



# The Daily Star



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**BANGLADESH UPDATE** 641 New cases in 24hrs | 7,103 Total cases | 163 Deaths | 150 Recoveries | **GLOBAL UPDATE** 219,513 Deaths | 3,165,235 Total cases

## RMG WORKERS Thousands rush in, raise fear of spread

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY, RASHIDUL HASAN and WASIM BIN HABIB

Thousands of garment workers yesterday returned to work in industrial belts in Dhaka and elsewhere amid the nationwide shutdown, raising fears of a rapid spread of the novel coronavirus.

The influx of workers, desperate to reach the factories permitted to resume operation, happened a day after Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said no one would be allowed to enter the capital from outside for work.

In the absence of public transport, they travelled by pickup vans and battery-run autorickshaws, paying two to three times the usual fare to reach their workplaces.

Of the 7,602 garment factories across the country, 2,356 ran operation yesterday. Of those, 443 are in Dhaka, 638 in Gazipur, 605 in Chattogram, 301 in Narayanganj, 80 in Mymensingh and 289 in Khulna, said the Industrial Police.

After a meeting with garment factory owners on Tuesday, the home minister 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.

Contacted yesterday, the minister said he was worried to see garment workers returning to Dhaka.

"I don't know why the workers are coming back to Dhaka," he told The Daily Star.

"Garment owners yesterday [on Tuesday] assured me that they would not ask any worker outside Dhaka to join work. We will ask the owners why and how workers are coming to Dhaka."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Hundreds of Dhaka-bound passengers, many of them garment workers, crowd to get off a ferry at Shimulia ferry terminal in Munshiganj yesterday disregarding social distancing guidelines.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## CLOSED FACTORIES Pay workers 60pc of gross salary for April

Govt asks owners; unions want 100pc

REFAJET ULLAH MIRDHA

In a bid to avert job cuts and temporary closures during Covid-19 outbreak, the government yesterday directed ready-made garment factory owners to pay their workers' salary by 60 percent for April.

The decision came two days after union leaders and factory management sat for a tripartite meeting with State Minister for Labour and Employment Begum Monnojan Sufian in the chair at Sramabhaban in the capital.

The union leaders, however, demanded full payment for all the workers.

The government decision came against the backdrop of unrest caused by layoffs in RMG factories and temporary shutdowns in different industrial belts in and outside Dhaka after reopening from April 26

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Dhaka, Delhi will work together to tackle food crisis

Modi calls Hasina; Swedish PM assures no garment orders will be cancelled

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and India yesterday decided to work together to increase food production to face the possible food crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Their pledge to work together came when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi phoned Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

During the 12-minute conversation that started at 5:50pm, both the leaders mentioned that their governments have taken initiatives to boost food production to face the possible food crisis.

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told UNB that the two leaders agreed to work together to this end, if needed.

Hasina said various international organisations, including the UN, have expressed apprehension that the situation may linger. "So, all the countries of the region will have to work in unison to deal with the situation."

Hasina and Modi appreciated the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

## Mugda hospital now at capacity

It's turning away Covid-19 patients with no beds for males empty

MD ANISUR RAHMAN and ZYMA ISLAM

Coronavirus patients seeking admission had to be sent back from the gate of Mugda General Hospital yesterday as the public hospital in the capital was bursting at the seams.

"Currently, 254 beds are full. We have no beds left for male patients, and only a few beds for female patients are available. I have to keep 39 beds in hand for patients requiring dialysis and postoperative care," said Dr Shah Golam Tuhin, principal of Mugda Medical College.

The hospital has 300 beds dedicated for Covid-19 patients. A photojournalist of The Daily Star, who was stationed there for five hours from 10:00am, saw many desperately trying to get a bed, but in vain.

Referred by doctors at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Saburunnessa, a 85-year-old woman who recently tested coronavirus positive, was taken to the hospital around 9:00am by her two grandsons. Unable to secure a seat inside, she lay on a metal trolley near the hospital's gate until 3:00pm.

Her grandson said, "Doctors here told us they have no capacity anymore to take elderly patients like her, and so we are going to Railway General Hospital to see if they are willing to take her."

The two then took Saburunnessa inside a CNG-run auto-rickshaw and headed towards the hospital in Kamalapur.

Md Delwar Hossain, 35, came all the way from Narayanganj in an ambulance around 10:00am. After around three hours, he too boarded a CNG-run auto-rickshaw and then headed towards home, unable to find a bed.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## 3 upscale pvt hospitals get testing permits

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

More than one and a half months after the detection of first Covid-19 case in Bangladesh, the government on Tuesday gave nods to three private hospitals for conducting coronavirus diagnosis tests on a limited scale.

The upscale hospitals in the capital -- Square Hospitals, United hospital and Evercare Hospital (formerly known as Apollo Hospitals) -- will soon start performing coronavirus tests only on the patients admitted to these hospitals, health ministry officials said.

The government has fixed Tk 3,500 as the maximum limit the hospitals can charge for a test.

Health experts and many private hospitals authorities have demanded testing facilities in private hospitals following the outbreak, but the government was reluctant to move forward until recent days.

"We have sent letters to all the private hospitals to inform us whether they are capable of performing corona test. Those who have the capacity and fulfil the criteria will be permitted to test Covid-19," Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

## Ramp up the response now

Nat'l advisory committee recommends; 641 new cases, eight more die

MOUJID AHMED SUJAN

As the number of confirmed coronavirus cases passed the 7,000 mark with record 641 new infections reported yesterday, the National Technical Advisory Committee has recommended scaling up case detection, isolation and treatment measures to tackle the crisis.

The committee came up with the recommendation at its second meeting on Tuesday.

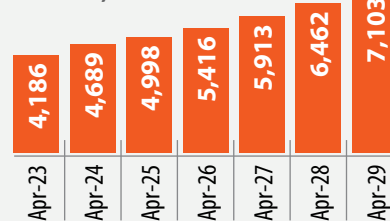
"We have put forward some specific recommendations considering the current coronavirus situation. Now, we have to emphasize on ramping up the activities in Dhaka city and Dhaka division. Root of the problem lies here," Prof Nazrul Islam, a member of the committee, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Earlier in the day, the authorities reported the highest number of new cases -- 641 -- for a single day. With it, the total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the country hit 7,103.

In 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, eight people died of Covid-19 infections, taking the death toll to 163, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

### NUMBER OF CASES ROSE BY 3,000 IN A WEEK



## Coronavirus claims first journo, cop in Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A senior journalist and a policeman, who were infected with coronavirus, died in city hospitals on Tuesday night.

These are the first deaths in the respective communities that have been working during the outbreak.

Humayun Kabir Khokon, 47, was the chief reporter of Dainik Somoyor Alo, while Jasim Uddin, 40, was a constable of Wari Police Station of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Humayun had been suffering from cough and breathing problems for the last couple of days. As his condition deteriorated, he was rushed to Regent Hospital in Uttara around 7:00pm on Tuesday in an unconscious state.

He was declared dead at the hospital's ICU about 9:45pm, say his colleagues and family.

His samples were collected and sent to IEDCR for tests later.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Anticlockwise from top, a patient who tested positive for coronavirus at Dhaka Medical College Hospital is brought in by a fire service ambulance to Mugda General Hospital yesterday, but due to a lack of beds, he had to wait for two and a half hours outside the facility before deciding to go back home in Fatullah of Narayanganj.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



## PROCUREMENT DELAYS Boro farmers of Sylhet in trouble

MINTU DESHWARA

Delay in government procurement is forcing desperate farmers to sell their paddy at lower prices to rice mill owners and hoarders in Sylhet region.

The authorities earlier announced that procurement of boro paddy would begin from April 26. But officials are now saying that the farmers' list needed for the procurement will not be prepared until another week.

"We have not received the farmers' list from the district-level officials. We will start purchasing after getting the lists," Azizur Rahman, assistant sub inspector at Sylhet Division Food Office, told The Daily Star.

The government will buy 8 lakh tonnes of paddy from farmers across the country for Tk 26 a kg this season.

Rahman said 4,278 tonnes would be bought in Sylhet division.

Meanwhile, cash-strapped farmer Jisan Mia said he has in the last few days sold sacks of paddy for around half of what the government had announced.

The farmer of Hakaluki Haor in Moulvibazar's Kulaura added that there were many others like him.

Makhan Lal Das, a farmer in Sunamganj's Shalla, said it cost him around Tk 750 to 800 to produce each mound of paddy.

But rice mill owners were not offering him any more than Tk 600 a mound against the government announced rate of Tk 1,042.

"I need money right now to repay the village lenders and buy essentials for the family," he said.

Abu Sufian, a freedom fighter and acting president of Sunamganj Haor Bachao Andolan, said the food department must act quickly.

"Any more delay would mean more profit for the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Pay workers

FROM PAGE 1  
following two weeks' gap.

According to industrial police, more than 500 factories were shut down temporarily and more than 10,000 workers were laid off from different factories.

The 60 percent salary payment, from the government's Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package, is applicable only for workers of closed factories, and only for the month of April, said Shibnath Roy, inspector general of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) after the meeting at Sramabhaban in Dhaka.

The running factories will have to pay the full salaries, he added.

"We have decided to pay 60 percent salary to the workers to avoid temporary shutdowns of factories and laying off workers," Shibnath Roy told The Daily Star.

He said if any factory shuts down, the management will have to pay at least 54 percent of gross salary to the workers, according to the labour law of the country.

"So, 60 percent is a better option. The management will not shut down any unit and will not terminate any workers," Roy also said.

Roy said management of many factories had started laying off workers who had not completed one year in their jobs. But the government's decision means those workers cannot be terminated, he said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in a speech to the nation on March 25, announced a Tk5,000 crore stimulus package for export-oriented sectors.

Amirul Haque Amin, president of National Garment Workers Federation said he is not convinced with the decision.

"We want 100 percent salary for all workers as it is a very difficult time for us all," he told The Day Star over phone.

"The government and factory owners will have to pay 100 percent. They should stand beside the workers with full pay at such a bad time. Cutting 40 percent salary is unjust and shameful," he added.

Nazma Akter, president of Sammilito Garment Sramik Federation also demanded 100 percent payment to all workers.

Many international organisations like the EU and International Labour Organisation, apart from the government, gave assurances of fund for the garment sector.

"The sector has the capacity to pay salaries in full," Nazma Akter said.

Mohammad Hatem, vice president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association said they decided on 60 percent so as not to lay

off any workers or shut down any unit.

"We started operations on a limited scale. It might be 25 percent of total capacity. So, we could not absorb all the workers now," said Hatem.

"If the situation improves, we will increase the number of workers. Moreover we cannot call the workers outside Dhaka as per the government decision," Hatem also said.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association in a WhatsApp message to The Daily Star said 60 percent pay is only for the time being for workers unable to work, but they will get the full pay when they return.

At least 65 factories in two export processing zones (EPZ) in Chattogram announced that they would shut down for 30-45 days due to non-availability of work orders and suspended shipment activities.

Of the number, eight were approved to reopen as of yesterday as the units are restarting operations gradually.

UNREST  
Incidents of labour unrest took place in Ashulia and Gazipur yesterday morning, where workers demanded reinstatement of the jobs of laid off workers.

Later, they blockaded the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway at around 12:00pm in favour of their demand.

The workers withdrew the blockade around 2:30pm after an assurance of reinstatement, Gazipur industrial police said.

Garment workers of a closed factory in Dhaka Export Processing Zone demonstrated in front of Ashulia Press Club, demanding four months' arrears.

Around 500 workers of a factory first went to Bangladesh Export Processing Zone authority's office inside DEPZ and later demonstrated in front of Ashulia Press Club to meet their demands the workers and worker leaders said.

The demonstrating workers said the factory authorities declared the factory shut a couple of months ago without paying the workers' arrears.

When contacted, Abdus Sobhan, general manager of DEPZ, told The Daily Star that as the factory owner could not pay the workers' salaries after rescheduling three or four times, they had cancelled the owner's land lease agreement.

Workers arrears will be paid by selling the factory belongings, said Abdus Sobhan, adding that he hoped it would be done in two months.

In another incident, some 240 probationary laid off workers of two factories in Ashulia's Aukpara area also demonstrated in front of factories, demanding reinstatement, said workers.



This photo taken recently shows homeless people waiting in front of the Supreme Court, the country's apex body for delivering justice, in hopes of getting some assistance from passersby. The shutdown to slow the progress of the outbreak hit the homeless hard.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Thousands rush in, raise fear of spread

FROM PAGE 1

He further said it was practically impossible to prevent such a huge number of people from entering Dhaka.

"The workers may be thinking that they will lose their jobs... that's why they are returning to Dhaka," added the minister.

Health experts say the move to reopen factories, mostly garment units, will increase the risk of wider transmission of the virus unless proper health safety measures and social distancing are ensured at workplaces and on their way to and from homes.

"This decision [to reopen factories] is not right. It will put the people at a serious risk," Prof Muzaherul Huq, former adviser (Southeast Asia Region) of the World Health Organisation, told The Daily Star recently.

"This is a total violation of the lockdown principle which means people stay at home and maintain social distancing... this would increase the rate of infections..."

The expert said the government might have made the decision considering the economic aspects, but it should not allow factory owners to resume operation before formulation of a safety guideline for workers.

### THEY KEPT COMING

Yesterday, two ferry terminals at Shimulia-Kathalbari and Paturia-Dauladia became crowded with hundreds of workers desperate to reach Dhaka and other areas from south-western districts.

Officials and staffers at the terminals said a large number of people crossed the Padma river by ferries on Monday, a day after many garment factories resumed operation. The number of

passengers went up significantly on Tuesday and yesterday.

"Today, the rush is like that of normal times," said Shamsul Abedin, assistant manager of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC), at Kathalbari terminal.

Police personnel were there but it was not possible for them to intercept such a huge number of people, he pointed out. Now seven ferries are transporting vehicles carrying goods and vehicles for emergency services a day. Usually, 15 to 17 ferries ply the route, he added.

A BIWTC staffer at Shimulia terminal said the number of people crossing the river rose sharply over the last three days.

"A few minutes ago, a ferry anchored at the terminal with around 800 people. It was full to the brim," he told this newspaper around 2:30pm.

The situation was the same at Paturia-Dauladia Ferry Terminal.

Zillur Rahman, BIWTC deputy general manager at the terminal, said the number of people using ferries increased after police withdrew barricades there on Monday.

Ohidul Islam, a worker of a garment factory in Tongi, said the manager of his factory phoned him on Monday and asked him to leave his village home in Bagerhat for the workplace.

"I didn't dare to question him why I needed to travel such a long distance to join work when the authorities said our wages would be deposited to our bKash accounts."

"Overcoming all the obstacles on the road, I reached Tongi from Bagerhat to save my job," he added.

Our Gazipur correspondent saw a large number of people, mostly workers,

on Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway. They were travelling to Gazipur and Dhaka, defying all the odds.

Police put up barricades in Bhabanipur and didn't let any vehicle cross the area to enter Gazipur. Many people, however, crossed the area on foot and then took battery-run autorickshaws to reach their destinations.

In Narayanganj, many workers travelled from Cumilla and Laxmipur to join work at the garment factories in the industrial belt.

Asked about yesterday's influx, Md Rezaul Haque, additional secretary at the labour ministry, said the owners had promised that they would not ask workers staying outside Dhaka to join work at their factories.

"We don't know how and why the workers are coming to Dhaka," he said.

There are 23 crisis management committees to see whether factory owners are violating the government instructions while running their factories, mentioned Rezaul.

"We will take action if any factory owner has called in workers from outside Dhaka. Steps will be taken if social distancing and health safety measures are not ensured in factories in line with the government instructions," he warned.

Ruhil Amin, executive president of Garments Sramik Trade Union Centre, alleged that the owners of many factories are asking their workers to join work from outside Dhaka, ignoring the decision of the government and Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

He also claimed that most of the factories are not ensuring social

## WHO says it acted quickly, decisively

REUTERS, Geneva

The chief of the World Health Organization (WHO) defended the agency's record in its response to the new coronavirus in a news briefing yesterday, saying it had acted "quickly and decisively".

The Geneva-based UN body has faced mounting criticism in recent weeks, especially from top donor the United States, which has cut off funding.

"From the beginning, the WHO has acted quickly and decisively to respond to warn the world," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said after giving a timeline of what the body knew in the lead-up to declaring Covid-19 a global emergency on January 30.

"We sounded the alarm early and we sounded it often," he added.

Tedros showcased the work of the WHO over recent months, saying it has trained 2.3 million health workers, shipped millions of tests and even brought "music and laughter" in dark hours through a telecast with pop superstar Lady Gaga.

distancing and health safety measures for workers.

Contacted, BGMEA President Rubana Huq said they clearly said the workers who are staying outside Dhaka need not return and that their wages for April will be deposited to their accounts.

"We also told our members that no attempt should be made to bring back workers..." she wrote in a text message to this newspaper.

She further mentioned that the BGMEA conveyed to the members that it would not cooperate with them if they don't follow its guidelines which clearly say no workers from outside should return to work.

"Hundreds out of millions of workers heading for Dhaka just proves that this is an isolated case and is not under anyone's control," she added.

BGMEA Vice President Arshad Jamal Dipu said about 42 percent garment workers have so far joined work, and most of them are from Dhaka and adjacent areas.

He, however, mentioned that around two lakh workers may have returned to work from outside Dhaka.

