell rice at very low prices, it is heartening to know the government is taking steps to help them get fair prices this time around. It has reportedly decided to purchase eight lakh tonnes of Boro paddy (at Tk 26 per kg) directly from farmers starting from April 26. Last year, the amount was four lakh tonnes. If implemented, the increase will bring "price support" to the doorstep of many more farmers. Add to that the 11.5 lakh tonnes of milled rice to be procured from the millers from May 7 onwards. The harvest of Boro, the principal crop of the country, has already begun in the haor areas of Mymensingh and Sylhet divisions. In other regions, it will start from early May.

However, there are deep reservations about the effectiveness of the government's existing procurement process of selecting rice-growers through lottery. The lottery system allegedly benefits non-farmers such as traders and local political men, instead of small and marginal farmers and sharecroppers. According to farmers, political connections or bribes are often required to make it to the lottery list. Besides, farmers often cannot bring the moisture content of their freshly cut paddy below the required 14 percent, forcing them to sell their produce to the millers and middlemen at lower prices. If past trends hold and the current moisture content regulation is not relaxed, an otherwise well-intentioned initiative will fail to reach its goal. The government should heed calls for reforms in its procurement system and eliminate the middlemen in the trade by setting up purchasing centres in large paddy *haats* and buying it directly from the farmers—who are already staring down the barrel of a crisis thanks to inclement weather, shortage of harvest workers as well as impending flash floods.

Removing the barriers in rice procurement—and indeed production—is extremely important. Farmers need to be kept motivated particularly because they are the ones who stand between a possible famine (caused by the coronavirus) and our food security in the future. The PM has already voiced her concerns about this and urged all concerned to produce more food and keep sufficient stock of food grains in the country. The need for initiatives and reforms reflective of this urgency cannot be overemphasised.

## Restaurant sector hit hard by the crisis

*Huge number of workers struggling to make ends meet*

**T**HE restaurant business has predictably taken a big hit due to the coronavirus outbreak as people have remained mostly locked in their homes during the past weeks. The sector was one of the first affected in Bangladesh as the number of customers started dwindling since late February, forcing businesses to either lay off or send home their employees without pay.

The government has recently unveiled a plan to transfer Tk 2,000 in cash to 40 lakh families whose breadwinners have lost jobs because of the shutdown and it is believed that that includes workers from the hotel and restaurant sectors. However, it is likely that the amount is not enough. The number of food service establishments in the country is estimated to be around 60,000 where more than 15 lakh people are working. In Dhaka alone, there are approximately 10,000 restaurants that employ 3 lakh people, a huge percentage of whom are now unemployed. To support all these people and their families, the government will clearly need to increase the monetary value of the allotted relief package.

According to the general secretary of the Bangladesh Restaurant Owner's Association, a formal request from the authorities for a list of workers who should receive aid is yet to be made. It is important that the government acquires the list quickly having consulted with restaurant owners, as Ramadan and Eid are fast approaching and restaurant workers have been under substantial financial duress for some time now. The list is also important to ensure that no restaurant worker is left out and to guarantee that no one who is not a restaurant worker is able to take advantage of the situation and there is no misallocation of funds—as we have seen attempted already during this crisis in other sectors.

Finally, given that the current predicament may last a while longer, the government could consider exempting businesses from paying utility bills and the 15 percent VAT on rents for a few months at least to help them get back on their feet once it ends.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Cutting funds is not the solution

Recently, US President Trump suspended funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) over the coronavirus response; however, his claims are rather vague. The WHO is the only leading body with a robust network and expertise that can effectively face any situation in the health sector. During this pandemic, the world is dependent on the guidelines provided by WHO. Many have criticised Trump's halting of funds as it disrupts the global battle against Covid-19. Considering the present scenario, this is exactly the time when the WHO requires more funding, not less! I hope global leaders create all possible forms of pressure to change Trump's decision as early as possible.

Shamim Noor, University of Chittagong



QUAMRUL HAIDER

**N**O one witnessed the birth of Earth. The Earth does not have a birth certificate to authenticate its age. But there is no doubt about Earth's antiquity. It is 4.55 billion years old. In the context of the Universe which burst into existence 13.7 billion years ago, Earth is in its early middle age. It will live for another five billion years, when the Sun will become a Red Giant, swallowing the nearby planets and ending its luminous career by dwindling into a white dwarf.

Although Earth is very small—a mote of dust—in the vast cosmic arena, it is the only planet that is filled with exquisite beauty, a cornucopia of boisterous wildlife slithering, scampering, soaring and swimming all over the planet. It showcases timeless marvels—a panoply of wonders—sculpted by Nature over millions of years. It is home to towering mountains, alpine glaciers, lush green rainforests, subtropical wilderness and millennia-old humongous trees, gushing geysers, beautiful coral reefs, lofty waterfalls and pristine lakes. The Earth is also home to incredible sandstone arches, deep canyons, varicoloured petrified wood and multi-hued badlands, massive caves filled with imposing stalagmites and stalactites, sparsely vegetated and colourfully painted deserts, gigantic sand dunes, and hundreds of species of flora and fauna.

Evidence of life—bacteria and single-



El Arco, Sea of Cortez, Mexico.

celled organisms—date to 3.85 billion years ago. Since then, life suffered wave after wave of cataclysmic extinctions. The dinosaurs are perhaps the most famous extinct creatures who roamed the Earth's surface unchallenged during the Mesozoic Era. After surviving for nearly 165 million years, they became victims of the greatest mass deaths in the history of our planet 65 million years ago when a large asteroid hit the Earth.

MD ABUL KALAM AZAD

**O**N April 22, 1970, about 20 million Americans, 10 percent of the US population at the time, took to the streets, raising their voices for a better, more liveable planet. They saw how badly the environment was being contaminated and what needed to be done to protect nature. This led to the establishment of Earth Day, celebrated every year on April 22.

Today is the 50th Earth day, but there will be no grand rallies, no gathering of global leaders, no bells ringing in cities like Vienna, Berlin and Geneva—the celebrations will be wholly digital. In Bangladesh, Earth Day is observed in a limited way by different organisations. This year due to the pandemic outbreak, Earth Day will be observed with more importance. As Bangladesh is a victim of climate change, we need to take up this event with a more proactive role.

Earth Hour is also celebrated on March 28—an annual event encouraging individuals, communities and businesses to turn off non-essential electric lights for one hour as a symbol of commitment to the planet. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) started this in 2007 in Australia, which gradually spread to all major cities across the world. Similar to Earth Day, it creates a global concern for climate change, and makes us think of how we can, with seemingly small actions, contribute towards reducing global warming.

From the very beginning, Bangladesh became a part of Earth Hour and Earth Day. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina set an example by switching off all appliances in her own office during Earth Hour and showing us the path to saving energy. In several public speeches, she has emphasised on saving power. Bangladesh

even attempted to introduce daylight saving time from December 2009, bringing time back by one hour and giving us more work hours during daylight, but unfortunately this was discontinued in March 2010.

