Jamilur's death condoled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country was left in a state of mourning after National Professor, renowned scholar and Civil Engineer Dr Jamilur Reza Choudhury passed away at the age of 77 at home in Dhaka early yesterday

A former adviser to the Caretaker Government, a foremost civil engineer, researcher, and education advocate, Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury had a heart attack at home around sehri time, according to family sources.

He was rushed to the city's Square Hospitals where doctors declared him dead around 4:00am.

The passing of one of the country's foremost intellectuals and a major driving force behind the infrastructural development of the country drew messages of condolences and tributes from all quarters.

President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, ministers, distinguished personalities, top leaders of different political and socio-economic-cultural organisations, educational institutions and a host of people from different walks of life yesterday expressed deep shock and sorrow at the demise of the intellectual giant.

In his condolence message, the head of state expressed profound shock and sorrow at the death of Dr Jamilur Reza Choudhury and prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family.

Expressing deep shock, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her condolence message said, Dr Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, as an eminent engineer, played an important role in the country's infrastructural development.

She recalled with profound respect the outstanding contributions of Dr Jamilur Reza Chowhudy to different development projects including the Bangabandhu Bridge, Padma Multipurpose Bridge, Dhaka Elevated Expressway and Karnaphuli Tunnel in which he led the expert panel.

Nobel laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus, in a condolence message, said, "He [Dr Choudhury] was always involved with my endeavours. We were supposed to hold a phone meeting around noon today with him in the chair. We were taking preparations for that."

Terming Dr Jamilur Reza Chowdhury a "long-time friend", Dr Yunus said, "He was an extraordinary person. He was capable of understanding any complex issue instantly and providing timely advice on that."

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, a host of ministers and state ministers including Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque, Road Transport and Bridges Minister and Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, Law Minister Anisul Huq, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Education Minister Dr Dipu Moni, Industries Minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun, Information Minister Hasan Mahmud, Planning Minister MA Mannan, Post and Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar and Prime Minister's adviser Salman Fazlur Rahman expressed deep shock at the demise of Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury.

Different socio-cultural, professional bodies and educational institutions including Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Foundation, Bangladesh Institute of Planners, Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, BUET, University Grants Commission, National University, Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur, National Heart Foundation, Movement for World Education Rights, Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), a civil society platform, also expressed deep condolence at the death of the national professor.

In a statement, Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Foundation said, "He was an exceptional professor known for infecting his students with the joy of learning and the excitement of research, an inspiring leader in education celebrated for his vision, integrity, and unfailing courtesy, an enlightened human being who exemplified the principles of science, humanity and social justice, and an admired friend and relative adored by all for his impish sense of humor and his phenomenal memory."

Different political parties and distinguished personalities including Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Gonoforum, Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad and eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain also expressed deep shock at the passing of Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury.

Dr Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, who led the experts' panels of Bangabandhu Bridge, Padma Multipurpose Bridge, Dhaka Elevated Expressway, Karnaphuli Tunnel and many other ongoing development projects, left behind a wife, one son, a daughter and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

He was also the founding vice-chancellor of Brac University till 2010, and In 2017 was awarded the Ekushey Padak by the Government of Bangladesh in the category of science and technology.

With his head covered with a plastic bag, a man walks on a waterlogged street in the capital's Kaptanbazar area carrying his groceries. Many city streets went under after a moderate rain in the afternoon yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Not all ICUs functional

FROM PAGE 1

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data shows public and private hospitals currently have 508 and 737 ICU beds respectively.

A fully-functioning ICU is necessary to ensure close monitoring and life-saving treatment for Covid-19 patients, experts say.

The ventilators, which are integral parts of ICUs, blow oxygen into the lungs of patients suffering from severe pulmonary stress. They are essential for saving the lives of the sickest COVID-19 patient as coronavirus attacks the respiratory system.