"We did not call them... They might have returned, knowing that factories are reopening. We have strictly instructed the authorities of factories not to bring back workers from outside Dhaka," he told The Daily Star last night.

He further said the factories introduced several measures to ensure safety of workers.

"Though we found some shortcomings on the first day, the situation has improved a lot. We did not get any complaint regarding safety issues as of today," added Arshad.

## Dhaka, Delhi

FROM PAGE 1

steps taken by the two countries to combat the pandemic and reiterated their commitment to work together for this purpose.

They also agreed to advance the initiatives that the Sarr countries took to fight the Covid-19 in a video conference held last month in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

Hasina extended thanks to Modi for sending medicine and other medical equipment to Bangladesh to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The Indian prime minister phoned Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina around 5:50pm and extended Bangla Nabo Barsho and Ramadan greetings to her and the people of Bangladesh," Ihsanul said.

"The Bangladesh prime minister also extended Ramadan greetings to Narendra Modi and the people of India," he said.

Modi paid tributes to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the occasion of his birth centenary, he added.

In another development, Swedish PM Stefan Löfven yesterday assured Hasina that his country would not cancel any garment product orders from Bangladesh.

"We'll continue importing RMG products from Bangladesh," he said while talking to Hasina over phone.

In reply, Hasina expressed her firm optimism that Bangladesh could deliver the ordered RMG products of global buyers despite the coronavirus outbreak.

"The Swedish premier phoned Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina around 2:00pm and exchanged greetings with her," Ihsanul told UNB.

During the 15-minute conversation, he said the two leaders discussed trade and business issues, particularly the RMG sector.

"We're hopeful that we could meet the orders of the RMG products of the international buyers, including Sweden, despite the present situation caused by the coronavirus outbreak," Hasina said.

She said the RMG factory owners in Bangladesh reopened their factories by ensuring health protocols.

The press secretary said the issue of coronavirus situation in both the countries also came up during their discussions.

The two prime ministers praised the steps taken by both the countries in containing the pandemic.

In this regard, Hasina reiterated her call to the international community to work together to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, Ihsanul added.

## Boro farmers of Sylhet

FROM PAGE 1

middlemen and loss for farmers," he said.

Abdul Hannan, general secretary of Bangladesh Krishak Samiti in Kulaura, alleged that corrupt officials of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) were naming hoarders in the list of farmers. He demanded that the list be made public.

Communist Party leader Chittaranjan Talukder said an overwhelming majority of the farmers cultivate the paddy by taking loans at high interest rates and they could not afford to wait.

Several Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) officials, who have been preparing the list of farmers, said they were too busy monitoring relief efforts at villages and finalising the lists would take at least a week.

"We also have a manpower shortage and our officers have other tasks.

## Mugda hospital now at capacity

FROM PAGE 1

As he waited on the ground for a bed, he was not wearing gloves, and was only protected by a flimsy surgical mask.

He said he too was referred to the hospital by doctors at DMCH where he had gone earlier.

"I sat on the ground the whole day. I have not been allowed into the hospital because I am coronavirus positive. I am going back to Narayanganj. I will stay home and try to recover. If I die, I will die at home," he told The Daily Star over phone later in the day.

Asked, Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told this correspondent, "We do not know how many patients who are coronavirus positive are dying at home. That is an important statistic we do not have."

## Coronavirus claims

FROM PAGE 1

"The IEDCR sent the test report around 3:45pm today [yesterday]. The report stated that he contracted Covid-19," said Md Shahed, chairman of the hospital.

Several ministers, political leaders, journalist organisations, and inspector general of police expressed condolence over his death.

He left behind his wife, two daughters, a son, and a host of relatives and colleagues to mourn his death.

Humayun, also president of Brihottor Cumilla Sangbadik Samity, had earlier worked for different media houses, including Amader Somoy and Dainik Manabzamin.

Meanwhile, constable Jasim, who was in self-quarantine and had died on Tuesday night, tested positive for coronavirus yesterday.

"The 40-year-old constable was in self-quarantine since he showed flu symptoms on April 25... His samples were collected a couple of days ago.

However, we will make the list within the next one week, said Hasan-ud-Daulah, upazila agriculture officer in Tahripur, Sunamganj.

Safar Uddin, deputy director at DAE in Sunamganj, said, "We will make the list by May 5 and verify it by May 7... and purchase will start from May 11."

Debol Sarkar, upazila agriculture officer in Barlekha, Moulvibazar, also said finalising the list may take at least another week.

According to the DAE, paddy was cultivated in 4,74,195 hectares this year. Over 27,96,000 tonnes of paddy is expected to have been produced. More than 41 percent of the produce has been harvested as of last Sunday.

Each farmer will be allowed to sell a maximum of three tonnes to the government this year.

## guards standing in front of the hospital's emergency gates said in the last two days between 60 and 85 coronavirus positive patients showed up, presented their IEDCR test results and sought beds. But they all had to leave.

"We need to open other hospitals quickly [for coronavirus patients]. There are more patients than empty beds," said Dr Shah.

A similar fate was met by a young couple and their baby from Wari. None of them wore gloves, or any other protective gear, save for surgical masks.

"I tested positive for coronavirus, but I cannot be home quarantined, so I came to the hospital to seek a bed. At the same time, I wanted to get my wife and baby tested. But they are saying that there is no vacancy so we are going back home," he said.

He tested positive today [yesterday]," Azizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Wari Police Station, told The Daily Star.

The constable was in self-quarantine at a hotel in Fakirerpool area. As his condition worsened, he was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 10:00pm on Tuesday where doctors declared him dead, police said.

Expressing deep shock at the death of Jasim, Bangladesh Police Headquarters said he was a proud member of the force who was a field-level frontline fighter against the deadly virus.

Bangladesh Police will turn the shock of losing Jasim Uddin into strength, says a press release of Police Headquarters.

Police will always stand by Jasim Uddin's family, it added.

More than 200 police personnel have so far been infected and over 600 have been in quarantine across the country.

## Ramp up the response now

FROM PAGE 1

director general (administration) of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said in a bulletin, aired online.

Besides, 11 more patients receiving treatment at different hospitals recovered over the same period, which brought the total number of recovery cases to 150.

In those 24 hours, 4,968 samples were tested across the country. The number was 14.68 percent higher than that of the previous day.

Of the total deceased, 137 were from Dhaka division, said the DGHS official.

Among the newly deceased, six were male and were from Dhaka, Dr Nasima said.

Age-wise, four of them were above 60, two between 51 and 60 and the rest between 31 and 40.

A total of 104 people were placed in isolation in those 24 hours across the country.

### TECHNICAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

At Tuesday's meeting, the 17-member National Technical Advisory Committee came up with multiple advices on improving the standard of hospital care to win the fight against coronavirus.

Many doctors and staff of private hospitals already tested positive for coronavirus although the diagnosis and treatment facilities for the disease were limited to government hospitals.

Arif Mahmud, senior general manager of Evercare Hospital, said they would start coronavirus testing from Saturday, adding that they were working out details of their testing facilities.

"... Already you know a huge number of medical staff are infected. So if we can identify the corona patients then it would be safe for other patients as well as for the staff."

He also said this test will help medical personnel maintain appropriate protocols before treating a patient.

According to Bangladesh Doctors Foundation, a private platform of

Besides, it recommended increasing case detection measures and selecting new hospitals for treating Covid-19 patients. It also advocated for using makeshift hospitals for patients with mild to moderate coronavirus infections.

The committee also recommended assigning adequate number of senior and junior healthcare staffers at those hospitals and lab employees at the testing centres.

Besides, it asked the authorities to ensure supply of World Health Organization (WHO) --defined standard personal protective equipment (PPE) to health staffers and recommended assigning an "expert committee" to ensure a proper supply.

The committee stressed on starting the treatment of anyone showing Covid-19-like symptoms.

"Many developed countries have started treatment of such people based on X-ray results and the symptoms. As community transmission of the virus is taking place here, this initiative is urgent now," said the committee.

There should be a separate plan and preparations in case a large number of healthcare staffers become infected. It is essential to ensure uninterrupted healthcare services,

doctors, a total of 440 doctors were infected till yesterday.

Many healthcare professionals are either in quarantine or self-isolation.

Although the outdoor patients will not be able to take Covid-19 tests in the private hospitals, health officials said the facilities would gradually be beefed up.

Asked about the limited scope for testing, Prof Nasima said,

"We are not permitting outdoor patients considering that if anyone tests positive, the private hospitals will not be able to bring that person under surveillance."

"This is the first step and certainly we will move forward with a positive attitude to gradually scale it up," she added.

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former adviser (Southeast Asia Region) at the World Health Organization, said, "Definitely, it is a good initiative. Now it is the time to expand the facilities across the country, but at the same time we have to keep an eye on the quality of the tests."

## INTEREST-FREE LOANS 2,000 lawyers appeal to SCBA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 2,000 Supreme Court lawyers appealed for loan to Supreme Court Bar Association after it had decided to provide interest-free loan to its members during the coronavirus crisis.

"We're still receiving applications. We will scrutinise those next week and then start giving loans," SCBA President Advocate AM Amin Uddin told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said SCBA executive committee will hold a meeting to decide on the amount of loan.

On April 15, the committee decided to provide the loans. On April 16, SCBA Secretary Barrister Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal told this newspaper that the loan term will be three years. "We have already created a fund of Tk 50 lakh," he had said.



The countryside shutdown might have brought everything to a standstill but everyone's hair is still growing without care. In this predicament a rickshaw-puller has decided to put his barber skills to the test by experimenting on youths who are in need of a haircut. This photo was taken yesterday from the capital's Motijheel.

## Ctg private hospitals yet to join the fight

Opening of 100-bed Covid-19 hospital delayed

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

The private clinic owners' association of Chattogram was supposed to open a 100-bed hospital only for Covid-19 patients in port city on April 25 but it is now uncertain from when the hospital will begin its operations.

Contacted, Dr Liakat Ali Khan, general secretary of the association, yesterday told The Daily Star that they have set up 30 beds.

Citizens and rights activists in the port city have expressed their concern over the delay in opening the hospital.

On April 4, the office of Chattogram divisional director of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) issued a gazette notification where it was mentioned that the government dedicated 12 private hospitals in Chattogram for ICU support of Covid-19 patients.

Following this, the private clinics owners' association initiated a new move with a proposal to divisional health chief where they said instead of using 12 hospitals, they would dedicate a 100-bed hospital for Covid-19 patients, said sources.

They started to renovate Holy Crescent Hospital in Khulshi area, which was left abandoned for several years. The move started on April 5, the day after issuance of the gazette notification. They promised to open the hospital with a 20-bed ICU facility by April 25, but it's yet to see the light of day.

"We don't understand what the problem is... we saw some hurried activities from the owners of private clinics when government issued a gazette notification for requisition of 12 private clinics for Covid-19 patients but now we're seeing a clear lack of effort from them," said SM Nazer Hossain, central vice president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB).

"The sooner the hospital opens, the better it will be for patients showing coronavirus symptoms," he told The Daily Star.

Asked, Dr Liakat said they prepared 30 isolation beds and 10 ICU beds so far. "We are ready to open the hospital and waiting for government approval," he said.

Asked about the promised 100 beds and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

## 1 lakh aspirant migrant workers in uncertainty

Top Baira leader says recruiting agencies incurred Tk 2,000cr loss due to Covid-19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An estimated 1 lakh migrant workers could not travel for overseas jobs in the last two months due to the coronavirus outbreak, a top leader of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) said yesterday.

As a result, the country's recruiting agencies have to incur a loss of about Tk 2,000 crore, said Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman, secretary general of Baira.

"We have about 1 lakh visas in our hands... a huge investment of us remains frozen. We couldn't recover the money as we couldn't send the workers," he told this newspaper by phone.

He said that the recruiting agencies have to shut their offices because of the outbreak.

This put some 32,000 employees of about 1,600 recruiting agencies in uncertainty, he said, adding that they invested money on various purposes including as deposit against workers' visas and to buy their plane tickets in advance.

Meanwhile, following Baira's appeal to the prime minister, the expatriates' welfare ministry has decided to give each recruiting agency 50

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

## DU to fix longstanding problems at dormitories

Only students to be allowed to stay post-pandemic

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University (DU) authorities on Tuesday decided to allow only "legal" students to stay at the dormitories once the university opens.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the provost committee organised to discuss the health risk of students in the post-coronavirus period and overall atmosphere of the dormitories, said a press release of the university.

"Only legal [those with formal student status] students will be allowed to stay at the halls as per the rules of dormitories. Those who do not have student status cannot stay at the halls and they have to vacate within the time limit given by the authorities," reads the release.

A total of five decisions including this were taken in a bid to reduce health risk of the students, improve the residential, educational and overall atmosphere of the dormitories, to resolve the "gono room" crisis, and renovate the dormitories.

The meeting also decided that no student can

stay on the floors of any room and if necessary, they might share a room with another student following due procedure.

"Hall authorities will take measures to supply beds to the rooms where there aren't any," added the release citing the meeting.

Attendees of the meeting also opined that the "gono room" culture will end if the aforementioned decisions can be implemented properly.

"But, cordial assistance from all the active students' organisations will be needed to stop the gono room culture and to prevent non-students from occupying the rooms," it added.

The university authorities will complete renovation and cleansing of the dormitories during the vacation.

DU authorities had earlier issued several notices asking non-students and outsiders to leave the halls, but to no effect.

On January 20 last year, authorities of every hall

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## 22 lakh Bangladeshis in KSA to get medical service over chat app

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday launched a call centre for the 22 lakh Bangladeshi expatriates who are currently living in Saudi Arabia, through which they can avail medical services using the instant messaging smartphone app Imo.

The service was launched through a virtual press conference organised by the ICT Division, where foreign minister AK Abdul Momen and expatriates' welfare and overseas employment minister Imran Ahmad also spoke.

The service is free for all Bangladeshis living in Saudi Arabia, and was launched on Imo because it is a popular communication medium in the Gulf country.

The government's Access to Information (a2i) programme has designed the model of the call centre, named Proband Bondhu, which will be run by Synesis IT.

Five Imo numbers (+8801400611995, +8801400611996, +8801400611997, +8801400611998, +8801958105020) were announced at the programme, along with a hotline (+8809611999111) where Bangladeshi expats can call from 9am to 9pm, seven days in a week.

Apart from medical service, expats can also avail other

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## 80-YEAR-OLD BEATS CORONAVIRUS

OUR CORRESPONDENT, DINAIPUR

Amid all the doom and gloom of rising coronavirus cases in the country, 80-year-old Moslem Uddin yesterday returned home from the Rangpur Dedicated Corona Isolation Hospital, making a full recovery from the virus after 14 days of treatment.

The hospital's chief and Principal of Rangpur Medical College (RMC) SM Nurunnabi confirmed the discharge to The Daily Star.

According to his family, Moslem had been in Dhaka for a long time. He returned to Rangpur on the morning of April 1, and was physically ill at the time. Arriving at Rangpur, he went to his son-in-law's house in Rangpur city, where he developed symptoms like fever, runny nose and cough. On April 16, Moslem was admitted at Rangpur Medical College Hospital for treatment as he was diagnosed with coronavirus.

On April 20, he was referred to the Dedicated Corona Isolation Hospital.



Moslem received a bouquet of flowers and a letter from doctors.

PHOTO: STAR

SM Nurunnabi added that after 14 days of treatment, his physical condition improved, and two consecutive coronavirus test reports came back negative, so it was decided to discharge him from the hospital.

All the doctors led by his chief

gave a farewell to Moslem yesterday with a flower bouquet and a letter.

In Rangpur division, so far 13 out of 111 people -- from Gaibandha, Rangpur, Nilphamari and Thakurgaon -- have returned home after recovery from Covid-19. Three people have died.

## AEDES MOSQUITOES Drives after May 10 to find breeding grounds: minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local Government and Rural Division Minister Tajul Islam yesterday said authorities will conduct mobile court drives after May 10 if they find favourable breeding conditions for Aedes mosquitoes at houses and offices in Dhaka city.

He was speaking at an inter-ministerial meeting at Wasa Bhaban in the capital.

The minister urged house and office owners to keep premises clean and take steps to destroy Aedes breeding grounds.

He said roofs, toilets, flooded floors, drums and water containers at construction sites must be cleaned by owners.

The government recently decided to form a "dengue monitoring cell" to combat the disease in the city.

Since January 1, at least 295 dengue patients were admitted to different hospitals across the country till Sunday, said Aysha Akhtar, an assistant director of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). Sixty-five of the patients were from outside Dhaka.

## DEATH OF SENIOR SBMCH DOCTOR Family files murder case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A murder case was lodged yesterday with Barishal city's Kotwali Police Station, after police recovered the body of Dr Md Al Azad Sajol, a senior consultant at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH), from the bottom of an elevator shaft at Mamata Specialised Hospital (MSH).

Dr Shahariar Badhon Utchash, Dr Azad's brother, lodged the case without accusing anyone, said Abdur Rahman Mukur, officer-in-charge (investigation) of the police station and investigation officer of the case.

"We have detained nine MSH staffers for interrogation, and we are scrutinising all possible causes of his death," the OC said.

Md Rassel, assistant commissioner (Kotwali) of Barishal Metropolitan Police (BMP), said different branches of law enforcement agencies -- including Rapid Action Battalion, Police Bureau of Investigation and Criminal Investigation Department -- are involved in investigation. Officials are consolidating and scrutinising information collected by them with top priority.