Earth Day is now observed globally, and a good number of countries also celebrate Earth Week to focus on environmental issues. Today, 193 countries are observing Earth Day, with this year's theme being "Climate Action". This huge digital civic celebration will demand that world leaders take science seriously, listen to their people and push for action at every level of society to stop the rising tide of climate change. This campaign intends to activate at least a billion people in climate action—a worldwide campaign to remove billions of pieces of trash, reduce waste and plastic pollution, improve habitats and prevent harm to wildlife and humans. The largest ever global citizen science initiative will be taken on this day regarding the health and wellbeing of the environment. This global campaign will also bring together artists in every discipline from around the world, using the power of their art to express our common humanity. A huge digital platform has been set up for different age groups to educate, motivate and involve people in their many innovative activities.

Due to a transport shutdown, which includes movement via air and sea as well as roads, and the shutting down of mills and factories, as well as the lockdown of cities, districts and provinces—a number of positive environmental impacts have been witnessed. The people of northern Punjab can now glimpse the Himalayas, and the air quality of Dhaka has significantly improved. We can list many such cases, but we cannot ignore the catastrophic loss of life and the economic shutdown that has come with it.

The coronavirus pandemic has also

any more. The massive increase in economic activity and the upsurge in population growth in the last 200 years have brought us face-to-face with the planet's limitations.

The second tenet sought to position humankind outside the realm of nature. Many people still continue to view human beings as separate from nature and persist in thinking we can do whatever we please without harming the planet. To the contrary, our independence is an illusion, engendered by our remoteness from a world we see through rose-coloured



Teton Mountains, Wyoming, USA.

PHOTO: MAHJABEEN HAIDER

glasses and thermo-paned windows.

As for the third tenet, industrialised nations view nature as a force that must be conquered and subjugated. Hence, we manipulated wildlife, fisheries, land, rivers, oceans and forests like so many pieces in a board game, until the environment reached a dangerous point of disequilibrium.

Over the years, the frontier ethic permeated our lives so much that we became more remote from the natural world outside our artificial environments. It influences our personal goals and expectations without thinking about the effects on the long-term health of the planet.

It cannot be overemphasised that the fate of the planet, our home, and the millions of species that share it with us, as well as the fate of all future generations, lies in our hands. Do we realise that because of resource and ozone depletion, global warming and other problems, the human species will be wiped off the face of the planet if we do not change our lifestyles? At the least, things will deteriorate to the extent that we could lose centuries of technological and economic progress in the next few decades. Our wonderfully diverse biological world, the product of billions of years of evolution, could be eradicated in a fraction of the Earth's history.

So, what should we do to keep the planet habitable for our future generations? Scientists have urged world leaders in vain to combat global-warming emissions, which have only continued

to soar upward. Should we instead rely on a pandemic, such as the coronavirus that is shutting down countries across the globe, slowing down economic activities, halting industrial productions and travel, thereby causing a significant decline in air pollution and carbon/nitrogen emissions all over the world?

The coronavirus pandemic is a tragedy—a palpable human nightmare unfolding in overloaded hospitals with alarming speed, racing toward a horizon darkened by economic disaster and chock-full of signs showing more sufferings

to come. This global crisis is also an eye-opener for the other global crisis, the slower one with even higher stakes—anthropogenic climate change.

The cure due to coronavirus is temporary and totally unacceptable, whereas the threat from the adverse effects of climate change will remain with us for years, unless we shape up pronto. Nevertheless, coronavirus should make us wonder if lessons learned from the pandemic might be the beginning of a meaningful shift from business-as-usual attitude.

On this International Mother Earth Day, let us pause for a moment and imagine what the Earth would look like when it will be bereft of mirth, when there will be no wilderness and wildlife, when lakes will be filled with sudsy waters, when coastlines will become unrecognisable and when the air will become a witch's brew. Can our planet still be called Earth? The answer is no, because we do not have the insight to predict the consequences of our frontier mentality and exercise restraint where we must.

I end the piece with the following words of wisdom from the Native American Chief Seattle. "The Earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the Earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

Quamrul Haider is a Professor of Physics at Fordham University, New York.

# Earth Day during Covid-19

*Globally, millions of personal protective equipment (PPE) are being used; the question of hygienic disposal of this PPE, including gloves and masks, is very important. Almost all of them are not biodegradable and can lead to generating greater medical waste.*

brought forward some extra challenges in terms of the environment. Globally, millions of personal protective equipment (PPE) are being used; the question of hygienic disposal of this PPE, including gloves and masks, is very important. Almost all of them are not biodegradable and can lead to generating greater medical waste.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also prescribed washing hands for 20 seconds with soap frequently, and product stock is running low in departmental stores and grocery shops. Concerned factories are working day and night, doing good business while catering to this huge demand. Likewise, the use of sanitisers has increased many fold. We know the main ingredients of sanitiser is alcohol and glycerin. A huge quantity of cleaning materials like bleaching powder and phenyl are being used globally, which ultimately goes back into canals and rivers. Without any doubt, these will cause harm

to rivers and the different fish and other aquatic species that populate these waters. Only time will tell what impact all these various substances will have.

Soaps in general are biodegradable but detergents contain phosphate, which contributes to the growth of algae in water bodies. Aquatic animals are deprived of oxygen as a result. Aquatic animals and water plants can also be severely affected by common household detergent. Detergent makes the process of water purification more difficult as well. Some antibacterial soaps contain additives like Triclocarban (TCC) and Triclosan (TCS) that are not easily degradable and contaminate lakes, canals and rivers, which may cause health hazards in different ways. Alcohol based hand sanitisers have a lower chance of polluting the environment as it evaporates, but prolonged use over a long period may cause harm to the skin. Even then, after using hand sanitisers as and when possible, experts still advise the cleaning of hands with soap and water. We need to be very careful when using cleansing materials to disinfect as well.

On this Earth Day, let us commit to reducing pollution, energy efficiency, using more solar and wind energy, plastic and polythene prohibition, cleaning our canals and rivers, less travel and greater use of tele/video-conferencing, saving water, reducing, recycling and re-using (3R), using less paper, using bicycles to travel and planting more trees.

The founder of the modern scouting movement Lord Baden-Powell once said, "Try to leave this world a little better than you found it". Let us try to implement that in our everyday life—practice doing more with less and think of all the things we can do without.

MD Abul Kalam Azad is a Distinguished Fellow of the Global Commission on Adaptation and former Principal SDG Coordinator.



# The need for SARS-CoV-2 genome sequencing

SHARIF AKHTERUZZAMAN

THE ongoing coronavirus pandemic has suddenly and drastically changed the way we lived in the world, only a few months ago. We have not seen such devastation in recent history since World War II. The virus has already killed more than 170,000 people worldwide and billions are at risk of getting infected. There is no drug yet with convincing scientific evidence that can cure the illness, neither is there any effective vaccine in sight. We really don't know how the crisis is going to end. But we know for sure that the post-pandemic world is never going to be the same as before. Therefore, envisioning a comprehensive strategy to cope with post-pandemic challenges by exploring all scientific means and ways of the 21st century is crucial.

