



# The Daily Star



REGD. No. DA 781 | Vol. XXX No. 108 | BAISHARH 20, 1427 BS | **Your Right to Know** | RAMADAN 9, 1441 HIJRI | 12 PAGES PRICE: Tk 12.00

<b>BANGLADESH UPDATE</b>	<b>552</b> New cases in 24hrs	<b>8,790</b> Total cases	<b>175</b> Deaths	<b>177</b> Recoveries	<b>GLOBAL UPDATE</b>	<b>242,103</b> Deaths	<b>3,440,538</b> Total cases
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## Stimulus all set to unfurl

Govt agencies, banks nearly complete preparations to implement Tk 95,619cr packages to cushion blow from pandemic

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Government agencies and banks have almost completed their preparations to implement 18 stimulus packages worth Tk 95,619 crore to tackle the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

The packages, equivalent to 3.3 percent of the country's GDP, will be implemented under the supervision of Bangladesh Bank and the finance ministry.

In line with the BB's instructions, banks will give out Tk 77,750 crore of the total amount in the form of soft loans to large, medium and small businesses in the industrial and service sectors, and growers and entrepreneurs in the farm sector.

The central bank has launched six refinance schemes to allow lenders to smoothly implement the credit programmes under the stimulus packages.

Under the six schemes, banks will disburse funds among the affected businesses and farmers, and then the BB will reimburse them the bulk of the money. The banks will have to pay the BB back after recovering money from borrowers.

The BB will provide around Tk 51,000 crore to the lenders under the refinance schemes. This means the lenders will have to give loans of Tk 26,750 crore from their own sources.

The Daily Star contacted a number of banks, which said they have almost completed the preparations to disburse loans under the schemes.

Since the enforcement of the nationwide shutdown on March 26, banks have been facing a cash crunch as many depositors withdrew money amid coronavirus scare. They now have to take the BB's funds to continue their lending activities, said the managing directors of the banks.

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Front line employees of Mugda General Hospital applaud as a man, who recovered from Covid-19, leaves the facility. Nine other patients were released yesterday from the 500-bed hospital in the capital dedicated for Covid-19 patients. Inset, people, mostly with symptoms, wait at the hospital gate early in the morning to get tested.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



## Journos provide antidote to the 'pandemic of misinformation'

UN secy-gen says about Covid-19 on eve of world press freedom day

STAR REPORT

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called for greater protection of journalists who are providing the "antidote" to what he has characterised as a pandemic of misinformation surrounding the Covid-19 crisis.

He made the appeal in a video message for World Press Freedom Day today. He underscored the crucial role media has in helping people make informed decisions.

Under the current circumstances, those decisions can make the difference between life and death, Guterres added.

"As the pandemic spreads, it has also given rise to a second pandemic of misinformation, from harmful health advice to wild conspiracy theories.

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## Detect, isolate and contain

Say experts as 552 new coronavirus cases, five deaths reported

MOULUDD AHMED SUJAN

As the number of Covid-19 deaths and infected patients keep going up, experts blame it on inadequate case detection and isolation measures taken up by the authorities.

They said although the ongoing shutdown has "slowed" the transmission rate of the coronavirus, the future might be "harsh" if there is no rigorous case detection and isolation measures put in place through the enforcement of a strict countrywide lockdown.

"The lockdown has slowed down the transmission, but we see the authorities' decision to open garment industries without ensuring certain health measures. Such actions could increase the danger," Dr Mushtaq Hussain, consultant at the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told The Daily Star yesterday.

Earlier in the day, the Directorate General of

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## You die, we live!

Global buyers choose this policy to recover from contagion loss, hold back \$5b earnings of Bangladeshi RMG exporters; glut of work-order cancellations pushes down the sector deeper

SYED ASHFAQUL HAQUE

Discount, deferred payment, auction or cancellation!

Options are being dished out by the buyers and importers of Bangladeshi garments to its makers. As Europe stutters to reopen after the coronavirus pandemic, global apparel businesses are making up their loss with money of manufacturers.

Except for a few lucky ones, most of the garment-makers are facing a three-way squeeze from their buyers on the prices of goods shipped months before coronavirus broke loose in Europe and the US, finds The Daily Star talking with over two-dozen manufacturers.