Mokter Hossain, deputy commissioner of BMP, said investigation is in primary stage and investigators are looking into all details.

Earlier, Dr Zahirul Islam Manik, director of MSH and head of surgery at SBMCH, said Dr Azad went missing since Monday evening, and they informed police on Tuesday morning. Officers recovered Dr Azad's body around 1:30pm on that day.

Dr Azad was a senior consultant at SBMCH's burn and plastic surgery unit and was working part-time at MSH, residing in a room on the hospital's sixth floor.

He was buried at Dhaka's Keraniganj, where he used to live with his wife and two children, said Shibuddin Khokon, the deceased doctor's cousin.

"He was famous for his kind-hearted demeanour, and at least 20 families regularly received grants for him," he said.

## Healthcare providers at increased risk in Barishal

Many hiding Covid-19 symptoms from physicians

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

On April 15, an elderly person was admitted to the medicine ward of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) in Barishal in an unconscious state.

Attendees of the 70-year-old from Banaripara did not inform doctors that he had breathing difficulties and cough, which became evident after a chest X-ray.

Immediately, physicians sent his sample to the lab and the man was tested Covid-19 positive, said Dr Sudip Halder, president of Indoor Doctors' Association of SBMCH. "As a result, we're keeping the medicine unit-3 locked down. Doctors, nurses and other staffers at the unit have been quarantined since April 16," he added.

This is not an isolated incident. There are a number of reports that people suspected of coronavirus infection and their attendees are excluding vital information of their contact history, putting healthcare providers and others at risk.

Experts said this is leading to panic and further spread of the disease. Such patients are even infecting doctors, who are on the front line of the battle against Covid-19. They said many patients hide their contact information so that they are not refused treatment, or become stigmatised.

## PepsiCo, Brac to provide 1.4 million meals to the needy

CITY DESK

PepsiCo in Bangladesh and the beverage company's philanthropic arm the PepsiCo Foundation has partnered with Brac to provide over 1.4 million meals to underserved families. The initiative is part of PepsiCo's #GiveMealsGiveHope global programme, under which the company plans to provide 50 million meals across the world.

Brac will be the on-ground implementation partner for the programme, working closely with local administration and law enforcement authorities.

Debasish Deb, Country Manager, PepsiCo Bangladesh, said, "We are committed to give our full support to the Government of Bangladesh in its fight against the pandemic and will continue to do our best to serve the Nation in these challenging times."

## Can't put a price on 'friendship'

Community-built market lets distressed families shop for free

MUNTAKIM SAAD

Imagine a market where anyone can buy daily essentials, but instead of money, they use friendship points!

Non-profit organisation "Thank You Foundation" has implemented such an initiative named "Bondhutter Bazar" (Friendship Market) in Uttara, in a bid to stand beside the poor and needy during the tough times of shutdown.

The organisation has been providing the underprivileged with food aid since the beginning of the pandemic. To expand their programme, they launched the market on April 25, in Uttara Sector-6.

Ashik Faruqi, founding president of the organisation, said economically distressed families will be able to shop from Bondhutter Bazar for free.

"We have put points on the products. A person can shop for a maximum of 500 points per week. It's enough for a four to five-member family," Ashik said.

The market will remain open from 10am to noon throughout the month of Ramadan from Saturdays through Thursdays.

The initiative is funded by Thank



At the Bondhutter Bazar at Uttara's Sector 6, items are labelled with points instead of price tags. Thank You Foundation allows those without privilege to shop here for free, upto 500 points per week.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

You Foundation. However, if anyone wants to contribute they can do so in the following ways: 01703979767 (bKash); 347 891 9280 (USA, Canada); +817016710421 (Japan)

To contact Thank You Foundation, one may call 01918802894, 01676940102, or reach out via their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ThankuFoundation>.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## Prof Lutfar reappointed DIU VC

CITY DESK

Prof Lutfar Rahman has been appointed as the vice chancellor (VC) of Daffodil International University (DIU) for the second time.

He successfully completed his first tenure as DIU VC from 2011-2015.

An official memo issued by Ministry of Education declared Prof Lutfar's appointment for the next four years, as per approval of Bangladesh president.

Prof Lutfar started his career as a scientific officer at Atomic Energy Centre Dhaka in 1967. He started his teaching career as an assistant professor at Department of Applied Physics, Electronics and Communication Engineering of DU in 1984.

He was appointed founding vice chancellor of Begum Rokeya University in 2008. He returned to DU in 2009, and resumed his duty as dean of DIU's Faculty of Science and Information Technology.



## Ctg private

FROM PAGE 3

20 ICU beds, Liakat said capacity of the hospital would be increased gradually.

Contacted, Chattogram Civil Surgeon Dr Sheikh Fazle Rabbi said the clinic owners attended a meeting with them on April 25 and asked for logistical support to open the hospital. "We asked them to give us a formal proposal on April 26 but they are yet to submit it," he told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

Asked yesterday, Liakat said the proposal was ready. "We will submit it tomorrow."

Contacted, Dr Hasan Shahriar Kabir, Chattogram divisional director of DGHS, said if the private clinic owners fail to open the hospital on time, the authorities would

further initiate a move for requisition of private hospitals for Covid-19 patients. They will have to run the hospital following a government guideline.

Two government hospitals -- Chattogram General Hospital with a capacity of 100 isolation beds and 10 ICU beds and Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases with a capacity of 50 isolation beds -- are dedicated to attend to Covid-19 patients in Chattogram.

Besides, Chattogram Field Hospital, a privately initiated hospital in Salimpur of Sitakunda upazila, with a capacity of 60 beds is also open for both Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 patients with symptoms of coughing and breathing problems.

## 1 lakh aspirant

FROM PAGE 3

percent of their deposited money to the ministry against their licenses as "repayable grant" for one year, said the Baira leader.

Shameem said they are expecting to recover the loss once labour recruitment by foreign countries resumes. He also thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad for the initiative.

The money will be given to meet staff wages and office rent, said a PID handout, quoting an office order of the expatriates' welfare ministry.

The expatriates' welfare ministry issued the order on Tuesday.

As per the order, recruiting agencies have to apply before the director general of the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training to withdraw 50 percent of the deposited money.

With the application, the agencies have

to provide an "undertaking" in a Tk 300 non-judicial stamp citing that they will return the money within a year.

Recruiting licenses will be revoked if any agency fails to return the money, the order said.

Shameem said recruiting agencies usually deposit security money of different amounts against their licenses for different categories such as for sending female migrant workers.

There is a license category for sending workers country-wise like for Japan or Singapore, he said. This deposited money can be up to more than Tk 60 lakh for an agency, he added.

He said considering the situation, Baira applied for 75 percent of the deposit as grant for two years. On the other hand, the ministry agreed to give 50 percent which can be refunded in one year without interest.

## Healthcare

FROM PAGE 3

Complex as the upazila health officer was diagnosed with Covid-19 on April 25, confirmed the civil surgeon.

Dr Mehedi Hasan, a medical officer of Bakerganj Upazila Health Complex, said they are discharging duties in fear. "If things go like this, there will be no doctors or nurses to provide service," he said.

Sources at DGHS said 107 people -- including ten doctors, four nurses and eight health workers -- were infected with coronavirus in Barishal division as of Monday. Of them, 36 are in Barishal district, 20 in Patuakhali, two in Bhola, seven in Pirojpur, 30 in Barguna and six were in Jhalakathi.

**NO PPE FOR INTERNS** Intern doctors at SBMCH are not getting personal protective equipment (PPE) from the government.

Several of them talked to The Daily Star about the issue seeking anonymity.

"I try to protect myself by wearing a raincoat and a mask," said one of them.

SBMCH Director Dr Bakir Hossain said they distributed PPE only among doctors and nurses according to DGHS directives.

## DU to fix

FROM PAGE 3

issued a notice asking non-students and outsiders to vacate the halls ahead of Ducusu polls. But the situation remained unchanged.

Later on October 9 that year, following the killing of Buet student Abrar Fahad, the university authorities again asked the students to leave their dormitories within 15 days of publication of their master's examination results.

Both dormitory and university authorities took no step to implement the decision and once again failed to evict those whose studentship had expired.

Chaired by DU Vice Chancellor Prof Akhtaruzzaman, Tuesday's meeting was attended by Pro VC (education) Prof Nasreen Ahmad, Pro VC (administration) Prof Muhammad Samad, Treasurer Prof Md Kamal Uddin and provosts of all the halls.

## 22 lakh

FROM PAGE 3

services from here, government officials said. "We plan to also run this after the Covid-19 situation is over," said Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT.

Already some 50 Saudi Arabia expatriate doctors have joined the service to support Bangladeshis, and 250 others have also showed interest.

Imran Ahmad termed it a groundbreaking service for expatriates, adding that gradually, this type of service can be opened for other countries where a huge number of Bangladesh citizens live.

Abdul Momen urged expatriate workers to stay safe and be patient during these difficult times.

"We know lot of you have lost of your job, but our kind request to you is to have patience, and you will get a job soon after the situation improves. But if you come back, then it will be tough to return to that country and get a new job," Momen added.

Secretaries of three ministries also spoke on the occasion, while the Bangladesh ambassador to Saudi Arabia and related offices in Dhaka also joined the event virtually.

## MCCI mourns death of Prof Jamilur Reza

CITY DESK

The contributions made by National Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury have been highly remarkable and substantial, said Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhaka (MCCI), in a message mourning his demise.

"The country has lost one of its brightest luminaries," said MCCI President Nihad Kabir in his tribute.

Prof Jamilur's role in imparting high-quality education, especially in the engineering and technology fields, has resulted in the creation of many accomplished leaders, said a press release.

His work in the field of infrastructure building in Bangladesh will remain a veritable legacy for a long time to come. Almost all recent major infrastructure projects, including Jamuna Bridge and Padma Bridge, bear his mark, as he was the most reliable and trusted mind to go to for the government, it added.

MCCI prays for the eternal salvation of his departed soul and conveys deep sympathies to his bereaved family.

## Save civilians in Rakhine

FROM PAGE 12

relating to those within four months.

The schedule for submission of the report for Myanmar is May 23.

Lee, who is concluding her tenure as the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, in her last report said the Myanmar military, Tatmadaw, is systematically violating the most fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and human rights.

Its conduct against the civilians of Rakhine and Chin may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, Lee said.

"Myanmar and its security forces must abide by the International Court of Justice's provisional measures and its own presidential directive to respect the Genocide Convention," she said in a statement yesterday.

"While the world is occupied with the Covid-19 pandemic, the Myanmar military continues to escalate its assault in Rakhine state, targeting the civilian population," she said, regretting that calls for a ceasefire, including by the Arakan Army, have gone unheeded.

Stressing that accountability was critical to ending the conflict, she said the Tatmadaw continues to operate with impunity. For decades, its tactics have intentionally maximised civilian suffering.

Recalling the atrocities against the Rohingyas in 2017 by the Myanmar army, Lee said they were now targeting all civilians in the conflict areas, with people from Rakhine, Rohingya, Mro, Daignet and Chin communities being killed in recent months.

"Their alleged crimes must be investigated in accordance with international standards, with perpetrators being held accountable."

An armed conflict has raged in Rakhine and Chin States since December 2018 between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army but in recent weeks the Tatmadaw has ramped up attacks against civilians, displacing more than 157,000 people. Hundreds including women and children have been killed and wounded since the conflict started, the statement said.

The Arakan Army has also conducted its hostilities in a manner that has had negative impacts on civilians, including kidnapping local officials and parliamentarians, it said.

Most recently, on April 12, the Arakan Army reportedly abducted an elected member of a Paletwa Township committee. However, it was declared a unilateral

ceasefire which has the effect of increasing civilian protection, the statement added.

"The focus of all authorities, including security forces, should be on dealing with the Covid-19 crisis," said Yanghee Lee.

The Special Rapporteur said the recent Tatmadaw air and artillery strikes in civil areas in Rakhine and neighbouring Chin states have killed and injured scores of adults and children, and the Tatmadaw has prevented some of the injured from accessing urgent medical care.

Men suspected to be linked with the Arakan Army have been detained for days and tortured. Schools, houses and a Buddhist temples have been burned or destroyed, even an entire village of up to 700 homes, Lee said.

"In one artillery attack on April 13, the Tatmadaw killed eight civilians, including at least two children, when it targeted Kyauk Seik village, in Ponnagyun Township, with artillery from its nearby Battalion 550 base," she said.

Witnesses say entire populations of villages have fled following the attacks.

The UN expert said the military has disappeared, arrested, tortured or killed dozens of men. After burning up to 700 homes in Tin Ma village in Kyauktaw on March 22, 10 men disappeared. One man was found shot dead and decapitated bodies were later located in a nearby river.

In the face of tight restrictions on humanitarian access since January 2019, the Tatmadaw is blocking aid from reaching certain areas, including Paletwa Township in Chin, where there are over 8,000 displaced people, with dire consequences for local populations, she said.

"It is also stopping people from accessing urgent medical care. Most heinously, a severely injured teenage boy died at a military checkpoint in Rakhine after the Tatmadaw forced the vehicle transporting him to wait there on the way to hospital."

Aid workers also have been targeted in the conflict. Last week, a WHO driver and Ministry of Health and Sports worker were injured, and the driver later died, after their UN-marked car was shot at.

"Humanitarian workers should not be a target; attacking them is a serious violation of international humanitarian law," Lee stressed.

Even, ethnic Rakhine journalists have gone into hiding in fear of arrest as they work for news outlets that have reported on the conflict, she said.

## UN Mission praises Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 12

with meager measures available," the report says. "It is usually inhabitants of those parts of the country where destruction was greatest who now display the most energy."

As regards the economic situation in Bangladesh, the report notes that since independence was attained the financial administration has been restored. The report advises the Bangladesh government to issue a comprehensive programme of rehabilitation. The government is also advised to review, with the agencies and countries concerned, the interrupted development projects. The mission stresses that rehabilitation aid in kind can be provided by friendly governments and this will

be most beneficial.

**INDIRA-BHUTTO SUMMIT IN MAY**

The summit talks between Indira Gandhi and ZA Bhutto will take place in May. The date will be fixed according to their convenience. The India-Pakistan emissary-level talks have ended and a joint statement is issued simultaneously from New Delhi and Islamabad.

**FOUR SOVIET HELICOPTERS**

**HANDED OVER**

The Soviet Union has formally handed over four helicopters to Bangladesh for movement of relief goods in the country. The helicopters and 30 Soviet crew members would render free services to Bangladesh government for one year to help distribution of food grains within the country.

**MOSCOW TO TREAT 50 WOUNDED**

**FREEDOM FIGHTERS**

The Soviet government has decided to take 50 wounded freedom fighters to Moscow for medical treatment as a gesture of goodwill for the people of Bangladesh. Talking to Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, Soviet Ambassador Valentin Popov says that this decision is taken by the Soviet government in response to a request made by Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman early this month. He adds that the Soviet Union is very happy to provide the opportunity to the freedom fighters who fought the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

*SOURCES: May 1, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Ittefaq*

## Toxic ship heading for Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 12

hazardous wastes and materials in the vessel in violation of article VI of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Waste and their Disposal.

The convention requires the exporting country to notify and obtain consent from all importing and transit countries about the quantities and types of the materials.

However, the Department of Environment (DoE), which issues clearance certificates for scrap vessels in Bangladesh, is not aware of J Nat's import.

"Generally, the shipbreaking yard owners contact us for permission once the ship reaches Bangladesh. We physically examine the ship and then give a clearance certificate for scrapping," Mohammad Mozammel Hossain, director of DoE Chattogram (regional), told The Daily Star last Tuesday.

Mizanur Rahman, national project manager of FSO and Environmentally Sound Ship Recycling in Bangladesh (SENSREC), said they had not given any no-objection certificate (NOC) for ship import since March 22 due to the coronavirus crisis.

"I am not sure whether somebody took NOC for this ship before this [March 22]," said Mizanur, also the deputy secretary of the industries ministry executing SENSREC, on Saturday.

The Daily Star could not know the name of the shipbreaking company which is importing the vessel.

Mizanur admitted that sometimes shipbreakers try to import toxic ships concealing information. Currently, a half-wrecked toxic oil tanker, brought without any proper documents, is lying on the Sitakunda beach.

**BYPASSING LIABILITIES**

The briefing paper mentions the ship, formerly known as FSO Jesslyn Natuna, was built in Japan in 1982. It was owned by Indonesian company

Global Niaga Bersama PT till August 2019.

Then, it was sold to a Hong Kong company connected to Somap, which buys end-of-life vessels for 100 percent cash upfront and sells to beaching yards in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan China and Turkey.

Somap changed the ship's name to J Nat and its flag from Indonesia to the west pacific island country of Palau.

The briefing paper shows a report issued by Indonesia's Office of the Environment and Forestry Department which states the quantity of sludge, slop oil and oily water and says instead of cleaning the waste in Indonesian water, the ship will be sent to Chittagong, Bangladesh.

On April 15, an NGO named Indonesian Environmental Care Committee filed an online complaint to the Indonesian environment and forest ministry about the illegal export of toxic waste.

The NGO, in a letter to the harbour master's office in Batam on April 17, also requested them not to allow J Nat to leave the port as the tank of the ship was not cleaned properly.

The very day, the vessel received port clearance for departure.