We all know by now that the causative agent of Covid-19 is a novel coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. Biologically speaking, viruses are not true biological entities and therefore require a host to survive. All viruses carry their genetic information as either DNA or RNA. The SARS-CoV-2 genome is an RNA molecule of about 30,000 bases containing only 15 genes. The human genome, on the other hand, is a double helix DNA—about three billion bases in size and containing about 30,000 genes. RNA is less stable and more prone to mutation than DNA, so RNA viruses generally change and evolve faster. This sometimes allows RNA viruses to jump from one species to another.

Coronavirus did not just pop up very recently. There are hundreds of coronaviruses belonging to a large

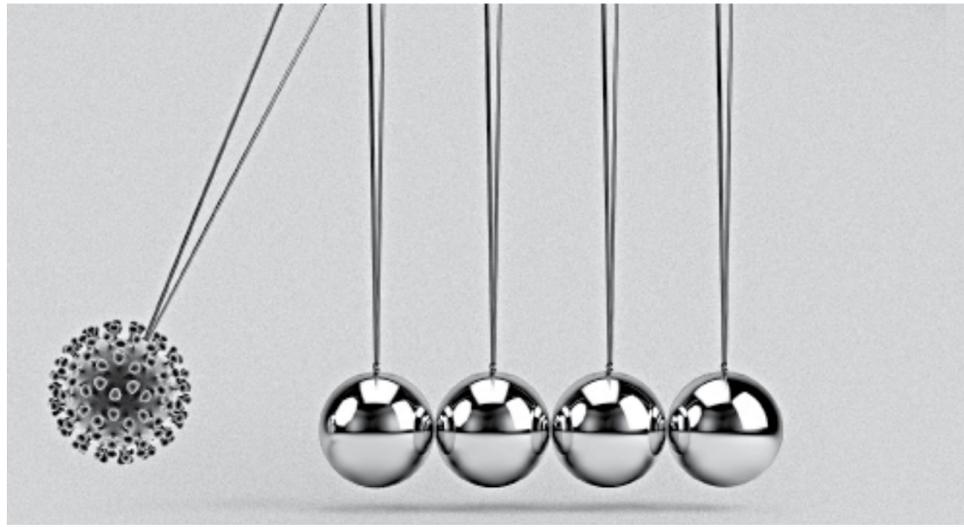


PHOTO: COLLECTED

family of viruses called *coronaviridae*. They have been around us for a long time in many avian and mammal reservoirs including bats, migratory birds, camels, civets, pangolins, mice, dog and cats. The current trail of death and disease around the world is believed to have been created by at least eight strains of the novel coronavirus.

Since novel coronavirus is a new virus, mining its genome sequence is of crucial importance. Genome sequencing has now become a powerful tool for tracking diseases—this is called “genomic prediction”. Whole genome sequencing will help researchers identify genetic changes that occur

in a virus when it spreads through the population. The changes in the genetic sequence of the viral genomes collected from several patients will allow the monitoring of the spread of the disease within the country and between populations over time. It will also provide us with answers to the following questions, which are not known to us at this moment with certainty.

These are—why are some countries suffering more from the virus when compared to other countries? Why do children seem to be less vulnerable than adults? Can the virus evolve into a more virulent strain, and what

will happen then? How fast is the coronavirus mutating? How can a vaccine be developed, targeting a particular population? Where did the virus actually originate?

From the perspective of any specific country, including ours, the most important information from the viral genome sequence at this moment will be—identification of particular viral strain/s that are prevalent, identification of infection hotspots or super-spreaders (individuals who spread the infection to more than the expected number of people), and formulation of strategies for public health intervention. This will also help develop a vaccine targeting

our own population.

Many countries have already started sequencing the viral genomes collected from patients. In India, three institutes (CSRI, CCMB and IGIB) have started working together on the whole genome sequencing of the novel coronavirus. The government of UK has announced a GBP 20 million investment for mapping the Covid-19 spread in UK through whole genome sequencing. The study will be conducted through a consortium comprised of several research organisations and numerous academic institutes. According to the National Centre for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), there are 818 entries of SARS-CoV-2 complete genome sequence from various countries around the world. Countries that have submitted complete genome sequence include USA, China, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, Iran, South Africa, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Nepal and Nigeria, with the highest number of submissions from the US.

From our country, we need to take the initiative to sequence the whole genome of the virus samples collected from infected patients in order to understand more about the virus type, its origin, rate of mutation, what type of vaccine would suit our population and most importantly, how we could face the next wave of infection in case of its re-emergence. In Bangladesh, we have several universities and institutes capable of doing genome sequencing with the necessary expertise. What is important is that we act quickly, before it is too late.

Sharif Akhteruzzaman, PhD is Professor at the Department of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, University of Dhaka.

## I can't call you

The challenges of getting help from a tele-counsellor

YESHIM IQBAL

THE mental health challenges of the current Covid-19 pandemic are formidable. The media is awash with articles about the effects of isolation and quarantine and how we should keep ourselves mentally robust during this difficult time. Suicides related to Covid-19 are occurring around the world, including in Bangladesh.

In response to this crisis, both physical and mental health services have moved to phone and online-based modalities. These options are well-established as important mechanisms for addressing psychological issues during natural or manmade crises, with the Covid-19 pandemic as no exception. Indeed, for this crisis, the phone makes more sense than ever before, as it allows people to get help while maintaining social distancing. In Bangladesh, options for tele-health and tele-counselling have rapidly increased in the past few weeks. Across the world, crisis helplines of various kinds are reporting surges in the calls and texts they are receiving.

But this might not be the case in Bangladesh, as I illustrate below, and I would encourage mental health service providers (especially those who are now focusing their services into being more phone-based) to consider why.

Kaan Pete Roi (loosely translated from Bengali, it means “My Ears Wait to Listen”) is the first and



ILLUSTRATION: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

only suicide prevention helpline in Bangladesh, and is staffed by trained volunteers. Kaan Pete Roi (KPR) follows the model of Befrienders

Worldwide, a global authority on suicide prevention. This model espouses the use of compassionate, open-minded listening to prevent

suicide, with the majority of this listening taking place over the phone. Since its inception in 2013, KPR has received over 20,000 calls.

As of the middle of March, coinciding exactly with the coronavirus lockdown, Kaan Pete Roi experienced a sharp decrease in calls, by almost 60 percent, and has stayed low in comparison to the standard average call rate of the past several years. To try to understand why this might be, the KPR administration ran a simple, two-option poll from its Facebook page, asking the following question (translated from Bengali): “I'd like to get help from KPR, but I can't. This is because: 1) My circumstances at home don't allow me to talk or 2) I can't add credit to my phone.” As of the time of writing this article, two days after this poll was published, this poll has 187 responses, with 96 for the first option and 92 for the second—essentially, an almost even split between these two options.

I would encourage mental health providers to consider these points while they are providing health-based services (of course, these are not the only factors that will affect the ability to make a call—but they are a good starting point!). First, privacy, or circumstances at home—everyone is stuck inside their houses right now. For the vast majority of families in Bangladesh, this means there is no privacy to make a phone call—much less a sensitive phone call to a mental health hotline,

to discuss their mental health status. Enough space, or the social circumstances to make a private phone call inside the house, is an extreme luxury in Bangladesh.