According to the WHO-China joint mission report released last month, five percent of people diagnosed with Covid-19 require artificial respiration and another 15 percent need to breathe in highly concentrated oxygen -- meaning around 20 percent of the patients need ICU care.

Although the authorities are assuring all that adequate measures have been taken in this regard, the real picture is still far from satisfactory.

Mahanagar General Hospital at Nayabazar in Dhaka, for example, was allotted five ICU beds with ventilators, but the authorities are yet to install these.

"There were no ICU facilities here and that's why it is taking time to make the room ready for ICU. It will take 10 to 12 more days to complete the installation," said Ashraful Hasan, resident physician of the hospital, on Friday.

The DGHS letter states that 50 ICU beds are required to start the ICU services in the 17 hospitals.

Also needed at these hospitals are 90 patient monitors, 34 pulse oximeters, 17 ABG machines with glucose and lactate, 28 external defibrillators, 30 12-channel ECG machines, 34 portable ventilators, 30 air conditioners of five-tonne capacity, 30 dehumidifiers, and 85 oxygen cylinders. Syringe pumps and suction machines round out the list.

The pulse oximeter, for example, measures a patient's oxygen levels -- if it reads under 90 percent, the patient must be given oxygen support. Suction machines help to clear the airflow when patients cannot cough up secretions on their own.

Excepting the portable ventilator, all of these are basic equipment for an ICU, said Dr Debasish Kumar Saha, assistant professor at Birdem General Hospital and a critical care expert.

"Without these basic equipment, an ICU cannot operate properly," he said.

SITUATION OUTSIDE DHAKA

Shaheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital is the only dedicated hospital for coronavirus patients in Sylhet division. Currently, it has two ventilators to treat critically ill patients.

Nine more ICU beds with ventilators will be installed at the hospital and four additional ventilators will be kept as backups, said Dr Anisur Rahman, assistant director (disease control) of the divisional health office.

There is no other ICU dedicated for Covid-19 patients in entire Sylhet division.

Rajshahi Medical College Hospital's ICU has dedicated all its 15 beds for coronavirus patients. Five more beds with negative air-pressure and an automatic disinfection process are likely to be added soon.

This facility is dedicated for patients from all eight districts of Rajshahi division.

"There is an ICU crisis across the world and Bangladesh is no exception. The work of completing the ICUs is going on and as all the equipment has to be imported, that's why we cannot set up an ICU overnight, even if we wish to," said Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of DGHS.

Besides, there is a crisis of manpower for treating ICU patients, she told The Daily Star on Saturday.

"The Society of Anaesthetists is working with us and they are looking for manpower to work in these ICUs."

As of yesterday, the number of positive cases of, and deaths due to, coronavirus continue to climb in the country with 155 dead and 6,462 infected.

Experts say things may take a turn for the worse in the coming days if the country does not take immediate steps to ramp up its healthcare facilities with necessary equipment to treat incoming patients.

Ask countries not to deport migrants amid pandemic

16 organisations in Bangladesh urge UN chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sixteen Bangladeshi civil society organisations have urged UN Secretary-General Antonio Gueterres to ask the destination countries to shelve their policies of deporting migrant workers amid Covid-19 pandemic.

In a letter issued on Monday, they expressed worries as some destination countries have exerted pressure on the countries of origins to take back their nationals who are undocumented in the host countries and also those behind bars.

Some home countries have been threatened with consequences, including revision of labour relations, if they don't adhere to the policies of destination countries, the letter said.

"Under international law in any crisis situation, it is incumbent upon the state concerned to take care of all people in its land including migrants, irrespective of their status.

"Moreover, bringing back migrants in the midst of a pandemic will heighten the risk of the spread of the virus that the concerned country can ill afford.

The letter comes nearly two weeks after some Middle Eastern countries have mounted pressures on the labour-sending countries, mostly of South Asia, to bring back their undocumented migrants.

In a letter jointly signed by Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM) Chair Prof CR Abrar and Co-chair Syed Saiful Haque, they said countries of origin now face the prospect of a large-scale unscheduled return of their nationals from the destination countries.