On April 23, Mohammad Abu Taher, president, Bangladesh Ship Breaking Association (BSBA), was asked by The Daily Star about the import of a toxic ship without cleaning it. He said no such ship is coming.

The shipbreaking yards reopened in the third week of April, although the nationwide shutdown continues since March 26.

**RISK FOR WORKERS, ENVIRONMENT**

Beaching and scrapping a toxic ship like J Nat would cause health hazards for workers, due to mercury's extremely poisonous nature, experts say.

FSO oil tankers become contaminated with mercury which naturally occurs in oil and gas fields. Even the steel body of these vessels, contaminated with mercury, poses great threat to workers when

they use oxy-acetylene cutting torch.

Toxic gas inhalation and explosion can even cause immediate fatalities.

Last month, two workers died and another required medical attention after being exposed to toxic gases while manually dismantling a scrap ship at a shipbreaking yard in Chattogram's Sitakunda.

Prof Alak Paul of the Department of Environment and Geography at Chattogram university, told The Daily Star that shipbreaking yards often do not take proper measures to protect the environment while scrapping toxic ships.

However, the extension of pollution caused by shipbreaking yards is yet to be determined, he said.

"Surely, it is polluting the aquatic resources like in the Sandwip channel or maybe killing the mangrove planted between Mirrorsora and Sitakunda. But it is hard to say what is happening there. We were not allowed to enter the shipbreaking sites," he said.

Prof Alak Paul co-authored a study titled "High Concentrations of Organic Contaminants in Air from Ship Breaking Activities in Chittagong, Bangladesh" published in the international journal "Environmental Science & Technology" in 2015.

**HIGH COURT RULING**

Last year, following a writ petition, the High Court observed that all permissions purportedly given for import, beaching, breaking, cutting, or dismantling of vessels that are deficient in form and content, are illegal, without lawful authority and detrimental to public interest.

It was delivered on November 14, 2019 in response to a public interest litigation filed by Bangladesh Environment Lawyer Association (Bela) about importing and scrapping of MT Producer, a toxic ship similar to J Nat.

The court said, "The circumstances of the import of the vessels into Bangladesh are, hereby, declared to constitute illegal traffic of a toxic ship into our territory."

## Bollywood icon

FROM PAGE 12

spread of coronavirus.

Born in the Indian desert state of Rajasthan on January 7, 1967, Khan discovered an early passion for acting and studied at the elite National School of Drama.

But his training in Shakespeare and Chekhov did little to ease his entry into the Hindi film industry, which was then largely focused on churning out formulaic song-and-dance blockbusters.

Even as he landed a role in 1988's "Salaam Bombay" -- directed by first-timer Mira Nair -- his part was slashed to a cameo.

He sobbed for hours when he found out about the cuts, he told India's Open magazine.

"It changed something within me. I was prepared for anything after that," he said.

Television roles followed, along with a handful of bit parts in Bollywood, where producers routinely dismissed him as looking too unconventional to play the lead.

By the time British director Asif Kapadia cast him as a mercenary in "The Warrior", he was ready to quit acting, frustrated over the direction of his career.

But, in a sign of the global success that lay in wait, the 2001 film racked up awards and won Khan praise -- including in India, where a new generation of directors was eager to experiment with fresh storylines.

**UNMATCHED TALENT**

His drama school training came in handy when he was cast in "Maqbool" and "Haider" --

contemporary Hindi adaptations of "Macbeth" and "Hamlet".

But he also charmed audiences in lighter fare such as "Piku", featuring Bollywood superstars Amitabh Bachchan and Deepika Padukone, and "The Lunchbox", in which he played a lonely accountant in love with a housewife.

Bachchan led tributes to Khan yesterday, describing him as "an incredible talent" whose death had left "a huge vacuum" in the industry.

His "Slumdog Millionaire" co-star Anil Kapoor called Khan "an inspiration for everyone, a remarkable actor, unmatched talent & a great human being".

Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas, one of a handful of Bollywood stars to find success in Hollywood, tweeted: "Your talent forged the way for so many in so many avenues. You inspired so many of us."

Khan consciously sidestepped traditional Bollywood tropes, focusing on the subtleties of his craft.

This allowed him to carve out a stellar career in Hollywood as well, where he collaborated with Oscar-winning directors such as Danny Boyle and Ang Lee and appeared in the HBO show "In Treatment".

Filmmaker Colin Trevorrow, who directed Khan in the 2015 blockbuster "Jurassic World", described the actor as "a thoughtful man who found beauty in the world around him, even in pain".

"In our last correspondence, he asked me to remember 'the wonderful aspects of our existence' in the darkest of days," Trevorrow tweeted.

## Economic cost

FROM PAGE 12

others, and you're not exactly protecting yourself, but you still feel a bit safer."

However, Germany extended a warning against travel worldwide to mid-June, spelling more bad news for a global aviation industry that has already been forced to cut tens of thousands of jobs.

**DISCONNECT FROM REALITY**

Italy, Spain and France have been the worst affected European countries, with each reporting more than 23,000 deaths but daily tolls appear to be on a downward trend and they are all charting their way out of shutdown.

## 13 prison

FROM PAGE 12

Their colleagues who might have come in contact with them are in quarantine at an empty female cell in Kerainganj jail.

The prisons department earlier arranged isolation units for inmates inside jails in Kishoreganj, Madaripur, Pirojpur, Sylhet, Feni and Dinajpur districts, according to a report of the home ministry's special coordination cell.

The jail authorities say they keep new inmates in 14-day quarantine before putting them inside the cell with others.

said officials also examine the medical history of new inmates.

Sources at the prison department said there are around 89,000 prisoners against the capacity of 41,244 in the country's 68 jails.

**WE MOURN**

National Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury  
13 November 1943 - 28 April 2020

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# DIGITAL PAYMENT SOLUTIONS DURING CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The Daily Star in association with Nagad organised an online discussion titled "Digital payment solutions during Coronavirus Pandemic" on April 25, 2020. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



**ZAHIDUL ISLAM SAJAL,**  
Business  
Correspondent,  
The Daily Star and  
Moderator of the  
session

Today's discussion will focus on how we can make the best use of our existing digital payment structure during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. According to the latest data released by Bangladesh Bank in February 2020, nearly Tk 140,000 crore worth of transactions took place in that one month. However, in March and April, the transaction has not been the same.



**TANVIR A. MISHUK,**  
Managing Director,  
Nagad

If a recession takes place and we choose to save all the big corporations and disregard the daily wage earners, farmers, and small businesses, our country will not be able to recover. Even though our country is on lockdown and everything has come to a halt, our economy cannot stand still. If our economy comes to a halt, it will take a long time for our country to get back up on its feet.

Around seven crore people in this country are daily wage earners and bringing all of them under government stipends is not possible. A long-term solution is required for the current economic problem. We need to figure out a way to slowly keep the economy moving while maintaining social distancing. Everyone, including marginal workers, must be brought under financial inclusion.

It's time we had one eye to the microscope and the other in the telescope, meaning we have to maintain the right balance in terms of our way forward, both including the short-term and long-term strategies. Hence, in the short-term there's no alternative to making robust efforts to bring as many people as possible under the digital payment solution ecosystem, to ensure social protection maintaining social distancing protocol.



**ASHISH CHAKRABORTY,**  
Director and Chief  
Operating Officer  
(COO), SSL Wireless

We have been trying to find the solution to two problems that people will most certainly face in the present situation. Firstly, we have been trying to come up with easy ways to deliver groceries to people. Secondly, we have been working on the digitisation of the payment procedure.

After the announcement of the lockdown, there was quite a bit of confusion surrounding who was to be allowed on the streets. This created a big challenge in our

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delivery system. The government and law enforcers need to look into these matters to ensure deliveries take place. There is no point in ensuring digital payment if deliveries themselves cannot be properly made.

There are two prominent challenges in digital payment. Firstly, there is a general distrust among people here when it comes to online payment. They have concerns surrounding receiving the right products at the right time. Hence, they tend to prefer cash on delivery. This cannot be changed overnight. To try to overcome this problem, we have started link-based payment where a customer will get a text message containing a link after receiving their delivery. Upon clicking that link, they will be able to complete the payment using their mobile financial service account or bank account. We have also tried to start QR-based payment, but there are still some issues with this method. We have also helped some local delivery companies set up digital payment systems.

We are trying to reduce cash-based payment and make online payments as convenient as possible since cash carries a high risk of COVID-19 transmission. To promote online payment, we have started some discount campaigns and cashback offers. Even though the number

of transactions is higher than usual now, companies in the payment industry should still provide more discount offers during this situation to motivate people to stay home and use digital transactions.



**SHEIKH MOHAMMAD MONIRUL ISLAM,**  
Chief External &  
Corporate Affairs  
Officer, bKash

The government has instructed the factory owners to take credit from banks and disburse wages among the workers through two mediums. The first being bank accounts and second, MFS accounts. We know that these workers will generally prefer to open and use MFS accounts. In the first ten days of May, we will see a lot of these workers getting their payments through their MFS accounts.

MFS is a digital wallet. If its use is not adequately known or understood, first-time users will naturally be a little hesitant. It is our responsibility to raise awareness about this digital wallet and educate everyone about this as much as possible. For a lot of mobile phone users, it might be their first time using their phone for transactions. Apart from this, first time users are also under the risk of facing fraudulence. So, we are starting campaigns to raise awareness about these issues.

Bangladesh Bank has declared us as essential service providers at the right time. But during total lockdowns, the MFS agent points cannot operate. During the period when everyone receives their salaries, there will definitely be a liquidity crunch since everyone will want to convert their digital payments. So, in that period, the law enforcers need to ensure these people are allowed on the streets. We also need to ensure enough liquidity so that a situation does not arise where we have digital money but our banks do not have enough liquidity for the conversions.



**RAHEL AHMED,**  
Managing Director  
and CEO, Prime  
Bank Limited

I want to take this opportunity to salute all the MFS service providers. If this pandemic had hit us a decade ago, it would have been very difficult for the government to reach the marginal people and provide them allowances.

This situation has been a huge wake-up call for Bangladesh's banking industry as well as for the consumers. In the past decade or so, Bangladesh has undergone a digital revolution and, with respect to this, the banking industry has come forward quite a bit. For example, in the past, we would have around 400-500 people register for internet banking every month. Compared to that, the data from April shows that this number has gone up to a few thousands. Also, people had a lot of issues and barriers regarding e-commerce but now the consumers are forced to lean towards it. Besides MFS, banks are also helping a lot in this digitisation process through the issuing of debit or credit cards, for example.

It is inevitable for banks to upgrade their digital technology to increase operational efficiency in the future. COVID-19 has shown us that banks can be operated remotely which is something no one had thought of before. We also need to begin the use of e-documentations and through this, we will be able to provide more seamless service to our customers.



**ZAHID HUSSAIN,**  
Former Lead  
Economist, The World  
Bank

Since we don't have any vaccines for COVID-19, we have no other choice but to keep the spread of the disease under control. We also don't know of any other way except for social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, this social distancing is having a profound impact on our economy, and the degree of this impact is varying. Some of us are able to afford to stay locked down in our homes but most people aren't financially capable to remain locked down.

For a country like Bangladesh, fulfilling the conditions of social protection is very important. Without social protection, social distancing will not be effective. It won't be possible to keep those people at home who cannot fulfill their basic needs by staying home and, the number of such people is huge in our country. Economists usually have some fundamental questions

regarding social protection such as how fast can it be delivered and how efficiently can we reach our target group. However, in case of COVID-19, another question has been added: how can we ensure social protection maintaining the steps that we are taking to contain the spread of the coronavirus? A health safety dimension is being added here. To ensure social protection, we have to undertake two steps. Firstly, we have to identify the beneficiaries and prepare a list and secondly, we have to ensure that the financial aid or food aid reaches them. MFS can play a big role here.

Most of the social protection programmes we have are food-centric. We also have well-targeted programmes such as Vulnerable Group Development Programme. Currently, we are facing the problem of delivering social assistance at a massive scale. The logistical challenge of these initiatives is huge. Moreover, the givers and receivers of such assistance are both vulnerable to health risks. We are also hearing about mismanagement in these initiatives. The alternative to this is providing cash but that too poses health risks. We need to figure out how we can provide people with purchasing power so that they can get their essentials as required. We can analyse the data our MFS has. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Bank, are all linked to this. If all experts can identify variables together based on this data, we can identify beneficiaries so that after the pandemic, we can look at their transaction patterns and see

cash. For instance, when people receive their salary, it can be checked whether they have cashed out their salaries. We need to look into how we can make digital payments easier in this regard. The government can also help us. If incentives can be provided to customers by both the government and MFS providers, it can encourage digital payments. Also, discouraging customers, for example, by charging more for cash payments can be an option.



**KAMAL QUADIR,**  
CEO, bKash

If economists highlight certain variables then operators like us can identify excluded groups such as the ultra-poor people in order to include them among the beneficiaries. In this way, errors will be minimal.

People who have NIDs can easily open accounts using their own phones or their relatives' phones or through digital KYC centres. Therefore, opening accounts is not a challenge in Bangladesh anymore. Moreover, even if the individual handset ownership

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Make robust use of digital payment solutions to ensure social protection maintaining social distancing protocol.
- 2. Increase the limit on the amount of money transferrable from verified bank accounts to reliable MFS accounts.
- 3. Discourage cash transaction and incentivise digital payment.
- 4. Encourage use of MFS to buy goods and services instead of using it only for cash in and cash out.
- 5. Digitise the entire supply chain.
- 6. Allow retailers and small business-holders to make digital payments without trade licenses.
- 7. Raise digital awareness and make mobile banking more accessible.
- 8. Open MFS accounts for those who are still left out of financial inclusion.
- 9. Ensure financial transparency and security of people using MFS.

who has been affected. The government has already announced some programmes which include food distribution through ration cards, adding money to old-age transfer schemes, allocating money in the informal sector through cash transfer. But no list has been made in this regard and which ministry will do it has also not been clarified. Therefore, we have a big scope of utilising our MFS system here.

If we are to rid ourselves of coronavirus, then every individual has to be free from it. We need to look into using digital technology for food delivery. We also need to look into how e-commerce can play a role in eliminating long queues of food distribution which are continuing to pose health risks.



**AKM SHIRIN,**  
Managing Director  
and CEO, Dutch  
Bangla Bank Limited  
(DBBL)

There is no alternative to digital payment in this situation. Components of digital payment include salary disbursement which, if handed over physically to the workers, would create a disastrous situation. We are now being able to provide salaries through MFS. We have already opened around 30 lakh accounts and this number will continue to increase. Before this, around 16 lakh accounts used to exist through which salary disbursements took place.

If we look into the physical aspect of merchant payments, we can see that QR codes are being used which are enabling payments through MFS and cards. E-commerce is also enabling two types of payment. One is online payment – payments are being made directly through the MFS accounts and goods are reaching customers. Cash-on-delivery is the other type of payment that also requires the usage of QR codes in some cases. Utility payment is another sort of payment. Since it is difficult to go outside our homes now for making utility payments and since banks have limited operating hours, we can use MFS apps to make these payments.

The government is providing different types of allowances. Beneficiary identification is extremely important for proper provision of these allowances. We can make it mandatory for the beneficiaries to open MFS accounts to receive the allowances. MFS accounts are also very secure so there is less chance of fraudulence. At DBBL, we have experienced higher disbursement of cash with MFS – around Tk 10,000 crore – surpassing the disbursement that takes place via ATMs which is around Tk 7,000 crore.

We need to reduce our dependence on

is not 90 percent, family-wise handset ownership is very high which will reduce the need to go to agents to open accounts.

We can see that MFS usage has increased in the last one month among both city-dwellers and those residing in mofoshshols. It is a good thing that a group of those above the poverty line are also adapting to MFS. If we see the overall data of the past two months, total MFS transactions have reduced, however. This is mainly due to lesser bank hours. If liquidity cannot be ensured among the agents, then services cannot be provided.

Moreover, some banks claim to be open, but in reality, a lot of branches are found closed. This hampers transactions, since consumers withdraw money from banks to pay agents, and agents collect money and deposit it in banks.

Small merchants are under difficult legal regulatory requirements when taking payments. All of them must present trade licenses which can only be approved by the Ministry of Commerce. It is not possible for many merchants to acquire a trade license in the current situation and also the cost of obtaining the license is too high for them to bear.

Central bank should increase the limit on the amount of money transferrable from a qualified account, with complete transparency in identity, to a fully verified bKash, Rocket, or Nagad account. This would decrease dependency on agents during the COVID-19 situation.



**MD ABUL KALAM AZAD,**  
Former Principal  
Secretary and  
Principal Coordinator  
of SDGs

The number of government-to-private payments was 2.5 million before the COVID-19 situation began. School payments must be added to that as well. Private-to-government payments were very low, at Tk 100 to Tk 150 crore monthly. A system of digital transfer of salaries for government workers has begun, which has ultimately helped develop MFS.

RMG workers already have access to many financial services, but in the context of new government decisions, in the past two to three weeks, around 2.5 million new accounts of RMG workers have been created. Electronic payment was only at five percent previously but has increased to 60 percent according to last week's data.

A mobile platform has been developed for daily necessities, which will hit the market very soon. A massive volunteer group has been formed, along with a large network which includes e-commerce. Volunteers are planning how the digital platform will be used to gain demand for daily necessities

and then supply the services. This has created a big opportunity for MFS to develop.