Troubles for factories are coming from three directions: goods that were already in stores of buyers but not paid for, goods that are still lying at ports of export destinations and work of goods that are in progress at factories in Bangladesh.

Goods worth over \$3 billion, which were shipped between January and February, are mostly lying at European and US ports, and items valued another \$2 billion or so could make it to stores, according to exporters. The export volume is similar to that in the corresponding months of 2019, but, unlike last year, hardly any payment is released by the buyers as yet.

Communications from buyers are

almost identical: business was ravaged by coronavirus, no sale as stores were closed down for months, and exporters, as partners in the trade, must compensate for the heavy loss.

For goods that are already in stores, buyers are pressing garment-makers to take payments six months later or wait till the end of year for an amount that's to be determined on sale.

For goods that are lying at ports, communications from abroad are quite blunt: up to 50% discount on agreed prices, take containers back home or else goods are to end up in auction.

And prices of goods that are to be shipped in the next 3-4 months would be slashed by up to 30 percent.

For example, about 35 factories shipped \$27m goods for prominent UK retailer Debenhams in the last two months. According to a report of Apparelinsider.com, the retailer is now refusing to pay for the goods (\$20m) that are already in its stores and offering only 10pc off \$7m price for the shipment lying at ports.

Worried to death, exporters are desperately trying to point out: options are absurd, no margin is left in orders to compensate, and no payment released from buyers means factories being laid-off.

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## Pvt univs ask for stimulus package

Say they need help in paying 25,000 teachers, staffers

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Private universities have sought a stimulus package from the government to shore them up amid closure of all academic institutions due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

They requested for the aid so that they can pay salaries of 25,000 teachers and staffs at these institutions for at least six months as they stopped

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## Shutdown likely to stretch till May 16

High-powered meet today to assess situation including effects of reopening of RMG units

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and RASHIDUL HASAN

The government is likely to extend the ongoing shutdown for most public and private offices until May 16.

"We sent a proposal to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in this regard for her consideration... We are hopeful about issuing a gazette notification in this regard by Monday," State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday.

As factories begin to reopen, thousands of workers from across the country have been coming to the industrial areas and cities for almost a week. Health experts have questioned the effectiveness of such a shutdown amid the coronavirus outbreak that has shown no sign of declining.

At least 175 detected Covid-19 patients have died in the country, including yesterday's five. The total number of confirmed cases has reached 8,790,

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The 2,000-bed isolation facility at the International Convention City Bashundhara for Covid-19 patients is all set for launch tomorrow. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

### আমরা শোকাহত



**আমানউল্লাহ চৌধুরী**  
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মৃত্যু: ৩০ এপ্রিল ২০২০

ব্যাংক এশিয়া লিমিটেড-এর উদ্যোক্তা পরিচালক ও ব্যাংক গ্রুপের ভাইস চেয়ারম্যান জনাব আমানউল্লাহ চৌধুরীর মৃত্যুতে ব্যাংক এশিয়া পরিবার গভীরভাবে শোকাহত। আমরা তার বিদেহী আত্মার মাগফেরাত কামনা করছি এবং শোক মগ্ন পরিবারের প্রতি গভীর মমবেদনা জানাচ্ছি।





## Shutdown likely to stretch

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according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

The health ministry is going to have two important meetings today and tomorrow -- one with mostly factory owners and another with health experts, an official said.

The shutdown that started on March 26 was extended until May 5 earlier. All essential services and vehicles carrying goods are out of its purview.

The government on April 23 while extending the closure till May 5, said factories, including pharmaceuticals and export-oriented manufacturing units, could reopen by ensuring the workers' safety.

Health experts, however, say reopening the factories increases the risk of a wider transmission.

Asked why the government wants to extend the closure further, Farhad Hossain said, "We don't want the spread of coronavirus among a large number of people by relaxing the shutdown... People are getting infected in a growing number in recent days. We think extending the shutdown will help us to contain the spread."

As of yesterday, 2,592 out of 7,602 export-oriented garments and other factories reopened, according to Industrial Police.

This resulted in an influx of workers to the industrial areas in Dhaka and elsewhere. This has been

happening although Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan on Tuesday said no one would be allowed to enter the capital for work.