"These countries have very limited capacity to rehabilitate the returnees by engaging them in livelihood activities," it said.

They urged the UN secretary general to call upon international agencies such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other development partners to create a global fund under the auspices of the UN to support the countries of origin in the rehabilitation of the returnee migrants.

The letter pointed out that there has been a major spread of Covid-19 in dormitories of migrant workers in Singapore due to a poor and crowded condition.

They recommended that the destination countries ensure appropriate accommodation of migrant workers as per the WHO guidelines.

The letter says in many countries employers have terminated the contracts of workers, pushing them towards a razor edge.

"We believe that governments of destination countries should discourage termination of workers. In case of such termination it is the duty of the destination countries to look after those retrenched," the letter said, urging the UN head exert his office's influence on the destination countries to take responsibility of such vulnerable workers.

They also requested the UN head to advise the governments to take measures so that migrants, who have jobs, can transfer remittances to their families, who depend on remittance and are now going through food crises at home.

Many of the migrants are also facing a food crisis, and it is imperative for the destination countries to provide emergency food support, the organisations said.

They also called for a system to be put in place in the destination countries so that the laid-off workers get priority when the dust settles.

The letter also requested the employers of host countries to clear all the dues and benefit claims of the returning workers as soon as possible.

Members of BCSM include Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, WARBE Development Foundation, Bangladeshi Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Ain o Salish Kendra, BASUG, IMA Research Foundation, International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions Bangladesh, Bangladesh Construction and Wood Workers Federation, Young Power in Social Action, Bangladesh Ovibashi Adhikar Forum, BASTOB, Rights Jessore, Center for Development Communications DEVCOM Ltd, Films 4 Peace Foundation and Change Makers.

Smart cards

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subsidised rice, meant for distribution among poor and low-income people, from the illegal possession of a section of local government representatives and members of the ruling Awami League.

Officials said an error-free database would eliminate the scope for irregularities in the beneficiary listing and distribution of aid.

Under the scheme, 49 lakh families getting Gratuitous Relief (GR) from the disaster management ministry, 50 lakh beneficiary from the food ministry's Food Friendly Program (FFP), 12.5 lakh recipients from the special Open Market Sales (OMS) programme would see their names in the database.

Also, 10.40 lakh beneficiaries of government's Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme, run by women and children affairs ministry, will be included in the database along with three lakh fishermen who get rice under the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme, said a senior official of the disaster management ministry, seeking to remain unnamed.

Officials said families involving more than 5 crore people will be given cards to provide them with food assistance in May and June.

The amount of food to be given by the ministry to each family is yet to be finalised. It, however, estimates that it would need to provide 98,000 tonnes of rice to 49 lakh families (20 kilograms each) in May and 97.91 lakh families in June under the GR programme. The whole GR operation in June is likely to require 2.18 lakh tonnes of rice, said officials.

Zeaul Alam said the government has a plan to develop a database and issue smart cards earlier. The Covid-19 lockdown and subsequent humanitarian aid has brought the issue of building the database faster.

"We expect that the database will be ready within next week," he said.

The database will contain National Identity (NID) number of recipients, their mobile phone numbers, address, the person's age and the number of family members so that all duplications and other irregularities can be avoided, said officials.

"If any beneficiary does not have that numbers, we will definitely include them but our target will be to incorporate as much as information as possible. The NID and mobile phone number are two main tools to identify a person," said Alam.

"We will not be rigid on NID and mobile number but we want to get the inputs from the regional offices."

A colossal loss for the nation

FROM PAGE 1

but also played a significant role in development of the country's infrastructure system. He was outstanding as a teacher, vice-chancellor, researcher, and administrator.

"It is our great misfortune to lose such a person today [yesterday]," Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus said in a Facebook post, adding, "My grief is that I have lost one of my closest friends. I am at a loss for words to console his family."