A crowd-funding platform will also be launched soon. Many people are trying to help those who have been worst affected by the pandemic, but are unsure of where to donate the money, due to the fact that they cannot go outside. The crowd-funding platform will encourage digital financing while enforcing safe volunteerism. MFS account fraudulence also remains an issue since people find new ways to commit fraud no matter how many ways are blocked.

Big data analysis is required for rehabilitation work during post-corona times. Systems for providing trade licenses online have been developed by various municipalities and city corporations. The government can come forward to ensure this process can be done in an hour. At the same time, Bangladesh Bank should consider developing the cash-out system. The use of digital financing will allow further capacity-building in relief management.



**MOHAMMAD AMINUL HAQUE,**  
Chief Financial  
Officer, Nagad

Bangladesh's crying need right now is increased financial inclusion. The number of people who have no MFS or bank account is still very high. However, after the recent RMG circular, there has been a tremendous flow of customers to Nagad, bKash, and Rocket.

The action plan would be to first use a circular and open MFS accounts for those who are still left out of the purview of financial inclusion. The first bottleneck at the moment is with regard to how to disburse incentives, especially cash incentives. This can be cleared now, even though it will be a mammoth job. Only 50 percent financial inclusion has been possible since independence, and so increasing inclusion is not easy, but is still feasible within a reasonable time-frame. Nagad has opened 120,000 accounts using its own marketing channels during regular times. With a government circular in place, Nagad can open 10 to 20 lakh accounts per day with its technological capacity.

In Bangladesh, the percentage of non-cash transactions using digital or electronic platforms is very low. Due to the percentage of cash transactions being higher, total money flow time is longer compared to other countries. The whole cycle of a retailer collecting cash after selling their product, ordering products again, and paying with cash to top up inventories require longer lead time. Bangladesh, therefore, cannot avail the benefits of the money multiplier, while developed countries can.

This problem cannot be solved if Nagad, bKash, and Rocket only focus on cash in and cash out. After G-to-P (government-to-person) disbursement is done, P-to-P (person-to-person) payments must be ensured by creating ways for people to carry out their top-ups and payments through MFS. Next, P-to-M (person-to-merchant) payments must be handled. Then comes M-to-M (merchant-to-merchant), which includes payments that one SME business-holder must make to another SME business-holder. Next is P-to-G (person-to-government) payment, since standing in queues at banks for these payments is not feasible now due to Corona crisis.



**MUSTAFA JABBAR,**  
Posts and  
Telecommunications  
Minister

There is no alternative to digitisation. If preparations for Digital Bangladesh had not begun in 2008, life would be very difficult in the current COVID-19 situation. Bangalis are able to adapt to any situation, and this case is no different. An example would be how quickly we were able to include RMG workers in the scope of mobile financing.

The days of traditional banking are long gone. At some point in the near future, bank counters will become obsolete. These days, more transactions occur through ATMs than through bank counters. Agent banking has great scope for expansion, but I believe the rate of expansion is currently not as high as required. COVID-19 has taught us that the banking sector must find alternative ways to reach people. Since digital methods are available and easy to use, they should be utilised.

The financial system of Digital Bangladesh will, of course, be digital, and the preparations required must be taken. I hope COVID-19 will accelerate the digital journey of our financial sector, which will greatly benefit the people of our country.

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
Closed	Closed	\$1,708.50 (per ounce)	\$23.02 (per barrel)	▲ 1.89%	Closed	▲ 0.46%	▲ 0.44%	BUY TK 83.95	90.01	103.78	11.72
				32,720.16		2,574.73	2,822.44	SELL TK 84.95	93.81	107.58	12.31

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## TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

# Banks' new headache? Looming bulk credit card charge-offs.

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Credit cards were slowly but surely finding a place in consumers' hearts in recent years, thanks to a combination of banks' aggressive push, a growing aspirational middle-class population and increasing awareness of the convenience the payment tool provides.

Banks too were all too willing to issue credit cards, which carry one of the highest interest rates. But the global coronavirus pandemic has now left them on pins and needles.

They are now bracing for a double hit: transaction volumes diving and delinquencies rising as unemployed and underemployed consumers lose the ability to pay back revolving debt taken on during better times.

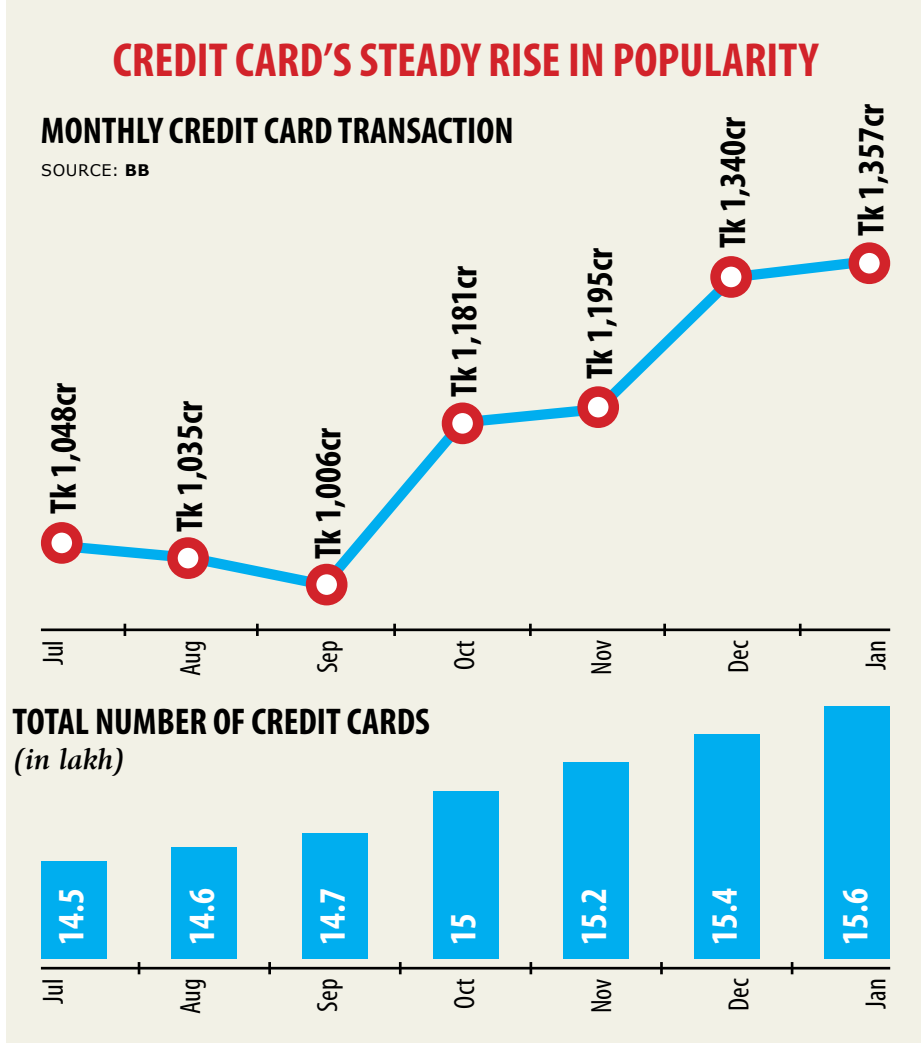
Since the countrywide movement control order was put in place on March 26, credit card usage has nosedived more than 50 per cent as almost all restaurants and retail points are closed, according to bankers.

And this outbreak could not have happened at a worse time for credit card issuers.

"We usually enjoy most business during Ramadan every year. But this time is completely different," said Mashrur Arefin, managing director of City Bank, which accounts 35 per cent of the credit cards in circulation, the highest.

Last Ramadan, City's credit cardholders had spent Tk 620 crore.

To turn the tide, Standard Chartered Bangladesh, which accounts for 14 per cent of total credit card transactions in the market, has rolled out promotions to tempt



as term loans for credit cardholders too.

For term loans, non-payment of instalments for a straight nine, 12 and 18 months would land the accounts in the sub-standard, doubtful and bad categories respectively.

Mutual Trust Bank is now brainstorming on how to facilitate many of its cardholders to pay their instalments on time, said its managing director Syed Mahbubur Rahman.

"We will scrutinise the clients' attitude on a case-to-case basis. The bank will block the delinquent clients if required."

The bank, which has issued 60,000 cards and has Tk 300 crore outstanding from this segment, is worried about recovery in the days ahead as many clients would lose their ability to pay back the funds, Rahman said.

"We will offer equally monthly instalment facility for the clients such that they can comfortably repay the loans," he added.

Dhaka Bank, which has 15,000 cards in circulation, has almost stopped issuing new credit cards to avoid defaults, said its Managing Director Emranul Huq.

Brac Bank, which is holding the second position in term of issuing credit cards in the market, has also faced difficulties to recover the loans from cardholders, said Md Mahiul Islam, its head of retail banking.

The bank, whose card transactions have declined to one-third in the last one month, has Tk 660 crore outstanding from its 178,000 credit cards, he said.

To protect the cardholders from financial ruins, the BB though has taken a host of measures.

Lenders are not allowed to impose any late payment fees on credit cardholders from March 15 onwards and they have been asked to follow the simple interest rate model instead of the earlier method of the compound interest rate.

It has also asked banks not to consider cardholders as defaulters if they fail to repay instalments until June 30.

"This is all well and good. The question is when this is over, do those loans start paying again and it's fine. Or, is there going to be a big wall of charge-off?" said a bank MD requesting anonymity to speak candidly on the matter.

# IDLC profits pounded by topsy-turvy financial markets

AHSAN HABIB

IDLC Finance, a listed non-bank financial institution, took another hit to its profit last year thanks to the bearish stock market and volatile money market.

In 2019, its profit dropped 21.65 per cent, or Tk 47 crore, to stand at about Tk 170 crore in.

"Growth in revenues from our core lending business was not sufficient to counter the fall in capital market returns, so profits fell," said Arif Khan, chief executive officer of IDLC Finance.

IDLC's net interest income was up 10 per cent from the previous year to Tk 467 crore in 2019. The company's income from stock market investment tumbled a staggering 82.81 per cent to Tk 46.31 crore.

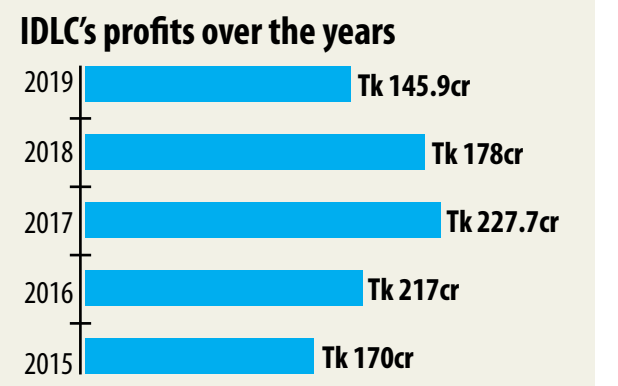
Fee income of the company stood at Tk 85 crore at the end of the year, registering de-growth of 18.35 per cent. It mainly resulted from declines in brokerage fees and fund management fees in the stock market.

DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange, descended about 17 per cent in 2019. And the average daily turnover stood at Tk 480 crore, dropping 12.8 per cent from the previous year.

Thanks to the downturn scenario of the capital market, IDLC Finance have reduced its stock market investment already.



financing happiness



It restructured the asset composition of its lending business over the year, with investments in marketable shares composing 9.88 per cent of equity at the close of 2019, down from 19.63 per cent at the start of the year.

For its subsidiaries, it is focusing more on foreign clients and high net-worth individuals through the research teams in its brokerage and investment banking subsidiaries.

The year 2020 would be more challenging for money market, stock market and all businesses due to the impact of COVID-19, Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

"If the economy tanks and loan disbursement drops, we will also face a problem though IDLC Finance is the most profitable NBF now," he added.

Return on asset of IDLC Finance is 1.50 per cent, which is the highest in the industry.

In 2019, the NBF industry saw a de-growth in deposits due to the liquidity crisis following the bankruptcy of People's Leasing and Financial Services, which created a negative perception for depositors regarding the sector.

However, IDLC's term deposits grew 7.34 per cent, with non-bank deposits rising 17.29 per cent.

The company's lending portfolio grew 10.02 per cent, reaching Tk 9,235 crore in 2019.

At the end of the year, its default loan ratio stood at 3.07 per cent, up from 2.20 per cent a year earlier.

Stocks of IDLC, which got listed with the DSE in 1992, traded at Tk 41.90 on March 25, the last day of trading before the bourses shut for the countrywide shutdown.

It announced 35 per cent cash dividend for shareholders for the year ended on December 31, 2019 which was same in the previous year.

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cardholders to splurge, according to Sabbir Ahmed, its head of retail banking.

The British lender's clients can enjoy 5 per cent cashback from selected retail points.

And those who would be unable to pay their instalments on time would get a debt restructuring

facility, he said.

But the possibility of missed instalments is looming large on most lenders' minds.

"We are struggling to recover the funds from cardholders," Arefin said, adding that in the last one month the bank's overdue payment from cardholders has increased more than seven times.

City is now considering requesting the Bangladesh Bank to follow the same classification and loan provisioning policies

# Bangladesh to face one of the highest decline in working hours: ILO

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh is among the countries that are forecast to face the highest decline in working hours in the first half of 2019 as the raging novel coronavirus continues to put economies on lockdown and factories closed, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) said yesterday.

The estimated hours lost for the lower-middle-income countries, which include Bangladesh, were 1.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2020 compared with the pre-crisis baseline.

The loss rose to 12.5 per cent in the second quarter, according to the 'ILO Monitor third edition: COVID-19 and the world of work', which was released yesterday.

Low-income countries are expected to lose 8.8 per cent in the working hours compared with 1.6 per cent in the first quarter, the upper-middle income countries 8.7 per cent working hours, up from 8.6 per cent in the first quarter, and the high-income countries 11.6 per cent of

the working hours, which is way higher than 1.6 per cent in the first quarter.

"The crisis is causing an unprecedented reduction in economic activity and working time," the ILO said.

Bangladesh has been enforcing lockdown since March 26, two weeks after it reported the country's maiden coronavirus infections, shutting factories and industries, suspending transport movement, closing offices and banning gatherings, as part of its measures aimed at flattening the curve on deadly virus.

The measures left most of the workers unemployed.

The continued sharp decline in working hours globally due to the COVID-19 outbreak means that 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy -- that is nearly half of the global workforce -- stand in immediate danger of having their livelihoods destroyed, the ILO said.

The drop in working hours in the second quarter of 2020 is expected to be significantly worse than previously estimated.



Worldwide, more than 436 million enterprises face high risks of serious disruption. These enterprises are operating in the hardest-hit economic sectors, including some 232 million in wholesale and retail, 111 million in manufacturing, 51 million in accommodation and food services, and 42 million in real estate and other business activities.

The ILO calls for urgent, targeted and flexible measures to support workers and businesses, particularly smaller enterprises, those in the informal economy and others who are vulnerable.

"For millions of workers, no income means no food, no security and no future. Millions of businesses around the world are barely breathing. They have no savings or access to credit. These are the real faces of the world of work. If we don't help them now, they will simply perish," said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder in a press release.

Measures for economic reactivation should follow a job-rich approach, backed by stronger employment policies and institutions, better-resourced and comprehensive social protection systems, the ILO said.

International co-ordination on stimulus packages and debt relief measures will also be critical to making recovery effective and sustainable. International labour standards, which already enjoy tripartite consensus, can provide a framework.

# Boro yield to offer some respite

SOHEL PARVEZ

Farmers are expected to bag a higher amount of boro paddy this harvesting season thanks to favourable weather and low pest infestation, a development that may offer some breathing room to the nation now reeling under coronavirus-induced uncertainty.

The yield of the biggest crop is likely to edge up 0.51 per cent year-on-year to 1.95 crore tonnes in the current harvesting season, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) said in a report on Bangladesh released on Monday.

"Farmers, although concerned about a labour shortage during harvest, believe this year's crop has benefited from favourable weather and no major pest or disease infestations," it said.

The prediction comes as farmers in

the northeast and northwest regions, two major boro producing zones in the country, are harvesting the paddy, which accounts for more than half of the total annual rice production.

The report cited government initiatives to support farmers during the pandemic and said labour, transportation, storage and processing costs are expected to rise as a result of COVID-19.

The agency forecasted that overall rice production might increase 1.4 per cent to 3.63 crore tonnes on the assumption of normal weather conditions and higher yield in the May-April period of 2020-21 from 3.58 crore tonnes in the previous year.

The USDA predicted wider use of high-yielding varieties (HYVs) and hybrid seeds in the marketing year of



- Boro yield may be **1.95cr** tonnes this season
- Overall rice production may rise to **3.63cr** tonnes
- Rice import may soar to **200,000** tonnes in FY21

2020-21 that stretches from May to April.

"There is a growing preference for HYVs and hybrid seeds because of higher yields."

The US agency also predicted that Bangladesh's rice import would increase to 200,000 tonnes in fiscal 2020-21 to meet the additional demand caused by the pandemic.

Import of wheat, the second most consumed grain after rice, is also forecasted to rise to 64 lakh tonnes in fiscal 2020-21 from 63 lakh tonnes in the outgoing fiscal year.

