

# 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 Mustaq 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.



PHOTO : PRABIR DAS

**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.