Second, the ability to add credit to phones. I've heard many cases already of people who would normally recharge their credit by handing their local shopkeeper some cash on the way to work or school. Now that they're not leaving the house, it's much harder to do so. Even if they do leave the house for essential errands, the agents who assist in recharging credit aren't always there, so they have to go further than planned. It's an immediate, clear logistical problem—one that I'm surprised hasn't been directly addressed by mobile companies already.

It is also extremely important to note that these issues will vary based on demographics. Notably, the gender breakdown for the respondents of the above poll differs. Of those who say the circumstances at home are the problem, 56 were male, and 40 female. Of those who say that recharging their phones were a problem, 66 were male and 26 female. Women are more likely to have caretaking and domestic responsibilities inside the house—a greater burden on their time and privacy; indeed, of the 66 female respondents to the above poll, 60 percent report home circumstances as being the issue.

There are several services

providing tele-counselling and tele-health in Bangladesh now. For those of us working in this sector, it's important to keep barriers to reaching services in mind. To address privacy, the solution might be night-time hours of service provision (itself a logistical challenge on the provision end, of course) and chat/text-based options (we all recognise the increased privacy and ease of texting over a phone call). For the credit options, these services will have to be toll-free or as cheap as possible—an appeal to the mobile operators is perhaps in order here.

As health service providers, we will rarely, in our entire lifetimes, collectively experience such a vast and extreme challenge to which we have to respond swiftly and decisively. There is one point I haven't mentioned yet—although calls to Kaan Pete Roi have decreased, actively suicidal calls have increased by 10 percent. People need our help, and they need it now. We have to make sure we can get it to them.

Kaan Pete Roi is an Emotional Support and Suicide Prevention Helpline. Trained volunteers provide emotional support through confidential, compassionate, and open-minded listening. Please call 01779554391-2, 01688709965-6, 01985275286, 01852035634, 01517969150, every day from 3pm-9pm, Thursdays from 3pm-3am.

Yeshim Iqbal, PhD is the founder and director of Kaan Pete Roi.

## BGMEA's response to “Magical thinking in the time of Covid-19”

BGMEA brings it to your notice that on April 13, 2020, an objectionable article under the title “Magical thinking in the time of Covid-19” was written by Nadine Shaanta Murshid, maligning the formidable reputation of BGMEA on a national and international level. The article misleadingly claims that BGMEA asked workers to return to work in direct violation of government shutdown protocol. This is nothing but a preposterous lie. The article insinuates that BGMEA has committed gender discrimination in the process. BGMEA never issued any directive asking workers to return to work so the question of withdrawing an imaginary and non-existent directive under the so-called compulsion of civil society does not arise. Accusing BGMEA of neoliberalism is capricious and ill-conceived. Her claim that BGMEA is promoting modern day slavery and the workers are not properly informed about the Covid-19 pandemic is baseless.

In reality, BGMEA not only represents the owners of RMG factories but is also the caretaker for labour health and safety issues. It is this sense of duty towards

workers that prompted BGMEA to write to the Ministry of Labour on March 20, specifically raising concern about workers' safety in running factories amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequent to BGMEA's letter, on March 21, a stakeholders' meeting was conducted convened by the State Minister for Labour and Employment Monnujan Sufian in the presence of FBCCI, BEE, BGMEA and BKMEA whereby a joint decision was taken to keep factories open with supreme caution adopting preventive measures. Next day, on March 22, the Minister sat with all labour union representatives representing the total labour force of the RMG sector in an office, deciding to keep factories open. Subsequently, the Prime Minister addressed the nation and issued 31 directives and in directive 29 stated that industry owners with consultation with workers will continue production, ensuring health and safety. The government issued various circulars declaring a “general holiday” and time to time extended the holiday up to April 25, and all these circulars unequivocally stated that export-oriented industries can be kept open if need be. More specific directions

were given by the Department for Inspection of Factories and Establishments (DIFE) on March 27 and April 1, abundantly declaring that factories which have running purchase orders and factories which are making Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) can be kept open.

BGMEA never formally instructed to close any factory simply because BGMEA doesn't have the mandate under law to do so. However, when the workers who left for their homes upon declaration of general holiday on March 26 started to come back around April 4, mostly to collect their wages, BGMEA played a pivotal role, went out of its way and instructed all its members to keep their factories closed and pay wages through a digital system. BGMEA had no part in the confusion created which led to workers going back to their homes and then returning to join work. BGMEA neither endorses neoliberalism nor does it practice worker exploitation and oppression: the damaging assertions made in the said article is devoid of any justification.

Dr Rubana Huq, President, BGMEA.

QUOTABLE Quote



ART WOLFE  
(Born 1951) American photographer and conservationist.

*It is in the wild places, where the edge of the earth meets the corners of the sky, the human spirit is fed.*

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

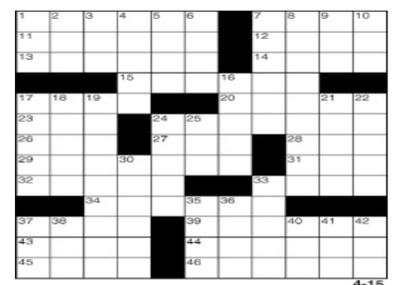
ACROSS

- 1 Dumbstruck
- 7 Unwanted email
- 11 Lively dance
- 12 Longing
- 13 Acts the usher
- 14 Tooth part
- 15 Start a round
- 17 Plays the ponies
- 20 Bank job
- 23 Director
- DuVernay
- 24 Brown in the funnies
- 26 Kinsey topic
- 27 Lobed organ
- 28 Seventh Greek letter
- 29 Blow up
- 31 Mai tai base
- 32 Pigs' digs

DOWN

- 1 Crunch targets
- 2 “The Simpsons” bartender
- 3 Stout relative
- 4 Lemon rind strips
- 5 Lake near Buffalo
- 6 Finished
- 7 Wave rider
- 8 Serial crime investigators
- 9 In the past

- 10 Got together
- 16 Midwest airport
- 17 Grounds
- 18 Calendar entry
- 19 Folks with returns
- 21 Crunch kin
- 22 League members
- 24 Put a stop to
- 25 Bowler, for one
- 30 Latitude
- 33 Rework
- 35 Take in
- 36 Trade show
- 37 That woman
- 38 Brewed beverage
- 40 Bee follower
- 41 Leather hue
- 42 Museum focus



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



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



Workers of Kaliti tea garden in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar bring out a hunger procession in the area demanding payment of their three months' arrear dues. Inset, tea worker Munni and her ailing husband Jagannath Almik look hapless in front of their hut in the garden area. PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

KALITI TEA GARDEN IN KULaura Uz

# Unpaid over 3 months, impoverished workers face grave situation

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

As many as 536 permanent workers of Kaliti tea garden in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila are passing days amid utter hardship as they have not been paid for the last 13 weeks.

Many tea workers' families are surviving on liquid extract from boiled rice taken with mashed tea leaves and chilli while the tea estate authorities are receiving their full-time labour during the ongoing plucking season.