"I never imagined that I would wake from sleep to hear such terrible news. The suddenness and magnitude of this bad news shook me deeply.

"Jamilur Reza Choudhury has been my friend for a long, long time. He has always been deeply involved in all my activities. Just today [yesterday], he was to preside over our advisory committee telephone meeting at midday. We had been preparing for that since yesterday [Monday]. Today, he is no more," said Grameen Bank founder Prof Yunus.

Jamilur Reza Choudhury was an extraordinary person. He had the ability to promptly grasp the essentials of any difficult subject or issue, and give excellent advice on it. His depth and breadth of knowledge on architecture was unparalleled; his personal integrity unquestioned.

"He would be among the leading personalities of any country of the world," said Prof Yunus, country's lone Nobel prize winner.

National Professor Rafiqul Islam said it was an irreparable loss for the nation. He was not only a teacher, or vice-chancellor, or an academic rather he was advisers of many mega projects.

Prof Jamilur was the chairman of the Panel of Experts (advising the government, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and OECF, Japan) for the Bangabandhu (Jamuna) Bridge.

He was also heading the International Panel of Experts for Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project.

Besides, he was acting as the chairman of the panel of experts in many other mega projects such as the First Dhaka Elevated Expressway PPP Project (21km), Karnaphuli Tunnel, Dhaka Subway, Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway Project (24km), and many others.

"You will not get a second man like him," Rafiqul told this newspaper.

"Another virtue of Jamilur's character was he was social. He was a wonderful person with great personality. Many will not understand what the country loses with his death," said Rafiqul, who along with Prof Jamilur, became the National Professor in June 2018.

Dhaka University Professor emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said he could not believe Prof Jamilur was no more. "We used to meet during morning walk and he was a healthy man. How did this happen? He always remained busy with work and he was a resource of the country."

He said Prof Jamilur was an outstanding and talented engineer. He was also a successful planner and advisers of almost all big projects.

"Usually eminent engineers leave the country. But Jamilur was really exceptional. He stayed home and served the nation. He was not only a talented but also a patriotic person," Prof Serajul said.

Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar, who is one of the childhood friends and schoolmates of Prof Jamilur, said he was shocked hearing the death news of Prof Jamilur.

He was a talented student and the most successful among all our friends and classmates. "To me, he was a successful teacher. His students feel proud to be his student. This is a great achievement of a teacher. His vacuum will never be filled," he said.

Completing his bachelor in civil engineering from Buet (then EPUET) in 1963, Prof Jamilur joined the Department of Civil Engineering as a lecturer the same year.

After his retirement from Buet in 2001, he was appointed as Brac University vice-chancellor, where he served until 2010. Since 2010, he had been the University of Asia Pacific VC.

He was an adviser to the caretaker government of Bangladesh in 1996.

CM Shafi Sami, chairman, Board of Trustees, University of Asia Pacific, said Prof Jamilur was a national figure of high stature. He made outstanding contributions to our national development as a brilliant engineer, consultant, and educationist of great repute.

He was a person of international distinction having earned tributes from many countries and organisations abroad, said Shafi, also a former diplomat.

For the University of Asia Pacific, he was a tower of strength … Prof Jamilur's passing is a colossal national loss and will create a vacuum that will be difficult to fill, he added.

Prof Jamilur had been the Buet alumni founding president since 2003.

His college and university friend Sadiqul Islam Bhuiyan, who is the secretary general of the Buet alumni, said he could not find words to express shock at the death.

"I have never seen such a person who is successful in his life and profession. He was a man of high values. I will never find such a man in my life. He was a loving friend. He used to take news of all of his friends. He was an honest, dedicated, and optimistic person.

"He used to love his students and stood by them when needed," said Sadiqul.

Record surge in infections

FROM PAGE 1

Most of the workers dwell in congested and unhygienic environments. If anyone gets infected, situation will be grave, he added.