### TWO MEETINGS

An inter-ministerial meeting is scheduled to be held at the Health and Family Welfare Ministry today, which is expected to be attended by representatives of home, commerce, labour and employment, and industries ministries, and police.

Representatives of business associations, FBCCI, BGMEA, BKMEA, and BTMA, will also attend the meeting where the issue of reopening factories on a limited scale will be discussed, according to the invitation letter for the meeting.

"It's actually a meeting with the industry people," Habibur Rahman Khan, additional secretary at the Health and Family Welfare Ministry, said.

He said the government allowed limited operation of factories "considering the reality" and the meeting would be held to discuss the impact of the decision and what further measures can be taken to ensure health safety.

Besides, a meeting of the national technical advisory committee formed last month to tackle the outbreak would be held tomorrow, he said.

Health issues would be discussed there, Habibur told The Daily Star yesterday.



**Policemen who tested positive for the coronavirus waiting in a vehicle in front of Airport Police Station in the capital yesterday to be taken to isolation facilities. Inset, law enforcers arrive in protective gear at Central Police Hospital to get tested for coronavirus. The photos were taken yesterday.**

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## You die, we live!

FROM PAGE 1

Orders worth \$3.15 billion (of 1,153 factories) have already been cancelled, said Rubana Huq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). "It will directly impact the lives of 2.2 million workers, not to mention their families."

Shipped in January and early February, nearly \$18million goods of the Winners Creations Ltd are still lying at ports of North America. "All I've been doing is to ask buyers repeatedly to accept the goods and clear payments," said Winners' managing director, Durjoy Rahman.

Mostafiz Uddin, managing director of Chattogram-based the Denim Expert Limited, told The Daily Star that his buyers have already sent letter to consider payment being deferred by 180 days. "It's neither acceptable nor sustainable."

Truly, it's absolutely unfair the way apparel business is being run over decades. Here buyers and importers set the rules of the game, in which liabilities are solely on shoulders of garment-makers.

With a clause of deferred payment in letter of credit (L/C) -- the formal loan agreement for a purchase -- they are literally fleeing the Bangladesh garment sector and raking in fortunes without investing a single penny for production of goods. With such L/Cs, these global traders let goods be made with money of makers, get those shipped out and release payments to manufacturers after months of delay.

This means they buy their products on credit and pay manufacturers only after selling those. And in case of poor sale, buyers invariably would ask for discounts and manufacturers oblige. Discount keeps the business going, after all.

In line with the legacy, buyers are now laying down the rules of business

on their own. The scale of damage that coronavirus has caused to the global \$758 billion apparel market a year is yet to be ascertained. But, if not the \$5 billion export proceeds are released by the buyers anytime soon, most of garment-makers in Bangladesh would find themselves on verge of bankruptcy, fear exporters.

About 80 percent of 5,000 factories in Bangladesh supply the cheap clothes to the world market, and buyers offer the same price they used to give 20 years back for many items including T-shirts. Factories in this bracket are barely surviving and set to be hit hard with this corona-squeeze. Buyers kept on hold \$1 lakh payment of Century Design & Fashions Ltd. And its managing director, Azharul Haque, does not know to how to pay the bills.

The next three months is the peak time for sweater industries. Owner of Crown Fashions and Crown Exclusives, Rezaul Ahsan, has invested almost 60pc of the \$15 million order on procurement of raw materials and accessories. And the whole investment of country's leading sweater exporter is now at stake. "I'm living on my nerves, constantly," he said.

Garment-makers kicked up an uproar when they hurried on to cut short the lockdown period and open factories against this grim backdrop. "Why is this desperation" is the commonly asked question.

"We're open!" Possibly, a desperate message exporters want to send out to their buyers.

"Garment manufacturers are in fear of their apparel-rivals in Vietnam that has recovered fast from the pandemic and is open for business," observed development economist, Prof. Rashid Al Mahmud Titumir. "They don't want to lose out to Vietnam whatever work orders they are left with."

The government has announced a \$589 million soft loan for the largest

forex-earning sector. But this bailout package alone is not enough for the beleaguered sector. Monthly salary of about 3.6 million workers in this industry stands at \$423 million, BGMEA president pointed out.