Wheat use will continue to rise in diversified bakery items and processed foods amid growing consumer demand for wheat-based products and low international prices, according to the report.

The agency said wheat acreage may

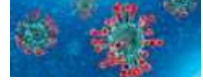
increase to 3.50 lakh hectares in the next marketing year of May-April from 3.40 lakh hectares in the outgoing year.

"Some farmers are expected to plant wheat in place of corn on expectations of higher profit margins and reduced exposure to wheat blast, a fungal disease that impacted Bangladesh's wheat harvest two years ago," said the USDA report.

Wheat production is likely to increase to 12.5 lakh tonnes in the next season riding on favourable weather conditions.

The growers will bag 12 lakh tonnes of wheat, which is harvested in April, during the outgoing year of 2019-20.

"Farmers have expressed optimism about this year's crop, stating that wheat blast was not as big of a concern this year relative to the previous crops," the US agency said.



TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

## Stock brokers cry out for support

AHSAN HABIB

Abdul Mannan, a stock investor who maintains two beneficiary owner's accounts, has been incurring losses on all counts for the last six months as the stock indices were plumbing new depths every day amid a fund crisis and a confidence deficit in the market.

On top of the heap of his woes, Mannan did not win a single lottery in the initial public offerings (IPO) in the last two years.

"My patience has exhausted," he said.

Mannan is one of the 10 lakh stock investors in the country who think at least a waiver of the BO account maintenance charge may bring them some respite at this crucial moment.

"The government should forfeit the fees for at least one year," he said.

DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange, sank to a six-year low of 3,603 points on March 18. The bourses have been shut since March 25 in line with the government-declared holidays to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Many stockbrokers are also in peril as they have been counting huge losses due to the falling turnover in the market.

Against the backdrop, DSE Brokers' Association (DBA) has sought an incentive package from the government and sent a letter to the finance minister on Tuesday.

The Central Depository Bangladesh Ltd is a profitable company and it will not impacted much if it does not charge investors any fee for BO account maintenance for one year, said Sharif Anwar Hossain, president of the DBA. There are now 25.78 lakh BO accounts in the market.

The stockbrokers asked for a government fund to bear office expenses and pay employees' salaries. They expressed intention to pay back the money within two years with 3 per cent interest.

The DBA called for lowering advance income tax on share trading to 0.015 per cent from existing 0.05 per cent.

The stockbrokers also made an appeal to the government to allow the investment of undisclosed money in the stock market for three years.

Interest on margin loans should be waived for one year and stock investors should be provided loans at 3 per cent interest, the DBA said.



SAZZADUL HASSAN

It was a bolt from the blue! This pandemic has truly taken everybody to a surprise. The deadly germ didn't take much time to spread all across the globe after it originated in China in December last year. Around 3 million people living in more than 200 countries have been infected so far, out of which about 200,000 innocent lives were perished.

To the disbelief of many, countries which are known for having the best of the medical facilities, are also struggling to contain the notorious microorganism popularly known as COVID-19. The danger is, even after the four months of the outbreak, nobody really knows when the mankind will be able to win over the notorious enemy.

The World Health Organization (WHO) warned that this virus will be with us for a long time and therefore, we should be extremely careful and vigilant in managing this pandemic for the foreseeable future.

Given the dire situation, the immediate focus for everyone, including the businesses should be on saving lives. Business organisations should come forward to join hands with the government and other stakeholders to make sure there is enough testing facilities to isolate infected people and adequate treatment facilities for the diagnosed patients. They should also be thinking of how to collaborate with the concerned research organisations or academia to accelerate the research on inventing a vaccine, which will eradicate the virus for good from

this world.

While carrying out their corporate social responsibilities, corporations are also looking for the ways and means to get the wheel of their operations up and running. In this regard, the top most priority is to ensure safety of the employees who are the most valuable resources.

Over the last fifty years, the mindset of the businesses with regards to employees has changed quite radically. Businesses in the

world. We foster diversity and inclusion, dignity and respect."

Keeping this spirit in mind, amid unprecedented business disruption, a growing list of businesses have vowed to pay their employees, while their business operations are temporarily suspended. This is quite obvious that people are really worried about their future. Here comes the role of empathetic leaders to stand beside their employees.

To deal with this abnormal

dollars. However, if the pandemic continues for a longer period, the global GDP will fall by further 3 per cent from the baseline assumption.

Businesses are facing multiple challenges both from demand and supply perspectives. Consumer spending has certainly plunged significantly as they are fearful, saving for the crisis, can't go out for spending and in some cases, especially in the developing countries, a large portion of them

5R: Resolve, Resilience, Return, Reimagination and Reform to face the ongoing crisis.

Resolve: This refers to containment of the virus and its spread to safeguard lives and livelihoods. Business must ensure safety of their employees by taking measures like work from home. For business continuity, if someone needs to work outside, they will maintain proper safety guideline. In some cases, they should adopt online transaction, delivery at customers' doorstep etc. But first, stop the virus to spread.

Resilience: This health crisis is obviously leading towards a severe financial crisis. Organisations will suffer from cash crunch, shortages of working capital and ability to pay debt. To deal with these challenges business need to work with government and other stakeholders to ensure concessional financing, debt relief and even for grants.

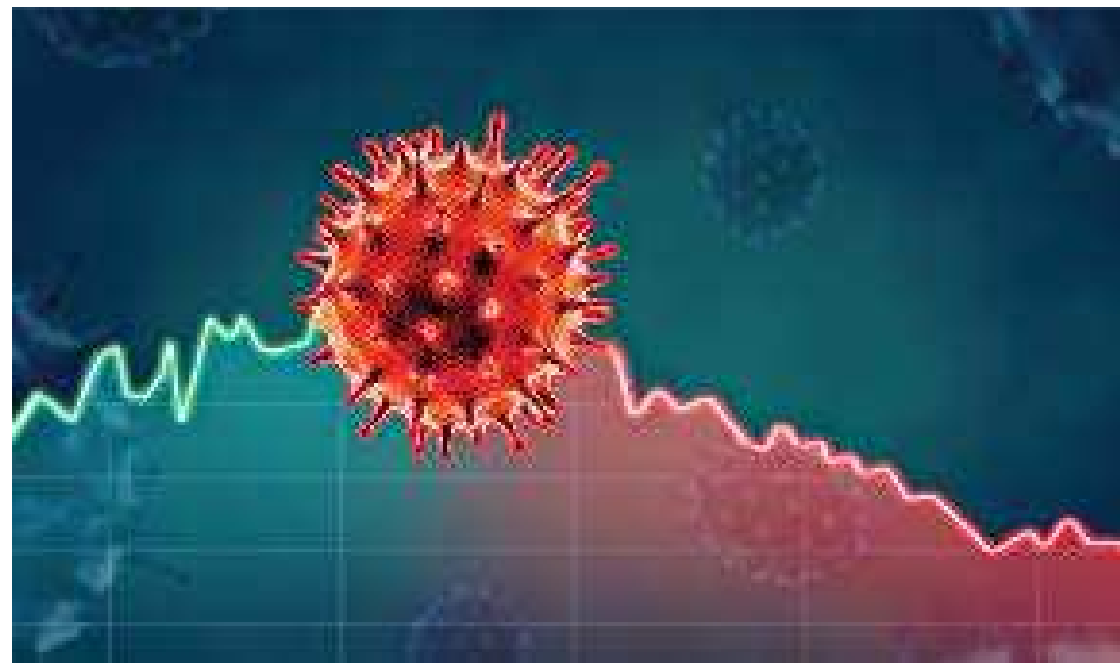
Return: As the situation gets better businesses should plan for resumption of their operations in phase manners. Trying to do everything together after a longer shutdown can create chaos.

Reimagination: The world will definitely be different post-pandemic. Expectations of the customers, employees and other stakeholders will be different. Organisations should carefully evaluate these shifts of the mindset and take appropriate actions. This will include use of technology, setting up plants and distribution centers closer to the customers etc.

Reform: It is not unlikely that in some cases organisations have to reform their policies, processes to survive. This can even be changing their existing business models.

Businesses would require lots of efforts and imagination to survive. Charles Darwin, the famous scientist of all times, said it loudly, "It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive; It is the one that is most adaptable to change."

The writer is chairman and managing director of BASF Bangladesh Limited



1970s were religiously following a doctrine of Nobel laureate economist Milton Friedman. He said: "The business's sole purpose is to generate profits for shareholders."

However, we saw a stunning turnaround in 2019, when the CEOs of the world's largest corporations in a business roundtable declared, "We commit to investing in our employees. This starts with compensating them fairly and providing important benefits. It also includes supporting them through training and education that help develop new skills for a rapidly changing

and unprecedented situation, corporations should first assess the situation and its impact carefully. IMF Chief Economist Geeta Gopinath described the present crisis as worse than the great depression of 1930's and the financial crisis of 2008.

According to IMF's latest forecast, the global GDP will fall by 3 per cent in 2020. Assuming that the pandemic improves in the second half of the year, economic activities start to take momentum, the global economy will grow by 5.8 per cent in 2021. The cumulative economic loss of 2020-21 will be nearly 9 trillion

who rely on daily wages are simply out of pocket as they are unable to render their services.

On the other hand, because of lockdown in most of the countries, both primary supply chain, which deals with raw materials or intermediate goods, and the secondary supply chain, which deals with finished products, are facing enormous disruptions. All these challenges boil down to weaker revenue and increased cost.

So, what should the businesses do to face this challenging time?

Reputed consultancy firm McKinsey & Company has come up with a concept called

**STOCKBROKERS' DEMANDS AT A GLANCE**

- Need help with office expenses, salaries
- Funds will be returned in 2 years with 3% interest
- Lower advance income tax on share trading
- Undisclosed money parked in stocks for 3 years
- Reduced interest on margin loan for 1 year

## Dhaka Elevated Expressway work will be in full swing once normalcy returns

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The investors of the 47-kilometre Dhaka Elevated Expressway are committed to completing the project as rapidly as possible as implementation had faced a setback due to the pandemic and a fund crisis, said AHMS Aktar, the project director.

The fund crisis has now been resolved as the partner of the project, Italian-Thai Development Public Company, has teamed up with two Chinese firms to complete the project on time, he said.

"The investors are keeping in close contact with me and preparing a plan on how to speed up work once the pandemic subsides."

The two Chinese companies already started disbursing Tk 7,318 crore, out of the Tk 8,940.18 crore of the construction cost of the project, from March, he said.

In exchange, Italian-Thai has handed over 49 per cent of its share to the Chinese companies -- China Shandong International Economic and Technical Corporation Group (34 per cent) and

Sino Hydro Corporation (15 per cent).

As per the revised deadline, the construction work of the first phase of the project -- Airport to Banani Rail Crossing -- will be completed by this October while the second phase -- from Banani Rail Crossing to Moghbazar -- will end by October next year.

The third and the final phase -- from Moghbazar to Kutubkhali on Dhaka-Chattogram Highway -- will be completed in October 2022.

Italian-Thai has finished installing more than 900 piles out of the 1,200 needed for the first section, Aktar said.

Construction of the much-talked-about project commenced formally on April 1, 2018. The main objective of this project is to bypass Dhaka in the fastest possible way, which would significantly reduce traffic load inside the capital.

Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA) had signed a deal with Italian-Thai in January 2011 to build the expressway, with 19.73km main line stretching from Shahjalal International Airport to Kutubkhali, under a public private partnership at a cost of Tk 8,703 crore.

The scheme faltered time and again over the years, mainly due to the failure of the private investor -- Italian-Thai -- to manage funds for the project, the government's delay in handing over the project, and problems related to land acquisition.

Amid uncertainty over funds, the BBA issued the work order to the private partner in March 2018.

Aktar said they have completed acquisition of necessary land and handed it over to the partners before the countrywide lockdown began due to the coronavirus pandemic.



SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Banks call for stretching loan classification deadline to Dec 31

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Banks have requested both the finance ministry and the central bank to extend the deadline for loan status classification to December 31 from June 30 as many borrowers are failing to pay instalments because of coronavirus-induced losses.

The businesses have been hit hard by the ongoing economic fallout, which drastically eroded their capacity to return loans on time, banks said during a virtual conference with Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday.

On March 19, the central bank asked lenders not to consider businesspeople as defaulters if they fail to repay instalments until June 30 this year. Banks will have to maintain the same credit

status of a borrower as of January 30 until June 30.

Banks have also urged the central bank to consider establishing a credit risk guarantee scheme for the lenders to protect the loans given under the recently announced stimulus packages.

Kamal asked banks to keep defaulted loans in control as the road to economic recovery would be challenging.

He emphasised putting a lid on banks' operating cost and reducing cost-income ratio, citing the examples of neighboring countries.

"Lenders should cut down unnecessary expenditures during this period as well," he said. The central bank will provide all necessary policy support and guidance to keep the business

community and the banking sector running, said Fazle Kabir, governor of the Bangladesh Bank.

The financial health of banks is now most crucial to the recovery of the economy from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic as there is no alternative source to support and inject money into the economy, said Ali Reza Iftakhar, chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh.

The central bank's latest moves have helped banks manage funds efficiently despite higher withdrawal pressure on cash and a shrink in deposits in the aftermath of the coronavirus outbreak, he said.

He appreciated the central bank's move to cut repo rate by 75 basis points to 5.25 per cent from 6 per cent.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Local Government Engineering Department  
Office of the Upazila Engineer  
Nasimgar, Brahmanbaria  
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.1290.000.02.001.20-295 Date: 28/04/2020

**Amendments/Corrigendum Notice No. 07/2019-20 (OTM)**

It is notified to all concerned that, the following amendments/corrigendum notice have been made for the above due to unavoidable circumstances.

Sl. No.	Tender ID	Document last selling (date & time)		Closing & opening (date & time)	
		Original	Modified	Original	Modified
1	448218, 450379	20/04/2020 12:00pm	04/05/2020 12:00pm	20/04/2020 14:30pm	04/05/2020 14:30pm

All other terms & conditions of the Tender will remain unchanged.

Mohammad Ali Haider Khan  
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Phone: 08526-56034  
E-mail: ue.nasimgar@lged.gov.bd

GD-774

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Office of the Divisional Forest Officer  
Coastal Forest Division, Patuakhali  
District: Patuakhali  
e-mail: dfopatuhali@gmail.com

Memo No. 22.01.7800.535.29.013.20.1278 Date: 28/04/2020

**1st Corrigendum Notice for e-Tender**

It is hereby notified to all concerned that the e-Tender ID No. 452002, 452039, 453202 vide Office Memo No. 22.01.7800.535.29.013.20.1230, Dated: 06/04/2020 have been amended as follows due to unavoidable circumstances.

Sl. No.	Tender/ Proposal ID No.	Invitation Reference No.	Brief description of works	As per Tender Notice				Amendments		
				Tender/ proposal publication date and time	Tender/ proposal last selling date and time	Tender/ proposal closing date and time	Tender/ proposal opening date and time	Tender/ proposal last selling date and time	Tender/ proposal closing date and time	Tender/ proposal opening date and time
1.	452002	PATUA/CFD/SUFAL/2019-20/ND-1	Construction of Boundary Wall at Mohipur Range, Kuakata Beat	06 April 2020 21:30pm	29 April 2020 14:00pm	30 April 2020 13:30pm	30 April 2020 13:30pm	27 May 2020 16:00pm	28 May 2020 15:00pm	28 May 2020 15:00pm
2.	452039	PATUA/CFD/SUFAL/2019-20/ND-2	Construction of Boundary Wall at SFPC, Kalapara	06 April 2020 22:30pm	29 April 2020 14:00pm	30 April 2020 14:30pm	30 April 2020 14:30pm	27 May 2020 16:00pm	28 May 2020 15:30pm	28 May 2020 15:30pm
3.	453202	PATUA/CFD/SUFAL/2019-20/ND-3	Construction of Boundary Wall at Mohipur Range Office	06 April 2020 23:00pm	29 April 2020 14:00pm	30 April 2020 15:00pm	30 April 2020 15:00pm	27 May 2020 16:00pm	28 May 2020 16:00pm	28 May 2020 16:00pm

All other terms and conditions will remain unchanged. This corrigendum notice will be treated as a part and parcel of the Tender Document.

Mohammad Aminul Islam  
Divisional Forest Officer  
Coastal Forest Division  
Patuakhali  
Tel: 0441-62285

GD-779

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA THURSDAY APRIL 30, 2020, BAISHAKH 17, 1427 BS

## Why is it taking so long to make ICUs functional?

*Many Covid-19 patients are dying for lack of proper support*

It is most unfortunate that many of the 17 dedicated hospitals for Covid-19 treatment in the country do not yet have their intensive care units (ICU) ready to treat the patients. Even though ventilators have been installed in most of these hospitals, the ICUs still could not be made operational for lack of other necessary equipment, including patient monitors, pulse oximeters, oxygen cylinders, etc. Reportedly, 12 types of equipment are needed for the smooth operation of an ICU which these specialised hospitals are lacking. Meanwhile, patients are dying in these hospitals every day without getting proper treatment. Allegations were made to the media by the family members of the deceased patients that their loved ones didn't get any oxygen support in the specialised Covid-19 hospitals while they were having difficulty in breathing, let alone any ICU support.

According to a WHO-China joint mission report released last month, around 20 percent of the Covid-19 patients need ICU care—five percent of them require artificial respiration and another 15 percent need to breathe in highly concentrated oxygen. And without having a fully-functioning ICU, such life-saving care cannot be given to the critical patients.