"We have to borrow for survival as we are not getting wages for over three months. My husband, who became paralysed two months ago, could not even arrange his treatment," said Munni, who joined as a worker in place of her ailing husband Jagannath Almik, 34, two months ago.

"My husband lost his ability to speak a few days. A storm badly damaged our tiny house early Sunday, making us even more helpless," said a tearful Munni.

Tea worker Biswajit Das, former president of the garden Panchayat ad hoc committee, said Kaliti tea garden was earlier leased by the government to Jobeda Tea Company Limited.

Each worker receives a meagre daily wage Tk 102 and the payment is supposed to be made on Thursday every week.

"But workers are not getting wages for 13

weeks. Previous wages of many workers also remained unpaid. Retired workers are not getting provident fund," Biswajit said.

"We are not getting any payment despite work. We are not getting any mask and other safety measures for protection from coronavirus infection. We demand our dues, not any relief in the crisis period. People are passing their days unfed or half-fed; some have fallen sick," said tea worker Doyal Almik.

Besides, around 1000 'no work, no pay' based workers at the garden are virtually jobless now.

Uttam Kaluar, secretary of the garden's panchayat committee, said, "Seven percent from each worker's wages is kept for future funds while the owners have to add another seven percent to the Labour Department. But the garden authorities are not doing it."

There are no doctors or treatment facilities in the garden, he said.

Shamvu Chowdhury Das, president of the panchayat committee, said they made a written petition to the deputy director of the Labour Department in Srimangal on January 5, seeking solutions to the problems prevailing in the garden.

"But the problems are yet to be solved, although we observed different programmes including bhukha michhil (march of hungry

people). We will go for tougher movement if the government does not take any action within 24 hours," he said yesterday.

Kaliti tea garden's Manager Pranab Kanti Das told this correspondent, "Fourteen officials and employees of different levels at the garden, including me, have not got payment for nine months."

Nahidul Islam, deputy director of the Department of Labour at Sreemangal office, said, "Around 50 lakh taka, meant for the provident fund for the tea garden workers, has not been deposited by the tea garden authority. The managing director and the manager of the tea garden have been warned several times for the payment of arrear wages to workers and the provident fund money but to no effect."

Kaiser Ahmed, managing director of Kaliti tea garden, said, "It is not possible to pay the workers' wages as we are in financial trouble, which is worsened due to the lockdown. However, they are being given ration facilities."

"All the problems of the garden will be solved quickly when the situation becomes normal. I request the government to provide relief to the workers of the garden," he said.

AKM Shafi Ahmed Salman, chairman of Kulaura Upazila Parishad, said, "We will take initiative to solve the problem of the tea garden workers within 24 hours."

# Treatment for rural people through telemedicine

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Everything has come to a halt due to the countrywide shutdown to flatten the spread of highly contagious Covid-19. During the trying time, many doctors cannot treat those suffering from common diseases in person due to coronavirus fears. In this situation, some youths and members of Kulaura Association of Medical Students on March 30 launched a free telemedicine service to serve those patients. It is now getting popular among local people.

Seven physicians of the association have been rendering treatment to those suffering from common seasonal diseases like cold, cough and fever every seven hours in three shifts in 24 hours through telemedicine, said Dr Md Al-Rafi Ali Shah, general secretary of the association.

The physicians are Dr Kisholoy Chowdhury, Dr Mustafizur Rahman, Dr Mehedi Hasan Anik, Dr Moshtak Hossain Tanim, Dr Tafhimul Islam Chowdhury, Dr Md Al-Rafi Ali Shah and Dr ATM Redwanul Islam.

The service will continue until the change of ongoing pandemic. They are receiving 25 to 40 phone calls from people of different ages daily. The number of phone calls is now increasing.

Sohana Begum, a resident of Amuli

village in Kulaura upazila, said her five-year old daughter was suffering from coughs and fever, but could not visit the doctor due to the ongoing countrywide shutdown.

Sohana added at the time, she learnt about the telemedicine service from a relative. Later, they got treatment by communicating with the assigned doctor using the mobile phone.

Wishing anonymity, an expatriate who came here from Dubai two months ago said "I had been suffering from cough. Later, I came to know details about the disease coronavirus through telemedicine."

Dr Md Al-Rafi Ali Shah said they give advice to those patients suffering from common diseases and if necessary they prescribe treatment over phone.

But if they find any patient with coronavirus-like symptoms, they suggest those to visit the hospital in Sylhet, said the doctor.

There are 28 members of this organisation, he said, adding that most of them have recently completed their MBBS degree.

Anyone can call at +8801300630698 for getting the telemedicine service, he said.

Kulaura Upazila Nirbahi Officer ATM Farhad Chowdhury said it is really a great initiative by the association in the crisis time.

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**Kulaura Association of Medical Students (KAMS)**

# A ray of hope for Jhalakathi farmers

## Re-excavation work of 10 canals started recently

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

Re-excavation work of 10 canals in the district has begun recently, bringing new hope for farmers.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Jhalakathi, there are around 238 canals in the district. Of the canals, 100 are almost dead now.

The canals, originating from the Bishkhali, Sughandha and Dhanshiri rivers, are the main source of irrigation for agricultural lands and a nursery for various indigenous fish as well in the area, said farmers and fishermen of four upazilas in the district.

Hundred acres of land remain unused during dry season due to lack of irrigation water in Mathbari village of Rajapur upazila, said Shaidul Islam, a farmer of the village.

"I usually planted watermelon on my land during summer but I couldn't cultivate it for over a decade as the canal close to my farming land has been dried up", he said.

"The canal is almost dead but I'm now dreaming of planting various summer

fruits and vegetables on my land again as re-excavation work of the canal has begun recently," said Shaidul.

If all the small and large canals in the village are re-excavated like the four-km-long Mathbari canal, the entire village will be covered with various crops and green vegetables, said Mahabub, another farmer of the same area, adding that re-excavation of the canal was their long dream.

Riaz Ullah Bahadur, an official of DAE in Rajapur, said several hectares of land in the upazila went under water during the rainy season due to lack of proper drainage system.

But if the canals are re-excavated, the rainwater will recede fast, he said.

Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation started re-excavating 10 canals in four upazilas of the district over a week ago, said Riaz.

The canals are also used as the source of water for indigenous fish, he said.

If the canals are re-excavated perfectly, fish production will increase rapidly, said Babul Krishna Ojha, deputy director of fisheries department in Jhalakathi.



Re-excavation work of Mathbari canal in Jhalakathi's Rajapur upazila has begun recently. PHOTO: STAR

## COVID-19 FALLOUT

# Over 1 lakh Tangail sari weavers need urgent aid

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Over 1 lakh handloom and power loom workers, the ones that weave the famous Tangail saris, are in dire need of help after they went out of work since their factories were shuttered nearly a month ago amid the outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus.

Traders and factory owners are also counting huge losses as they invested heavily ahead of the festivities of Pehela Baishakh and the Eid-ul-Fitr -- the two occasions in a year when the markets see highest sales of Tangail saris.

With no cash flowing in, many weavers have been breaking their lifesavings, while the ones having no savings are borrowing money from local money lenders.

Yet, the affected workers and businesses did not receive any form of food or financial aid from the local administration.