Rashed, a teacher at Dhaka University and chairman of the development think-tank Unnayan Onneshan, thinks this sector requires a sustainable bailout formula to survive in the post-pandemic world. All the stakeholders-- the manufacturers, buyers, governments, labour unions and organisations like Accord-Alliance-- should sit together and find out a long-term formula like the way they did after Rana Plaza tragedy in 2013 to scale up compliance standard in factories.

A huge social and economic disaster is waiting to happen if it's not done, he warned.

The sector is in dire straits for sure, but it has a very negative image as well, for which it's more often than not misunderstood and deprived of the public and private support it needs. As public perception goes, garment-makers are worker-unfriendly, low-paying, and lying-for-profit greed merchants.

The image is not fully a figment of imagination. But, truly, the sector has come a long way, going through some serious reforms since 2013. And, now is the time when these industries require serious help, more strategic than financial.

With a long-term bailout formula, garment sector would recover to remain as the county's robust growth-driver. And, with a short-term unplanned assistance, it's destined to become an industry on saline for good.

Would garments sector get medicine for recovery? Onus is on the government. (Senior business reporter Refayet Ullah Mirdha contributed to this report with additional information)

## Journos provide

FROM PAGE 1

"The press provides the antidote: verified, scientific, fact-based news and analysis," the UN secretary-general said.

Meanwhile, Transparency International Bangladesh has called upon the government to ensure an environment conducive to free and unrestricted discharge of professional functions of media as an indispensable precondition for constitutional rights of citizens and democratic accountability of the government.

In the context of the Covid-19 crisis, the TIB has demanded the government and other stakeholders protect professional freedom and health safety of media workers in the interest of people's access to information and public awareness.

In a statement issued yesterday on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2020, the graft watchdog expressed concern over media workers reporting on corruption, theft, extortion and swindling of relief goods being subjected to self-censorship by various predicaments, harassment, intimidation, physical abuse, torture, disappearance and arbitrary arrests under motivated use of the Digital Security Act.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "The World Press Freedom Day this year is of much greater importance than ever. Free media is the most important catalyst to control illicit designs of those who are out to convert the Covid-19 pandemic into a festival of corruption."

"Media must be free to report not only on corruption and irregularities in relief operation on the ground, but also on different types of abuse of power and collusive corruption at higher levels where the need to fast-track procurement and distribution decisions in the crisis and recovery period may be treated as a licence for self-enrichment by a section of the politically and otherwise powerful."

"In this context it will be self-defeating to create any predicament against the media from discharging their professional role of information disclosure freely and safely," the TIB executive director said.

**US HIGHLIGHTS FREE EXPRESSION**  
The USA has joined countries around the world, including Bangladesh, to reaffirm the universal right of free expression and the essential role press

freedom plays in protecting democracy and keeping citizens informed and safe, reports UNB.

"The work of journalists, photojournalists, and media outlets often comes with sacrifice, including here in Bangladesh," said US Ambassador to Bangladesh Earl Miller in a statement yesterday marking the World Press Freedom Day.

"This year, we pay special tribute to those journalists who work tirelessly, often under stressful and dangerous conditions, to inform the public about the Covid-19 pandemic."

The envoy said they honour the journalists who have fallen ill from Covid-19 and their selfless dedication to public service.

"We honor the life of Humayan Kabir Khokon, a senior journalist who worked until the day of his death and posthumously tested positive for the virus. We send our sincere condolences to Khokon's family," he said.

Ambassador Miller said they honour all journalists, everywhere, who have sacrificed their lives, freedom and personal wellbeing in pursuit of truth and justice.

### 'END CRIMINALISATION OF JOURNALISM'

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, David Kaye, has urged states to free all media workers detained because of their work and stop the intimidation and repression of the independent press.

"A free press gives people access to information of all kinds, especially critical during a public health crisis," he said in a statement on Friday marking World Press Freedom Day today.

Kaye said the theme of this year's World Press Freedom Day is "Journalism without fear or favour".

He urged all states to ensure that media workers can do their jobs without fear, keeping in mind that journalism expands people's right to know and their right to accountable government.

He said detaining journalists runs directly counter to the state's obligation to ensure an enabling environment for the media.

"At a time when disease outbreaks spread through detention facilities, detention's cruelty is exposed, imposing an additionally excessive punishment that carries with it the risk of illness and death," said Kaye.