It is incomprehensible why it is taking so long for the government to prepare only a handful of hospitals with ICU facilities for Covid-19 treatment. Already a month and a half has gone by since the first coronavirus case was detected in the country, with the number of deaths and new infections rising by the day.

Therefore, we urge the health ministry and the Directorate General of Health Services to immediately provide the hospitals with the necessary equipment to make their ICUs fully functional. They should also give attention to the hospitals outside the capital which have a very negligible number of ICU beds ready for the Covid-19 patients. Besides, the crisis of manpower for treating ICU patients should also be addressed. If the government does not take immediate measures to make the ICUs functional, we might see a surge in deaths from Covid-19 in the coming days.

## Countries must look after their migrant workers

*Govt must play a greater role in protecting their rights*

SIXTEEN Bangladeshi civil society organisations have urged UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to request host countries to put a hold on their plans to deport undocumented and imprisoned migrant workers, according to a report in this daily yesterday. Origin countries of migrant workers, such as Bangladesh, have also been put under undue pressure—which includes the threat of revision of labour relations—if they do not submit to these plans. At a time when the entire world is reeling from the shock of a pandemic, with developing countries and countries with weak public health systems shouldering the greatest burden—such demands from host countries, especially the wealthy Gulf states, is nothing less than moral bankruptcy.

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers clearly lays out that migrant workers are entitled to enjoy treatment not less favourable than other nationals of the state, and that they specifically have the right to receive medical care on the basis of equality of treatment. However, we have already seen reports of migrant workers in the Middle East and Southeast Asia—which includes Bangladeshi workers—being crammed into work camps, losing their jobs and facing high rates of infection, with no way home and no way of continuing to provide for their families. The Bangladesh government has said that migrant workers will be brought home once the lockdown ends, but for now, they are stuck in limbo, with no assurances from their host or origin countries.

There are an estimated 10 million Bangladeshis currently working abroad, who send billions of dollars in remittances back to Bangladesh every year. Our government has a responsibility to ensure the safety of these workers as well as their families. Rights groups have urged the government to create an emergency fund for migrant workers, which would include interest-free loans for their families in Bangladesh. However, rather than responding to these requests, the government has requested OIC member states to retain the jobs of migrant workers and create a "voluntary fund" to fight coronavirus. The expatriates' welfare ministry has also made the rather insensitive announcement of Tk 3 lakh compensation for the families of workers abroad who will die from coronavirus, without detailing any plans of how they will fight the virus and survive.

We urgently request the government to speak for and support our migrant workers, engaging in all levels of diplomacy with host countries as well as international organisations to protect our workers from the threat of deportation and create a safe environment for them abroad, and depending on their choice, to facilitate their safe return home.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

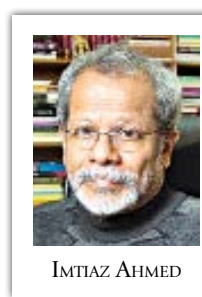
letters@thedailystar.net

### The joy of giving

A few days ago, I came across a report in this daily titled, "A beggar's love for the destitute" and I was immensely inspired by it. It is about Nozim Uddin, a 70-year-old beggar in Sherpur who donated his three-year savings worth Tk 10,000 to a relief fund in order to support the poor during the crisis caused by the countrywide shutdown.

The generosity displayed by Nozim Uddin proves that one does not need to be affluent to contribute to society, all it takes is a big heart. Taking inspiration from him, I believe we should all come forward to assist the people whose lives have been turned upside down during the ongoing pandemic. And if a good number of people come forward to help the impoverished, a sense of solidarity will prevail in our society which will be a ray of hope for us all.

Jamil Al Masrur, by email



IMTIAZ AHMED

It is unfortunate that Covid-19 came at a time when the conservative or right-wing forces are in power in several of the major countries of the world, including USA, UK, Brazil and India. Given their agenda of guarding their national interests, albeit territorially conceived, and that again, mainly for winning national elections and remaining in power, the spread of Covid-19 found them paralysed beyond description. In fact, as *The Washington Post* reported on April 19, even when more than a dozen US researchers, physicians and public health experts were providing real-time information about Covid-19 to the US administration from Geneva headquarters of the World Health Organization (WHO) when the virus emerged in Wuhan in December 2019, the president of the US remained unaffected, calling it either a hoax or another kind of flu or something that will vanish soon!

Indeed, sealing borders or policies resembling political gimmicking became more important than giving time and resources to understand and contain the virus. Trump, for instance, banned foreigners visiting China to enter the US from February 2, but kept it open to the American citizens traveling from China as late as end March. Not sure why this was done, knowing very well that the virus would not be able to distinguish an American from a non-American.

Nearer to our home, India too was slow in responding to the spread of Covid-19, and then when it started to respond it came out with the idea of cancelling visas to non-Indians from March 13 onwards and calling for a 14-hour all-India "public curfew" on March 22. The first one is easy to implement, but since the virus is fully country-blind the impact would be no different from that of the US.

The second one probably was intended to be more symbolic and a way to build awareness, but then how it would be operationalised defies logic, particularly when New Delhi alone has more than 300,000 street children, while some estimates put the total number of street children in India as high as 18 million. In the midst of all this there was one interesting move on the part of India and that was to call a Saarc virtual meeting on March 15. But then in the backdrop of having no Saarc Summit since 2014, the virtual meeting remains ineffective, if not out of place, not only because it was programmed to contain China's influence in South Asia, which few would

*What is to be done then? Banishing fear ought to be the first thing. This is because fear takes us nowhere, it can only make things worse. Not only because much of it arises from ignorance, but also because, as Ibn Rushd would say, it leads to intolerance and violence.*

be excited about at this moment, but also it was too late to stop the spread of Covid-19. More collective efforts ought to have been pursued by the major powers, indeed, as early as January 2020 when news of Covid-19 started pouring in from China and WHO, and not wait till March 12 when WHO came out with a scientific declaration of Covid-19 outbreak as a pandemic.

Bangladesh too lacked knowledge and preparation in responding to the pandemic. It had some plans in the beginning when 316 Bangladeshis were evacuated from Wuhan on February 1 and quarantined for 14 days in Dhaka, although none of them tested positive for Covid-19. Bangladesh, however, lost hold of the situation when thousands started returning from Europe, mainly from Italy and Germany, and this continued even after international flights were banned on March 14.

Some estimates put the figure between 450,000-550,000 passengers returning from abroad in the first three months of 2020. Although late in February the passengers were asked to go for self-quarantine in their respective locations for 14 days, but the instruction lacked strict supervision. Returnees too were less enthusiastic in maintaining the quarantine. It may be pointed out here that Bangladesh was relatively slow in dealing with Covid-19 in January

# Overcoming the Covid-19 crisis

and February mainly because the whole country was geared towards the centennial birthday celebration of the Father of the Nation, which was due on March 17. The prime minister, however, took the bold decision of postponing the event on March 8. On April 17 the government declared that the entire country is at risk of Covid-19. Now there is no option but to face the virus boldly and smartly!

What is to be done then? Banishing fear ought to be the first thing. This is because fear takes us nowhere, it can only make things worse. Not only because much of it arises from ignorance, but also because, as Ibn Rushd would say, it leads to intolerance and violence. Indeed, by mid-March 2020, social media was full of fearful news, creating panic in the minds of people.

Secondly, taking lessons from the countries who have fared better in dealing with Covid-19 ought to be prioritised. China, South Korea and Vietnam are some of the countries that would immediately come to mind. Apart from getting information from the media and the internet, governmental and non-governmental, even personal, contacts ought to be activated for a

indeed, referring to 1971. This has created a structure which has proven useful not only during natural disasters but also in international peacekeeping, with Bangladesh peacekeepers even managing hospitals in Gbarnga, Liberia, during the Ebola outbreak in 2014. The expertise of the military in disaster management ought to be utilised alongside the civil authority and international agencies to the full. In this context, the military can play a critical role in ensuring inter-district communication, including supply of food and essential goods, besides helping in lockdown efforts.

Sixthly, re-starting the economy. This relates more to the formal sector than the informal sector, although the workforce of the latter probably has suffered more than the workforce of the former. This is because the income of many in the informal sector is on a daily basis, whereas in the case of the formal sector it is mostly monthly. A complete or partial lockdown otherwise is possible in the formal sector, but not in the informal sector. If one looks at the composition of the informal sector then one will find that in all three employment sectors—agriculture, industry and service—the informal employment is overwhelming,

in this sector, mainly because there are countries (Vietnam, for instance), who have managed to restart their RMG sector, and then, there are few other countries (Myanmar, for instance), whose workforce, particularly those who have lost their jobs, is being supported by the European Union with emergency cash fund.

Since Bangladesh has to compete with both Vietnam and Myanmar, for instance, in the RMG sector, it is important that Bangladesh keeps a track of things around the world so that it can best strategise its clothing industry. A change from shopping malls to e-shopping is bound to happen in both short- and mid-terms, the quicker the reorientation is done in the demand-supply channels the better. A proliferation of e-offices will also make virtual business the new norm, indeed, as much in the cities as in the rural areas, where e-entrepreneurs, subject to their availability and training, would certainly make a difference.

There is no denying the fact that a dubious business-political nexus, involved in money laundering, exists in the country. The government needs to keep a close eye on this more than ever. Indeed, a part of the laundered money in



Keeping faith in humans and restoring confidence in them are equally urgent in reproducing social resilience.

PHOTO: AFP

continuous flow of knowledge and know-how. Since some of these countries have opened up special hospitals, even factories producing essential items, it is important to know from multiple sources how that is being done and in what way Bangladesh could replicate it without jeopardising the lives of the people. Bangladesh missions, including the diaspora, can play a critical role in disseminating the knowledge and mapping the requirements so that Bangladesh would know how to save lives, what to produce, and what to supply.

Thirdly, there is an urgent need to reenergise the GO-NGO partnership, which has proven its efficiency and effectiveness in Bangladesh in dealing with both natural and human-induced disasters. The former refers to the periodic floods and cyclones, while the latter refers to the Rohingya, over a million of them, now residing in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. Indeed, the partnership need to be activated not only in the much-required health sector, which, I understand, is getting some pace, but also in the advocacy of hand-washing and social distancing, delivering food and medicines, helping farmers, even providing education and supporting community policing at the ward/thana level.

Fourthly, public health ought to be revisited. There is certainly a lot to learn from the regimes that have fared better during the pandemic, from Vietnam, for instance, mainly because, like Bangladesh, it is also a developing country. In fact, in matters related to public health, the democratic-authoritarian dichotomy has become meaningless. Instead, what is required is professionalism in delivering things when it is required in emergencies. One cannot help remembering the words of Alexander Pope, "For forms of government let fools contest; whatever is best administered is best." Public health ought to be mainstreamed, indeed, at levels of education, from kindergartens to tertiary, and not limit the knowledge to medical schools only. Also public health ought to be the subject of the visual and print media, professional courses, both civil and military, cultural performance, indeed, with a larger allocation in the national budget.

Fifthly, making good use of civil-military relationship. Bangladesh is the only country in South Asia where its military fought side by side with the people for the independence of the country during the Liberation War. I am,

indeed, according to the Labour Force Survey Bangladesh 2016-2017, 95.4 percent in the agriculture sector, 89.9 percent in the industry sector, and 71.8 percent in the service sector of the total employment in that sector. This, of course, has advantages and disadvantages.

One critical, if not unfortunate, advantage is that the informal economy will keep on running even in a dire situation. This gives us hope in the sense that a large section of the population, given that they are employed in the informal sector, would continue reproducing their lives in some form or another. Apart from not being able to get employed because of the lockdown and not getting the daily wage, the disadvantage of the informal workforce would be in their getting exposed to Covid-19 in a much bigger way. This is where creative intervention is required in reproducing the informal sector, which cannot be stopped in anyway, of course, without the workforce getting exposed to Covid-19. Washing hands, physical distancing, even testing for virus, would play a major role in reproducing the informal sector.

The matter is different for the formal sector, which needs to be "smart" to bounce back. There is bound to be a short-term downturn, but it is destined to have a quick upturn, provided it can play its part smartly. A cue can be taken from the South Korean tech giant Samsung, whose operating profit in the first three months of 2020, when Covid-19 was creating havoc all over the world, rose from a year ago and beat expectations slightly. The reason is not difficult to understand. Samsung was selling items, mainly memory chips, whose demand went up as more people were working from home and making their purchases online. As Albert Einstein once said, "In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity." Indeed, a thorough knowledge, backed by in-depth research, is required to map the items that would be required in short, mid, and long-terms.

The need for medical items, including PPE, ventilators, sanitisers, gloves, and the like is understandable. Securing the health condition of the workforce, particularly physical distancing, the production of such items ought to be carried out in full speed and, if required, with extra workforce. Given the relative secured space, the EPZs could play a greater role in restarting the production lines. Clothing certainly would be one item that would be required mid-term onwards. A greater smartness is required

Bangladesh is regularly siphoned off to the developed countries, with the latter legalising the illegal money to the full! In fact, one report, published in March 2020, indicates that capital flight from Bangladesh stands at USD 7.53 billion on an average per year, and that again due to misinvoicing during import and export alone. Since those involved in capital flight are from the same nexus, it becomes difficult to stop such transfer of wealth. As one critic pointed out, "Many politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen try to launder money as their children stay abroad." This is where the government, including civil watchdogs, must remain extra vigilant as "fear" at home would make the nexus and many more rationalise their illegal transfer of wealth even more.

Seventhly, education in the broadest sense of the term needs to be reinvented. There is no doubt that during this crisis some have made use of the "de-class space" with the help of the internet through various apps, such as Skype, Zoom, Google, and many more, instead of delivering lectures at the locked down traditional classrooms. But this needs to be institutionalised at all levels, from kindergartens to tertiary levels, with an effort to have education connected globally in real time. Fresh MOUs need to be signed to partner within and outside the country to offer gradable e-courses. But then, the national curricula at various levels need to be revisited as well. Not only for mainstreaming public health, as indicated earlier, but also for mainstreaming knowledge of survival, with a focus as much on the futures, nature and post-nationality as on the civilisational ingenuities.

Finally, restoring confidence in the minds of people with the objective of reproducing social resilience. It is important to keep in mind that humans are not only political and economic beings but also spiritual beings. There is no doubt that some would find solace and get spirited in prayers, some in music, some in poetry, some in plays and films, some in breathing fresh air, and then some just by remembering their mother walking past by them from nowhere. Whatever may be the means keeping faith in humans and restoring confidence in them are equally urgent in reproducing social resilience, without which overcoming the current crisis or any crisis, for that matter, would become difficult if not impossible.

Imtiaz Ahmed is professor of international relations and director, Centre for Genocide Studies, University of Dhaka.



# Remembering Jamilur Reza Choudhury

A tribute to a visionary

MAMNOON MURSHED CHOWDHURY

THERE was every reason for Jamilur Reza Choudhury not to return to the Dacca of 1968 after completing his PhD at the University of Southampton, UK. It was not the best of times being a Bengali in the state called Pakistan, especially when racial identity prevailed over academic brilliance. By then, he had proven his academic genius and had been told about all the opportunities that awaited him if only he wanted the world to be the stage. But he chose the road less travelled by and, as he used to say, it was not a difficult decision.

Prior to his post-graduation studies in UK, he had received education mostly at government institutions almost at no expense and he thought it was time to give something back. He kept on doing that till the last day of his life. When JRC, as he was reverently and fondly known to everyone, passed away on April 28, 2020, it was the departure of the most luminous star in the firmament of science and engineering in Bangladesh.

But JRC was much more than an engineering genius to the nation. He epitomised what the people of this country earnestly looked for among its leaders and intellectuals—he was a man of highest personal integrity. It is therefore hardly surprising that he was a most sought after person to lead and be part of activities that hardly had any relation to his professional expertise. This was only because of his impeccable credentials of honesty and unquestioned moral rectitude.

As the chairperson of Bangladesh

Poribesh Andolon (BAPA) from 2001 to 2006, he led the environmental activism to protect the rivers and water bodies of the country with vigour and unflinching courage. Till his death, he was serving as the chairperson of the Bangladesh chapter of People's Saarc Water Forum. Among the numerous organisations that he associated himself with dedication and care was the renowned Diabetic Association of Bangladesh, of which he was the vice president.

Within his own field of structural engineering, JRC had probably contributed to almost every one of Bangladesh's recent mega infrastructural projects. From the Bangabandhu Bridge over Jamuna to the ongoing engineering tour de force Padma Bridge, he had led the technical panel of experts with vision and innovation. Development projects like Karnaphuli underwater tunnel in Chattogram and the Dhaka elevated expressway, that have far reaching impacts on the future shape of these cities, had been progressing steadily under his stewardship. At the age of 77 and up to the time of his unexpected demise, JRC was as active as he had been in his youth.

From the day when a young JRC was first exposed to the use of computers during post-graduate studies in UK, the idea of information technology's capability of transforming a society remained with him. To transform the ideas into action, he pioneered the establishment of Bangladesh's first computer centre in Buet and remained associated with it for a decade. Just as he had earlier identified the priorities



Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury (November 15, 1943 – April 28, 2020).