During the daily online bulletin on Covid-19 situation yesterday, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said with the new cases, the total number of infected patients stood at 6,462.

Previously, the country recorded its highest number of new cases -- 503 -- on April 24.

About the fatalities, she said the three deceased were aged above 60 and that they passed away in Dhaka.

In the 24 hours until 2:30pm yesterday, 26 labs across the country tested samples of 4,332 individuals, she said, adding that some 54,733 individual samples were tested until yesterday since January 28.

So far, Dhaka city alone has the highest number of deaths -- 79 -- followed by Narayanganj with 39 deaths.

Of the new cases, 290 were in Dhaka city while Narayanganj had 150 cases.

All the upazilas in Dhaka district and other districts in Dhaka division had 20 new cases yesterday.

Speaking about the cases in Dhaka, Prof Ridwanur said the highest number of deaths in Dhaka does not necessarily mean that Covid-19 deaths were fewer in other regions.

"It is mainly because many deaths go unreported," he said, adding that the low number of tests carried out created the situation.

"At this stage [around two months] of transmission, the number of infection and deaths supposed to be higher. But our system is failing to detect all the cases," he said.

Prof Nasima Sultana said eight more people, who were treated in hospitals, have recovered from the disease, raising the total number of recoveries to 139.

"But most of the infected, who are recovering at home, are not added to the recovery list," she said.

The DGHS official asserted that there were no shortage of testing kits and health protective equipment in the country.

Nearly 13.9 lakh personal protective equipment (PPE) were distributed at the hospitals across the country and 3.41 lakh were in stock as of yesterday, she said.

Prof Nasima said the government has prepared 601 institutions across the country for institutional quarantine where 30,635 people can seek instant services.

Nearly half of RMG factories reopen

FROM PAGE 1

Talking to this newspaper, a number of workers said they struggled to get vehicles to reach workplaces from their houses as no public transport was available amid the countrywide shutdown.

A number of workers in Narayanganj said they were left with no choice but to pay two to three times the usual fare, reports our Narayanganj correspondent.

Wearing masks and disposable caps, thousands of workers yesterday joined work at garment factories in the industrial belts in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Chattogram and Narsingdi.

The authorities of the factories arranged hand-washing facilities, masks, and disposable caps for the workers and also checked their body temperature as a precaution against the virus, said a number of workers.

Our Savar correspondent reports that many of the small factories in the industrial belt were yet to make preparations to resume operation.

Meanwhile, the International Labour Organisation urged the government to take action to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace with active involvement and dialogue with the employers and the workers.

To minimise the risk of Covid-19 exposure for workers, all employers need to carry out risk assessments and ensure that their workplaces meet strict occupational and health safety standards, the ILO said in a statement yesterday.

Many of the big factories in Gazipur, Narayanganj and Chattogram found it difficult to ensure social distancing at workplaces as they employ a large number of workers.

In Chattogram, a number of garment workers alleged that their employers did not provide them with adequate hand sanitizer, soap and disposable gloves. Besides, the factory authorities had been lax in ensuring social distancing at workplaces.

In a statement, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association said they conducted surprise inspections of 27 factories yesterday, covering all the industrial belts in the country.

"It is a continuous process, and it will be done every day in all the zones

"We found 25 of the factories in a very good condition in terms of health safety. One factory needs improvement while we were not satisfied with one.

"We asked it to show improvement immediately otherwise the authorities concerned will be notified of it," the BGMEA mentioned.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said garment workers would not be allowed to enter the capital from outside as apparel factories would run on a limited scale with workers now staying in the city, reports UNB.

"Garment workers who are now in Dhaka can join work at factories… no one from outside will be allowed to come to Dhaka for work. Necessary steps have been taken in this regard," he told reporters after a meeting with garment factory owners at the Secretariat.

Leaders of the BGMEA and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) attended it.

The minister said the owners had told the meeting that they are running factories on a limited scale with workers staying in Dhaka and also maintaining hygiene at workplaces.