## Pvt univs ask

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taking tuition fees from students.

Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh (APUB) sent a letter to the University Grants Commission (UGC) in this regard on Wednesday.

The association promised to repay the aid in instalments over three years when the situation stabilises.

"We are hoping positive response from the UGC as many universities are facing existential threat," said Sheikh Kabir Hossain, chairman of APUB.

"We did not mention exact amount of incentive as we are still estimating it," he said.

All the educational institutions have been closed since March 17 and the government has extended the closure till May 5 to stem the further spread of Covid-19.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on April 27 said all educational institutions would remain closed until September if the coronavirus situation does not improve.

Fund crisis in the universities deepened further as they have halted their admission process -- another major source of income -- in line with the UGC directives, the letter said, adding that the newly set up universities would suffer the most.

According to the latest UGC annual report 2018, there are some 3,62,000 students at 105 private universities across the country.

"We have received the letter ... We will forward the letter to the Ministry of Education soon," UGC Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah told The Daily

Star.

The issue was discussed at a meeting attended by Education Minister Dipu Moni, UGC top officials, vice-chancellors of several public and private universities and leaders of APUB on Thursday, he said.

The minister said she would look into the matter after receiving the letter, said the UGC chair.

UGC acting secretary Ferdous Zaman said the meeting also decided that the private universities would not pressure the students or their guardians for the tuition fees during the ongoing crisis.

It also decided that the authorities would not lay off their teachers and staff and their salaries would be paid regularly, he added.

### ONLINE EXAMS FOLLOWING UGC GUIDELINES

At the meeting, the education ministry and the UGC have asked all private and public universities to complete academic activities for the current semester through online classes.

However, private universities will have to hold exams in line with the commission's guideline in that score, which is in the making.

"At the meeting, we decided that all public and private universities must ensure that the classes be held online," Ferdous said.

UGC sources said that only 63 universities out of the 151 are conducting online classes. Of them, only two to three are public universities, and the rest are private.

## Detect, isolate

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Health Services (DGHS) reported that 552 new cases were detected and five more people died in 24 hours since 2:30pm yesterday.

With it, the total number of detected Covid-19 cases stood at 8,790 while the death toll hit 175.

Like other days, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) at the DGHS, informed about the country's latest Covid-19 situation in a bulletin through videoconferencing.

She said three more patients receiving treatment at hospitals recovered in those 24 hours, taking the total number of reported recovery cases to 177.

Among the five deceased, three were males and two were females. All of them were from Dhaka.

One of the deceased was over 60 years, one between 51 and 60, two were between 41 and 50 and one was between 31 and 40, said Prof Nasima.

The authorities had reported the first three Covid-19 cases in the country on March 8 and the first death on March 18.

Of all the 175 deceased, 73 percent were males, shows IEDCR data.

Some 42 percent of all the deceased were above 60, some 27 percent were aged between 51 and 60, some 19 percent between 41 and 50, some seven percent between 31 and 40. The rest were below 30.

No death has so far been reported from the age group 11-20, shows the data.

Dhaka city continues to remain the worst-affected region in terms of the number of cases and deaths caused by the deadly virus.

As of yesterday, a total of 4,309 cases -- 56.02 percent of all cases -- were detected in Dhaka city alone, according to the IEDCR website.

More than 83 percent of the total cases were from Dhaka division, it showed.

As many as 95 Covid-19 patients who died in hospitals were from the capital, seemingly the epicenter of the outbreak in Bangladesh.

During the last three days, the city

saw more than 200 new cases daily -- a continuous upward trend compared to other regions.

Among other regions, Narayanganj saw the highest cases -- 987 -- followed by Gazipur with 322 confirmed cases.

Out of 342 confirmed cases in Chattogram division, highest 104 cases were detected in Cumilla district, proved to be another epicenter outside Dhaka division.

Mymensingh saw 269 cases as of yesterday while 149 cases were detected in Rangpur division, 147 cases in Khulna, 135 in Sylhet, 123 in Barishal and 112 in Rajshahi.

A total of 5,827 individuals' samples were tested in 24 hours since 2:30pm yesterday, which is 4.56 percent more than the previous day, Dr Nasima said. One hundred and sixty eight people were put under isolation across the country over the period, she added.