According to Bangladesh Handloom Board (BHB), more than 1 lakh workers are employed in 12 upazilas of Tangail where around 20,000 handlooms and 25,000 power looms are operational at different factories.

Of the workers, 50 percent have their origins in Sirajganj, Pabna and Kurigram, while the rest are locals, BHB officials also said.

This correspondent recently visited some areas in Tangail that are usually found bustling from dusk till dawn, with movement of machinery at hundreds of weaving factories.

While visiting, there was no sign of any activity at any of the factories in Bajitpur in Sadar upazila; Pathrail, Chandi and Dhulutia in Delduar upazila; and Balla, Rampur and Chhatihati in Kalihati upazila.

Several of the workers said they used to make from Tk 300 to Tk 500 every day.

After spending so many weeks



A piece of famed Tangail sari left unfinished in a handloom in Rampur of Tangail's Kalihati upazila. Thousands of weavers had to leave their factories in late March when the government imposed a shutdown of non-emergency industries and services to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. PHOTO: STAR

without any income, they said, many ran out of cash and had been buying daily essentials on credit from local grocery stores.

Others said many are falling victims to loan sharks and it would be extremely difficult for the poverty-stricken weavers to get out of the debt over a long period of time.

Omar Ali, a handloom worker from Singair in Balla union, said unless urgent assistance is provided, a good number of the workers will not be able to save themselves from the entrapment of the lone sharks.

The situation seems to deteriorate with the passing of

each day as the poor weavers are unable to feed their families, said Mohammad Ali, another worker in the same area.

While speaking with this correspondent, Balla handloom owners' association President Mofakkkharul Islam said the situation has turned for the worse at a time when the workers would remain the busiest making orders for the Pehela Baishakh and the Eid.

The loss of sales during the time of peak demand is also causing the factory owners and traders pay a heavy price, he added.

Imranul Haque, liaison officer

at BHB's Balla Basic Centre (serving Kalihati, Bhuapur, Ghatal, Gopalpur, Madhupur and Dhanbari upazilas), said a cloud of gloom hangs over both the handloom and power loom industries in the area as the factories remain closed amid the ongoing nationwide shutdown.

In order to support the industry, the BHB has suspended collection of small loan repayments from the weavers. "We are now preparing separate lists of affected workers and factory owners."

The list would be sent to the chairman of the BHB, the deputy commissioner and upazila nirbahi officers concerned," he added.

## Rooftop tennis amid lockdown

Two young girls in Italy took their tennis games to a higher level despite a nationwide lockdown as they staged a remarkable rally from the rooftops of neighbouring buildings. The girls in the Ligurian town of Finale Ligure coolly managed a 12-shot rally featuring forehands and backhands during a 24-second video posted on Facebook last Friday by a tennis club.

-- REUTERS



BEHIND THE LENS:

## Sorrow in click, pleasure in outcome

If times were normal, professional sports photographers would be roaming around the city capturing the best shots from the Dhaka Premier Cricket League, Bangladesh Premier League or other sporting action. Everything, however, has come to a standstill because of the coronavirus pandemic. For all concerned, and especially those in sport, the memory lane is the one most travelled during this unwanted break. And the photographers are also providing pictures of the good old days but they have their own stories behind the memorable pictures. The Daily Star Sport took the opportunity to share the joy, sorrow, and pleasure of their special clicks. Here, our own Firoz Ahmed talks about stories behind his best captures.

It was one of the hardest moments in my professional career. I was shell shocked when I read the news in the morning about Mohammad Ashraful's involvement in match-fixing during the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) in 2013. It took me some time to calm down because he was my favourite cricketer.

He was our first cricketing superstar and I loved his every movement. It was always a thrill for me to press the button to capture his best shots. His presence was always pleasing; I especially loved to frame his photograph with the infectious, innocent smile.

So, I couldn't believe myself... was it true? But I calmed myself down because I thought, as a professional photographer, I had to take the best shot of him on this day no matter how painful



it would be for me. The main challenge remained finding him. I first rushed to the cricket board's

headquarters in Mirpur and then I was asking around to know his exact whereabouts.

The anxiety increased as the daylight began fading. How could I manage a good picture had I not got enough light?

Finally, I got news of his whereabouts and rushed there only to face the toughest challenge in my career. Ashraful came down to the ground floor at his Banashree residence with little daylight remaining and broke down in tears while talking to reporters. And I had to control myself to capture the best shot of the deep sorrow of a man, pictures of whose smiling face were my favourite.

Seven years have passed since the event took place but the photograph still draws my attention because it's my favourite picture as it depicts all the sorrow of a fallen star.

## FIFA gives Masuk Mia compensation

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh midfielder Masuk Mia Jonny recently received the second instalment, worth approximately Tk 4 lakh, as compensation from FIFA under the club protection scheme.

The Bashundhara Kings midfielder sustained an ACL injury during a practice session ahead of the September 10, 2019 World Cup qualifying tie against Afghanistan.

He underwent surgery in October last year and has been out of football since then.

FIFA had, in February, released the first instalment of the money and will release the third instalment -- both worth Tk 4 lakh each -- after assessing the present condition of Jonny, said a Bangladesh Football Federation official yesterday.

## Chess has adapted well to shutdowns: Anand

PTI



Five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand feels chess has adapted quite well to the coronavirus-forced shutdowns across the globe by simply going online just as he has been doing to stay in touch with family while being stuck in Germany for a couple of months now.

Anand had gone to Germany in February to compete for SC Baden in the Bundesliga Chess. However, travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have ensured that he has been unable to return home.

"I would say Germany is pretty comfortable. I am in a small town. I have had a chance to go out a couple of times for a walk...of course, keeping a safe distance," he told PTI from his current base near Frankfurt.

"Also, (I) do some shopping



and essential stuff like that. I have friends living nearby and that's a big comfort," he said.

The 50-year-old reflected on sports in time of worldwide lockdowns and said chess seems to have coped well.

"Nobody really knows what the impact (of COVID-19) on the economy will be. First of all, let's take

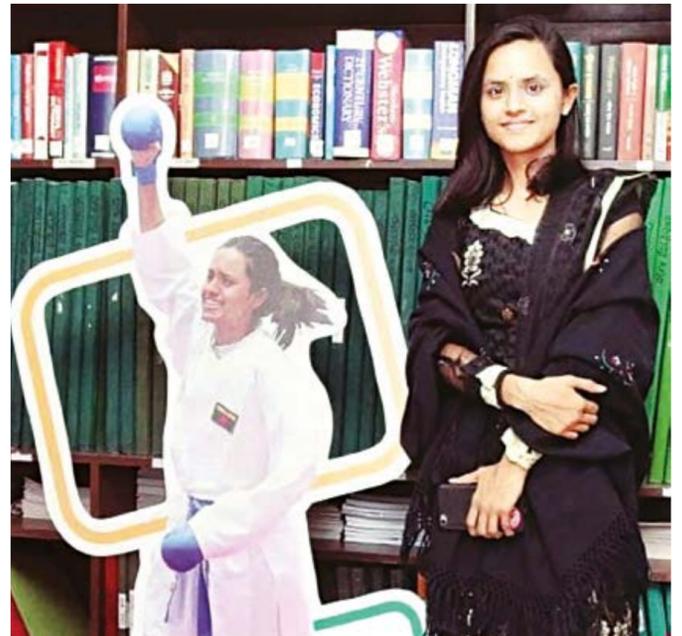
chess. Chess was already something that happened a lot on the internet. So, it has been smooth to adapt to going completely online," he said.