PHOTO: PROTHOM ALO

of the newly liberated Bangladesh, JRC realised that with the advent of the new millennium, he should focus on the nation's future that depended on digitisation and information technology. He played instrumental roles in IT policy making bodies in government, including serving as the convener of Committee for Formulation of IT Policy for Bangladesh and as a member of the Prime Minister's Task Force on developing Digital Bangladesh.

JRC envisioned a knowledge based society in Bangladesh. He had always been a believer in the talents of Bangladeshi youth and together with equally zealous and likeminded band

of enthusiasts, he had been leading the Bangladesh Mathematical Olympiad in identifying geniuses from schools and colleges from locations all around the country. In one of the gatherings of BMO, he once declared his belief of a Bangladeshi winning a Nobel in the field of science within 2030.

It is interesting to note that JRC, through his own life and activities, deconstructed the stereotypical social perception of a genius. In their book *The Genius Famine* (2016), authors Charlton and Dutton concluded that geniuses seldom fit into normal society and they seldom want to. JRC was an exception. With confidence and self assurance, he had been actively

interacting and contributing to so many segments of the society and it made him among the most socially connected intellectuals of contemporary Bangladesh. This attribute was perhaps acquired during the early part of his life, where due to his father's job postings, he was exposed to people of diverse culture and backgrounds. For him, the discourse of knowledge was as much about the people as they were about ideas.

If anything equalled JRC's erudition, it was his humility and compassion. He could be approached by the youngest of his students and he dedicated his precious time addressing their queries. His relatives were amazed by his habit of enquiring about everyone's well being throughout the year. Even being the busy person that he was, he would visit or call the children of his deceased school friends every once in a while and reassure them. He was the first person to share the success stories of his students in social media, just as he was in condoling the passing away of an old colleague or alumni. In October 2019, when Abrar Fahad was brutally murdered in Buet campus, JRC went back to his alma mater to lead the calls for restoring dignity of life in the campus.

April, as Eliot wrote in "The Wasteland", is the cruellest month. In a country where shortage of persons of integrity has never been as acute as now, Jamilur Reza Choudhury's sudden departure created a gaping void that will be hardest fill.

Mamnoon Murshed Chowdhury is an architect who graduated from Buet and a visiting faculty at the University of Asia Pacific.

## Efficacy of the home-made mask



IN OTHER WORDS

AMITAVA KAR

THE recent back-and-forth debate over the use of face masks to prevent the spread of covid-19 has settled. In the beginning, the World Health Organisation

(WHO) said that there was no need for people who are well to wear face masks. Countries such as the US, the UK, much of Europe, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa and Singapore adopted this policy. They emphasised frequent hand-washing and physical distancing, and the need to save available masks for healthcare workers.

All that changed in early April when the US and Singapore switched to advising people to wear masks as they leave home. The WHO also made a U-turn. Dr Mike Ryan, executive director of WHO's health emergencies programme, said, "We can certainly see circumstances on which the use of masks, both home-made and cloth masks, at the community level may help with an overall comprehensive response to this disease."

Now, a noted Bangladeshi-American scientist is saying that home-made masks can be even better than medical masks. "We just published a study ["Performance of fabrics for home-made masks against spread of respiratory infection through droplets: a quantitative mechanistic study" (has not been peer reviewed)] on the efficacy of home fabrics in blocking droplets that are released during coughing sneezing and speaking," says Dr Taher M Saif on email.

Dr Saif is the Gutsell professor of

Mechanical Science and Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign whose research interests are Molecular, Cellular and Tissue Engineering. In 2015, he was the principal investigator of a scientific project that created the first bio-robot ("A living machine", *The Daily Star*, September 26, 2014) capable of revolutionising medical science.

What makes home-made masks better? Professor Saif says, "In the case of the coronavirus, droplets

spread from symptomatic as well as pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic infected individuals. A healthy individual can get infected by inhaling virus loaded droplets. We find that masks made of 2-layered T-shirts are better than medical masks both in terms of droplet blocking efficiency and in breathability. Home-made, 2-layer masks ensure more air flow through the mask cloth and less through the sides. There is not much benefit in using 3 layers. In fact 3-layer masks

lower breathability and forces more air through sides, increasing the risk of infection."

How did they arrive at this conclusion? "We examined the performance of ten different fabrics, ranging from cotton to silk, in blocking high velocity droplets (as released during coughing and sneezing), using a 3-layered commercial medical mask as a benchmark. We also assessed their breathability and ability to soak water. We believe that the materials should

be as breathable as possible, without compromising blocking efficiency, to reduce air flow through the sides of the mask since such flow would defeat the purpose of the mask. We found that most home fabrics substantially block droplets, even as a single layer. With two layers, blocking performance can reach that of surgical masks without significantly compromising breathability."

What is the fundamental difference between the ways they work? Professor Saif says, "We found out that home fabrics are hydrophilic to varying degrees, and hence soak water. In contrast, medical masks are hydrophobic, and tend to repel water. Incoming droplets are thus soaked and 'held back' by home fabrics, which might offer an as of yet untapped and understudied advantage of home-made cloth masks. Overall, our study suggests that most double-layered cloth face coverings may help reduce droplet transmission of respiratory infections."

Like in many countries, medical masks are in short supply in Bangladesh. They are to be reserved for frontline workers in healthcare and other areas. Professor Saif says, "Bangladesh is still at the early stage of Covid-19. Home-made masks might be the only protection people can have. This might have a significant effect on the fate of the country. Media can play a critical role here by informing the public."

Recently, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also has recommended home-made cloth face masks for use by the general public in areas of significant community-based transmission.

We have to use everything we have to fight this virus. A virus does not have creativity. We do.

PHOTO: THOMAS COEZ/AFP

Amitava Kar is a mechanical engineer.



Some governments have urged the public not to wear masks in order to ensure enough supplies for healthcare workers.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW**  
(1807-1882) American poet

*It takes less time to do a thing right, than it does to explain why you did it wrong.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Easy runs
- 6 Dominant
- 11 Showy display
- 12 Less bright
- 13 Intent look
- 14 "Pal Joey" writer
- 15 Utter
- 16 Make mistakes
- 18 Sweet tuber
- 19 Genesis name
- 20 Rent out
- 21 Quarter-back Manning
- 22 Sight from Yemen
- 24 Says further
- 25 Agony
- 27 Paul's collaborator
- 29 Flower part

**DOWN**

- 1 Inferior
- 2 Musical range
- 3 Went with the likeliest case
- 4 Lobed organ
- 32 Binary digit
- 33 PC key
- 34 "Evil Woman" band
- 35 Old roadster
- 36 Fire remnant
- 37 Dieter's no-no
- 38 Pranks
- 40 Take on
- 42 Mix up
- 43 Lasso loop
- 44 Said with a twang
- 45 Like some floors
- 5 Pittsburgh player
- 6 Left at sea
- 7 -- di-dah
- 8 Behaved comically
- 9 Harbinger
- 10 Friend of d'Artagnan
- 17 Stockpile again
- 23 Heir, often
- 24 Little laborer
- 26 Charm
- 27 Syria neighbor
- 28 New York tribe
- 30 Go by
- 31 Broke down
- 33 Canvas holder
- 39 Suffix with pay or play
- 41 "How -- love thee?"

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

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

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

**BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER**

WHAT'S SARGE DOING? TEXTING COOKIE

THEY SET UP A REMOTE DELIVERY SYSTEM

**BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT**

SOMETIMES IT FEELS LIKE I'M MISSING OUT ON OUR KIDS' LIVES. HOW SO?

WELL, FOR EXAMPLE, I DIDN'T KNOW THAT THE STINKBUG WAS HAMMIE'S SPIRIT ANIMAL.

AND YOU'RE SEEKING MORE OF THIS EXCITING INFORMATION? YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN!

South Korea fire kills 25

A fire at a warehouse in South Korea killed 25 people yesterday, it was reported, while "all necessary" resources were being mobilised to save those still trapped inside.

British PM's partner gives birth to baby boy



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's partner Carrie Symonds on Wednesday gave birth to a "healthy baby boy" in a London hospital, a spokesman for the couple said.

Hillary Clinton endorses Biden's White House bid

Hillary Clinton endorsed Joe Biden's White House bid on Tuesday, saying the United States needs a "real president" and not just "somebody who plays one on TV."



A man in protective gear offers funeral prayers for a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel who died from the COVID-19 coronavirus before his burial, at a graveyard in New Delhi, yesterday.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

1.6b workers risk losing livelihoods

Some 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy, representing nearly half of the global labour force, are in immediate danger of losing their livelihoods due to the coronavirus pandemic, the International Labour Organization (ILO) said yesterday.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

US panel urges targeted sanctions on India

A US government panel yesterday called for India to be put on a religious freedom blacklist over a "drastic" downturn under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, triggering a sharp rebuttal from New Delhi.

UN fears 20pc rise in domestic abuse

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION, London The coronavirus lockdown could lead to a 20% surge in domestic violence as victims remain trapped at home with their abusers, the United Nations predicted on Tuesday, warning the pandemic will have a "catastrophic impact" on women.



unplanned pregnancies if restrictions continue for six months, according to the study carried out with Johns Hopkins University, Victoria University in Australia and global health organisation Avenir Health.

Blast kills 3 in Kabul

AFP, Kabul A suicide bomber killed at least three people and wounded 15 others after detonating explosives near a military outpost in Kabul yesterday, an official confirmed.



People wearing face masks following the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak walk past flower installations set up to mark the upcoming Labour Day holiday, at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China, yesterday.

UNSC eyes 3-month 'humanitarian pause' in global conflicts

AFP, United Nations The UN Security Council plans to call for a 90-day "humanitarian pause" in conflicts worldwide as part of the ongoing struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a draft resolution obtained by AFP Tuesday.

e-Tender Notice section containing a table with columns: Tender ID, Name of goods, Tender/proposal publication date & time, Last date of tender submission. Includes details for various medical supplies and equipment.



**PADMA BRIDGE RAIL LINK PROJECT IS BEING BUILT WITH BSRM**

COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT **BSRM** building a safer nation

**GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS RECOGNIZES**

World's Largest VRM

**SHAH CEMENT**

# Toxic ship heading for Bangladesh

Could reach country's coast on May 7

PINAKI ROY

A shipbreaking company is set to illegally import a highly toxic ship for scrapping, risking workers' health and environmental damage.

The ship, once used for storing oil by offshore oil and gas companies, is an end-of-life floating storage and offloading (FSO) vessel named J Nat.

Now it is coming to Bangladesh from Indonesia carrying toxic waste contaminated with mercury, according to lab results obtained by the NGO Shipbreaking Platform.

It left Batam, Indonesia, on April 18 and is due to reach the Bangladeshi coast on May 7, according to satellite information sent by the ship and published on maritime databases.

The vessel is flying the flag of convenience of Palau, an offshore tax haven in the Pacific Ocean.

It is being towed by Indian company Prayati Shipping Pvt Ltd's tug S CAS (IMO 8411047), said the Platform.

Documents obtained by The Daily Star



show the vessel contains around 1,500 tonnes of mercury-contaminated waste, 60 tonnes of sludge oil, 1,000 tonnes of slop oil, and 500 tonnes of oily water on board.

Samples of this sludge have revealed mercury levels of 395mg/kg, according to lab results obtained by NGO Shipbreaking Platform. The Hazardous Waste and Ship-breaking Waste Management Rules list mercury and mercury compounds as hazardous if their concentration exceeds 50 mg/kg.

If dumped in Bangladesh, the waste will pose a serious threat to environment.

Like other end-of-life ships, J Nat also has toxins such as Polychlorinated Biphenyls, asbestos and other different heavy metals within its structures.

NGO Shipbreaking Platform issued a briefing paper on J Nat titled "Export of toxic vessel in breach of international law" on April 19.

The paper states that Indonesian authorities appear not to have informed Bangladesh about the presence of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Four customers, two of them in personal protective equipment, stand on marked spots to get take out iftar items at Star restaurant on Dhanmondi-2 in the capital yesterday. Sales of iftar items at the popular restaurants have started after the authorities announced that takeaways would be allowed.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



## Bollywood icon Irrfan Khan dies

AFP, Mumbai

Acclaimed Indian actor Irrfan Khan, whose international movie career included hits such as "Slumdog Millionaire", "Life of Pi" and "The Amazing Spider-Man", has died aged 53, his publicist said yesterday.

The Bollywood star, who was diagnosed with a neuroendocrine tumour in 2018, was admitted to a Mumbai hospital earlier this week with a colon infection.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tribute to the award-winning actor, tweeting "Irrfan Khan's demise is a loss to the world of cinema and theatre."

Funeral rites for the actor were under way at a graveyard in Mumbai, with only immediate family allowed to attend in keeping with India's strict lockdown to curb the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

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

### UN Mission praises Bangladesh people's resilience



Bangabandhu inspecting the Lalbahini in front of Gonobhaban on May 1, 1972.

April 30, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

#### FRANKFURT DELEGATION CALLS ON BANGABANDHU

An economic delegation from Frankfurt calls on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today at his official residence. They discuss various economic issues related to the reconstruction of the economy of Bangladesh and trade between the two countries.

#### UN REPORT ON BANGLADESH

The UN Mission to Bangladesh headed by the Austrian diplomat Erna Sailer has stated in its report that despite the disruption of life in the last 12 months, "the Bangladesh people have shown remarkable objectivity and attained a degree of unity."

"They have shown remarkable resilience and inborn capacity to help themselves

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## 13 prison guards, 1 inmate test positive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 13 prison guards, who watched over inmates at hospitals, tested positive for the coronavirus.

A hospitalised inmate also tested positive, Mohammad Monzur Hossain, assistant inspector general (admin) at the Department of Prisons, told the Daily Star yesterday.

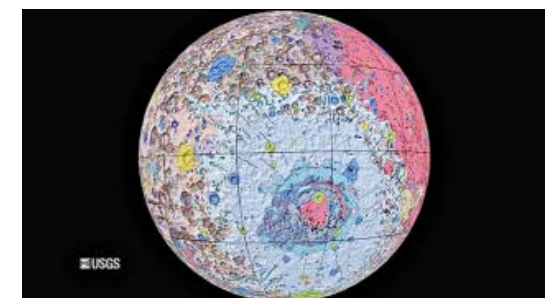
"The infected prison guards were discharging duties with ailing inmates at different hospitals in Dhaka," he said.

In different prisons across the country, 55 other officials and inmates are in quarantine with Covid-19 symptoms, he added.

The guards who tested positive are from a barrack near the old jail in the capital's Bakshibazar, he said, adding that they are now admitted to a hospital in Zinzira area.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

## First map of lunar surface made



MAIL ONLINE

Nasa will have a new resource to help it plan future missions to the Moon - after geologists create the first map of the rocks on the lunar surface.

The lunar map, called the Unified Geologic Map of the Moon, has been created by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), Nasa and the Lunar Planetary Institute.

The colourful map is designed to act like a blueprint of the Moon's surface geology and will be "invaluable to the scientific community, educators and the public".

It was created using information from six Apollo-era regional maps and updated information from more recent satellite missions to the Moon.

The different coloured regions show elevations, rock types and specific surface features to help aid future explorers and researchers.

The USGS digital map is available online for free and shows the geology of the Moon in "incredible detail" at a scale of one to five million.

## Save civilians in Rakhine, Chin states

UN human rights expert Yanghee Lee urges

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UN human rights expert Yanghee Lee has called upon the United Nations to step up its efforts to protect civilians in Rakhine and Chin states of Myanmar, alleging ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed by the Myanmar military there.

She called for investigations into the crimes and actions to ensure that there is not another systemic failure like in 2017 when a military crackdown led to the killings of thousands of Rohingyas and an exodus of some 750,000 Rohingyas to Bangladesh.

The International Court of Justice on January 23 ordered for provisional measures to prevent crimes of genocide against Rohingyas in Rakhine State and submit reports

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



A woman is being taken to hospital by a rickshaw-van on an otherwise empty Old Elephant Road in the capital. As the income of poor people falls significantly, those needing medical attention have become particularly vulnerable. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Economic cost of pandemic mounts

Europe struggles to ease lockdown as US deaths surpass Vietnam War toll

AFP, Berlin

European countries tried to balance how far to ease coronavirus lockdowns yesterday, with Germany enforcing mandatory masks in shops, as the crushing global economic cost of the pandemic became clearer.

Excitement over moves towards normality is being tempered by fear of fresh outbreaks of a disease that has already killed more than 217,500 people worldwide and infected more than three million.

China said its legislature would hold its annual session in May after being delayed by the coronavirus, signalling the communist leadership's growing confidence in taming the disease that emerged in the country late last year.

But with forecasts predicting the worst recession in a century, the world was anxiously looking to the United States where the first economic growth figures from the pandemic era were due to be published and the death toll exceeded that from the Vietnam War.

From yesterday in Germany, masks were needed to enter shops, which began to open last week after the government declared its outbreak under control. Nose and mouth coverings are already compulsory on buses, trains and trams.

"I think it's great, it's the right thing," said Heike Menzel, 54, who was stacking shelves in Bio Company supermarket, wearing a simple black fabric mask: "You're protecting

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

**PRAYER TIMING APRIL 30**

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4:00	12:45	4:45	6:30	8:00
JAMAAT 4:10	1:15	5:00	6:40	8:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



**SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING**

RAMADAN APRIL SEHRI IFTAR		
6	30	6:30
7	MAY 1	3:59 6:31
8	MAY 2	3:58 6:31