### 'CASE DETECTION, ISOLATION CRUCIAL'

Recently, thousands of readymade garment workers have returned to work from their village home after the government allowed to operate RMG factories with certain conditions.

Sources, however, said the decision was finalised without fixing any health protocol in coordination with the DGHS.

"Maintaining social distancing is the key to contain the transmission. Now the situation will depend on how we are maintaining it," Prof Nasima told The Daily Star, while replying to a query on the issue.

Asked whether the reopening decision was taken in consultation with the DGHS, she said, "You better ask it our high-ups."

Source said the government office concerned and the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association had sought suggestions from the DGHS and the IEDCR in this regard.

Later, the DGHS asked to ensure social distancing in the living places of the garment workers, while the IEDCR suggested keeping the workers in 14 days of quarantine before they would join work.

"There was a recommendation that

## A step forward for Ganashyasta test kit validation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University has formed a committee that will supervise the validation of the home-grown rapid test kit developed by Gonoshasthaya Kendra.

"We had a meeting with the scientists of Gonoshasthaya Kendra. We have formed a six-member committee. They will prepare a protocol based on the discussions with Gonoshasthaya," said BSMMU Vice-Chancellor Prof Kanak Kanti Barua.

Once the committee finalises the protocol, it will have to be approved by the BSMMU Institutional Review Board before the validation of the kit -- Rapid Dot Blot -- begins, he told The Daily Star. The committee will decide on the sample size of those who will be tested, the VC added.

## Stimulus all

FROM PAGE 1

Every bank has to sign participation agreements with the BB to get funds under the schemes. Some cash-strapped lenders have already done it, they mentioned.

They also said the banks would start disbursing loans to export-oriented industries this week for paying workers' wages for April as the BB already gave the lenders Tk 2,000 crore from a Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package.

M Kamal Hossain, managing director of the Southeast Bank, said both the central bank and the finance ministry have taken prompt measures to implement the stimulus packages.

"We have already signed a participation agreement to get funds from one of the refinancing schemes. The other agreements will be signed soon," he mentioned.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, said banks may start using the soft funds from the central bank by this month as many of them have acted promptly and submitted applications to the BB.

Seeking anonymity, a BB official said 41 banks have so far signed participation agreements with the central bank under the refinancing scheme worth Tk 5,000 crore for small and medium entrepreneurs in the farm sector.

"We hope banks will start giving loans within a week or two, as the central bank will disburse the required funds in the quickest possible time," added the official.

Banks will get funds under the scheme at 1 percent interest rate, and lend those to borrowers in the farm sector at 4 percent interest rate.

Under the Tk 30,000 crore package for large industries and the service sector, Sonali Bank, the country's biggest lender in terms of loan disbursement and deposit mobilisation, has already sanctioned loans of Tk 1,000 crore to Biman Bangladesh Airlines at 9 percent interest rate.

The state-run bank will get an interest subsidy of 4.50 percent from the BB for the loans.

Under 11 other stimulus packages, the government will provide Tk 17,866 crore in the form of budgetary support to the underprivileged people, farmers and the government employees infected with the coronavirus.

Farmers will be provided with fertilisers, machinery, fuel and electricity at subsidised prices under one of the packages involving Tk 9,500 crore.

The government will also give Tk 2,000 as cash support to each of the 50 lakh urban families hit hard by the nationwide shutdown.

Those engaged in the informal labour sector -- mostly manual labourers, mechanics, construction workers, rickshaw-pullers, street vendors and restaurant employees -- will be eligible for the cash support, said Shah Kamal, senior secretary at the disaster management and relief ministry.

"Our ministry has prepared a list of such people based on information collected by the offices of the deputy commissioners, upazila nirbahi officers and city corporations across the country. We will submit the list to the Prime Minister's Office on May 4."

The government also has a plan to provide food assistance to 1.25 crore families under various programmes, Kamal said.

The public employees, infected with the virus, will get Tk 5 to Tk 10 lakh based on their pay scales.

Experts say the BB has to be proactive in implementing the stimulus packages as the central bank of a country plays a pivotal role in containing the economic fallout during a recession.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute, said the BB will have to take prompt measures to implement the refinancing schemes which will give a lifeline to the moribund economy.