"Even so, it is a bit of shock that so many tournaments got cancelled and everyone is sitting at home. playing chess on the internet is lot of fun

"(But) organising a chess tournament (online) requires some skill. Where do you place the arbiter? How do you monitor things? and so on...yet chess has adapted relatively easily," he added.

As for how he has been doing while being away from his family for such a long duration, Anand said he has tried to stay positive by devoting time to some aspects of his game, which he ignored earlier.

"I have a chance to do some chess work that I never had time for. I have a lot of time to wander around the internet just looking for information on this or that."



## Priya's fight for a better future

ANISUR RAHMAN

Determination and hard work might have given Marzan Aktar Priya overwhelming success within three years of stepping into the karate mat, but the South Asian (SA) Games gold medallist is seemingly losing interest in the sport due to its bleak future in Bangladesh.

Just four months ago Priya, a student of fine arts department of Jagannath University, hit the headlines by bagging a gold medal in 55-kg category in the regional sports extravaganza in Nepal.

The very next day, she hit the headlines again, this time after being admitted to a hospital in Kathmandu following an injury she sustained on the lower part of her ear while playing against a Sri Lankan opponent in a team semifinal clash. The youngster recovered from her injury and was released from the hospital hours later, much to the relief of the people of the country.

Priya, who took to karate against her parents' will and later touched highest success in South Asia, is now more focused on her studies after refusing to accept a soldier's job in Bangladesh Army.

"I was supposed to join Bangladesh Army but I changed my mind and did not join as there is no rank/post except for soldier for the athletes. So I stepped back thinking of my future and concentrated on my studies," Priya told The Daily Star over phone.

Priya is concentrating on her studies because she believes the future for athletes in Bangladesh, except for the ones in cricket and football, is not a good one.

"Athletes in Bangladesh can't continue sports and studies together because they have few opportunities in job market. So at one point, athletes get frustrated and drop out of sports and get involved with higher studies or business to ensure a secured future," said the Karateka.

She, however, said that there are some exceptional players, who stick to sports due to their passion but they too are left with little option for a good job, which leaves them in hardship after retirement.

"The biggest strength of anyone is his/her family but a player fights against the family to come into sports. But when it comes to survival, they lose this fighting attitude. In that sense I don't see any prospect of sports in Bangladesh. However, if sports are properly nursed, then there can be good prospect," believes Priya.

"For example, archery is now being well nursed. Archery has international coach because of the financial support from the sponsors. That's why Ruman Sana is now Ruman Sana," Priya said, adding that she would try to do better in karate but everything depends on how others come forward to help her.

Priya, however, said she enjoyed moments after returning from Nepal as everyone including her relatives, friends, teachers and well-wishers congratulated her and inquired about her health. She also got a big surprise from her teachers, who arranged a special final exam of the first semester which she missed due to the games. Priya believes she might not have gotten this opportunity had it not been for the gold medal.



## Nadal frustrated, Federer happy

AFP, Madrid

Rafael Nadal on Monday expressed frustration that tennis players remain unable to practise due to the coronavirus pandemic, while Roger Federer revealed he was happy with his recovery from knee surgery.

The Spanish government has extended the country's state of alarm until May 9, with the entire population confined to their homes except a small number working in specific sectors, leaving Nadal perplexed as to why he can't train.

"It's true I don't understand very well because we cannot play tennis when many people are going to work and even more so in our sport, where we keep at a large and safe distance and we play on opposite sides of the court," Nadal said during an Instagram Live.

"But I understand that we are in a very

critical situation, that the government is dealing with something unprecedented and I understand that the last thing they think of is who can train and who cannot train."

Nadal treated tennis fans to an Instagram Live in which he spoke to both Roger Federer and Andy Murray about their experiences during lockdown.

Federer meanwhile gave an update on his right knee after the 20-time major winner decided to undergo surgery in February.

"I've been hitting a bit against a wall, (doing) rehab with the knee," Federer said. "It's OK, I had a really good first six weeks, then it was a bit slower, now it's getting better again but I have plenty of time. There is no stress, no rush. If there is anything positive (about being in lockdown) that's the only thing really. I just want the knee to be good, it doesn't matter when I return."

## Rest has been good for me, says Rashford

AGENCIES, Manchester

Marcus Rashford admits there were "ups and downs" with former manager Jose Mourinho, but the Manchester United forward feels stronger for the experience.

"It was tough but I think in five or six years' time, you look back on it and they're the moments that will give you that mental toughness," Rashford said. "Because as an all-round player, I think I've improved a lot and a lot of it is down to them two years under Jose."

"Yeah, we had ups and downs, but when I look back on it, it was a tough period but definitely a period that made me better."

Rashford has been out since mid-January with a back injury, which meant representing England at Euro 2020 was up in the air. But the suspension will give him time to recover -- and means he will not have to go into the Euros short of full fitness.

"I was probably going to go back with the team in the middle or end of April, but that would have been a push because I didn't want to miss the summer," Rashford told the Utd Podcast.

"So, for my body, really, it's been good to just let it (rest). I can give it its full duration to rest."



Juventus and Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo provided another glimpse into his life during quarantine, sharing this picture of himself staying in shape. He captioned it: "Work out to improve mind and body."

PHOTO: TWITTER

## Ozil against pay cut

AGENCIES, London

Mesut Ozil is among three Arsenal players stalling on a pay-cut. Ozil, the club's top-earner on £350,000-a-week, is thought to want more time to assess the impact of the coronavirus shutdown before committing to a deal.

The remaining 24 members of the first-team squad have agreed to a 12.5 per cent reduction for 12 months, following a fortnight of intensive talks with the club and a personal intervention by manager Mikel Arteta on Wednesday.

The Spaniard and his core coaching staff have also agreed to the terms.

The players are expected to be fully reimbursed if they qualify for the Champions League in the next two campaigns, while the cut will be reduced to 7.5 percent if they reach the Europa League.

Talks with Ozil and the two others will continue, with the trio not thought to have ruled out a future cut.

The PFA has urged players only to accept deferrals and Ozil's agent said earlier this month: "Deferral is an option but not a cut today when the clubs may still make the same profit as last year. What the exact financial impact is on the clubs, we can see three to six months later but we can't see it today."

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MONSOON AMID OUTBREAK

# Preparation lapses can be deadly

UNHCR warns

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN Refugee Agency warned of life-threatening consequences if annual monsoon preparations cannot be completed on time in Bangladesh amid the global outbreak of Covid-19.

"As countries around the world fight the pandemic, the coming of the monsoon rains risks worsening the already difficult situation of refugees in Bangladesh," said UNHCR Spokesperson Andrej Mahecic at a press briefing in Geneva yesterday.

In Bangladesh, so far there are no confirmed cases of Covid-19 infection among the Rohingya refugee population. Despite this, both host communities and refugees in Cox's Bazar are considered to be among the most at risk globally in this pandemic. The area is also seasonally prone to both landslides and flash flooding, the UNHCR said.

In 2019, during the heaviest monsoon downpours in September, over 4,000 households were temporarily displaced in the camps in Cox's Bazar, and more than 16,000 people affected. Thanks to mitigation measures in place, the damage was far less than the previous year. This year now the refugees remain at the centre of preparedness planning and response.

Annual monsoon preparations, however, have been



A child in Savar looks on as a family on a nearby rooftop fly kites, one of the few sporting activities that are possible within the social distancing guidelines during the ongoing countrywide shutdown. This photo was taken on Sunday evening.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## He was just abandoned on a char

Old man with Covid-19 symptoms rescued after 2 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Local administration rescued an elderly person with Covid-19 symptoms left at a char of Jamuna in Pabna's Bera upazila on Monday.

The man was too sick to confirm his identity while the locals too could not recognise him, said Asif Anam Siddiquee, the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO).

Being informed by the locals of Char Safulla, the UNO along with some medical staff rescued the man on Monday evening.

Quoting locals, Asif said the man was abandoned in the char by a passenger boat on Saturday evening and nobody came close to him since then lest they should contract the virus.

"We are suspecting that his family members might have left him here as he showed Covid-19

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## Sampadak Parishad concerned over case against two editors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council) has expressed deep and serious concern over the filing of a case against bdnews24.com Editor-in-Chief Toufique Imrose Khalidi and Jagonews24.com acting editor Mohiuddin Sarker under the controversial Digital Security Act (DSA).

It also demanded immediate withdrawal of the case, according to a statement from the Parishad issued by its President Mahfuz Anam and Secretary General Naem Nizam.

Mominul Islam Bhasani, president of Thakurgaon's Baliadangi upazila Swachhasebak League, filed the case on Friday night after the online news portals ran reports on misappropriation of OMS rice in the upazila recently.

In the case statement, Mominul accused the two editors of "deliberately publishing false and defamatory news". Two Facebook users named Shawan Amin and Rahim Shuvo were also accused in the case filed with Baliadangi Police Station.

The Sampadak Parishad statement said, "We are further concerned by the fact that cases have been filed under the draconian DSA without issuing any rejoinder or lodging any compliant with the Press Council whose job is to deliberate on such matters."

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

### Bangabandhu pays homage to Jalalabad martyrs



British author Robert Pyne calls on Bangabandhu on April 22, 1972.

April 22, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

POPOV CALLS ON BANGABANDHU Soviet Ambassador to Bangladesh Valentin Popov today calls on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Gono Bhaban. Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad also attends the meeting.

HOMAGE TO MARTYRS OF JALALABAD The people of Chittagong today pay homage to the sacred memory

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## AL man held for selling rice for poor

STAR REPORT

A ruling Awami League leader in Jamalpur, also a government-appointed dealer of the "rice at Tk 10 per kg" programme, was arrested yesterday for selling rice on the black market.

Law enforcers also recovered over 4 tonnes of misappropriated rice in Jamalpur and Mymensingh on Monday.

In the wake of widespread allegations of irregularities over rice meant for the poor, law enforcers and admin officials continue drives against those involved in the irregularities.

Since March 30, they have recovered over 318 tonnes of rice, 5 tonnes of sugar, 8,048 litres of edible oil, and 25 sacks of chickpea from different districts. Besides, 56 persons were arrested in this connection, according

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## STAY HOME, STAY WELL

### Strict isolation for mothers to be

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Mothers who are between their first and third trimesters of pregnancy should maintain strict isolation in the days of coronavirus.

Sharmin Abbasi, assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology department at Anwer Khan Modern Medical College Hospital, said the time is crucial for pregnant women as they are more vulnerable to viruses.

"They [mothers] have less prevention ability at the time," she said.

She suggested the mothers to stay at home and keep themselves isolated from other family members and should not rush to hospitals for regular checkups.

"Talk to doctors over phone and visit the nearest hospital to your home only if the situation is alarming," she said, adding, "Less travel means less chance of infection."

Those who are at the final stage should keep the transportation and other belongings ready in advance.

"Transportation is a big problem now. So, it should be wiser to fix those in advance," she said.

Sharmin said that earlier they recommended the patients to stay at hospital for four days but now they are suggesting maximum two days except

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## Bogura man sent to jail over rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A Bogura court yesterday sent a man to jail on charges of raping his housemaid. The accused is Ansar Ali, 50, of Santahar Yard Colony in the district's Adamdighi upazila.

Jalal Uddin, officer-in-charge of Adamdighi Police Station, said the victim filed a rape case against Ansar Ali on Monday afternoon. The accused was arrested the same night.

According to the case statement, Ansar raped the 35-year-old housemaid on April 16 at his home

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### PRAYER TIMING APRIL 22

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 4-25 12-45 4-45 6-27 8-00  
JAMAAT 5-00 1-15 5-00 6-31 8-30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## Facebook powered virus 'heat map' unveiled

AFP, Washington

Researchers Monday unveiled a coronavirus "heat map" powered by Facebook data which is aimed at helping track the spread of the disease and plan for reopening society.

The Carnegie Mellon University project offers "real-time indications of Covid-19 activity not previously available from any other source," according to a university statement.

The map was developed with millions of responses to surveys of Facebook and Google users as part of an effort to monitor the spread of the virus.

Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said the heat map, currently available for the United States, was being expanded globally with help from University of Maryland research teams.

"As the world fights Covid-19 and countries develop plans to reopen

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Two women waiting for a TCB truck in the capital's Motijheel yesterday to buy essentials at cheaper prices. They had arrived at the spot at 7:00am in a bid to be one of the first in line but when this photo was taken at 1:03pm, they were still waiting.

PHOTO: SKENAMUL HAQ

## Virus likely of animal origin

Says WHO as no sign of lab manipulation found; Trump signals immigration ban

AGENCIES

The World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday that all available evidence suggests the novel coronavirus originated in animals in China late last year and was not manipulated or produced in a laboratory.

US President Donald Trump said last week that his government was trying to determine whether the virus emanated from a lab in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus pandemic emerged in December.

"All available evidence suggests the virus has an animal origin and is not manipulated or constructed in a lab or somewhere else," WHO spokeswoman Fadelia Chaib told a Geneva news briefing. "It is probable, likely, that the virus is of animal origin."

It was not clear, Chaib added, how the virus had jumped the species barrier to humans but there had "certainly" been an intermediate animal host. "It most likely has its ecological reservoir in bats but how the virus came from bats to humans is still to be seen and discovered."

She did not respond to a request to elaborate on whether it was possible the virus may have inadvertently escaped from a lab. The Wuhan Institute of Virology has dismissed rumours both that it synthesized the virus or allowed it to escape.

Chaib, asked about the impact of Trump's decision last week to suspend funding to the UN agency over its handling of the coronavirus pandemic, said: "We are still assessing the situation about the announcement by

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