The BB should share the credit risk and offer the lenders a loan guarantee scheme to encourage them to disburse loans, he said.

Otherwise, many banks will be reluctant to disburse loans out of fear that the loans will become defaulted given the poor economic outlook, Ahsan pointed out.

He further said the government should come up with a package ranging from Tk 25,000-Tk 30,000 crore to provide cash support to the marginal people. It will help boost their capacity to purchase goods.

"This will also help create demands for products and offset the ongoing deflationary trend at the same time."

Many countries such as the US, Chile, Malaysia and Singapore have already injected a large amount of the money into their economies, he added.





**A MAKE-BELIEVE OUTING...** A family poses for a group selfie in their balcony. The father said his six-year-old daughter has been upset for the last month as she couldn't leave the house and hasn't met her kindergarten friends. It was her mother's idea for all of them to dress up and come to the verandah to take photos, in order to cheer her up. The photo was taken last week from the capital's Tejkunipara.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Laying Covid-19 victims to a dignified rest

Volunteer organisation, city corporations conducting burials

HELEMLUL ALAM

For over two decades, charity organisation Hamza Al-Markazul has been involved in the burial process of the deceased, among other social works.

But they never thought they would have to bury people whose families wanted to bid farewell but could not because of Covid-19.

Since the outbreak of the virus in the country, they have been conducting funerals and burials of victims at the government-designated graveyard in Khilgaon-Taltola with the help from the two Dhaka city corporations.

As there was a fear of infection, initially family members of a deceased would not come to the graveyard during burial of their near and dear ones, but since the last one week the situation has changed, said Shahidul Islam, acting chairperson of the organisation.

"Presence of family members has started to increase since the announcement of the World Health Organization that a deceased person is unlikely to spread the virus," he said.

Still the grim reality remains that the number of deaths due to coronavirus continue to take place in the country and accordingly, volunteers of Hamza Al-Markazul carry on with their social and humane responsibility of performing the last rites of those succumbing to the deadly virus.

Till Wednesday, around 180 people have been buried at Khilgaon-Taltala graveyard, designated for the burial by the two city corporations.

Of them around 140 have been tested positive, Shahidul told this correspondent. "We have also sent bodies of 20 Hindus to the cremation field at Postagola following proper procedures," Shahidul Islam told this correspondent.

Over the last couple of days, family members of around 30 Covid-19 infected persons were present during the burial, he said. Shahidul said they have also handed over three bodies to family members who took those to Sylhet, Feni and Sirajganj for burial.

### 'A COMBINED EFFORT'

A 17-member group of volunteers are involved in the total process. Being informed by the health ministry officials, the team receives the body from a hospital or other places and brings it to the graveyard after disinfecting the body properly.

Tanzina Sarwar, chief social welfare official of Dhaka North City Corporation, said besides Al Markazul, two other organisations -- Quantum Foundation and Rahmat A Elahi -- are also involved with the burial process.

"We are making sure that the bodies are being disinfected properly at the hospital before bringing those to the burial ground," she added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

## BDI mourns passing of Prof Jamilur Reza

CITY DESK

Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI), a U.S.-based non-profit corporation promoting socio-economic development in Bangladesh, mourned the loss of Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury, an honorary life member of BDI, a press release said.

In his passing, Bangladesh has lost one of its most distinguished citizens with a global reputation as a visionary engineer and educator, the organisation said.

Through journal publications, consulting work, and presentations, he contributed to a corpus of knowledge that has improved our understanding of scientific theory to solve problems of poverty and economic development, it added.

Prof Choudhury began his academic career at Buet. He served as the VC of Brac University (2001-2010), and was serving as the VC of University of Asia Pacific at the time of his passing, a position he held since 2012.

He published numerous research papers on tall buildings, low-cost housing, earthquake-resistant designs, cyclones and storm surges, IT applications and policy and has patented methods in his name.

He received numerous awards and accolades for his work, including the Ekushey Padak in 2017.

# Shouldn't make the same mistake again

Health experts call for institutional quarantine of returnees

RASHIDUL HASAN

Allowing Bangladeshis returning from abroad, especially the Middle East, to go into self-quarantine poses a big risk for public health. To avert that, the authorities concerned should arrange institutional quarantine facilities for the returnees and make it mandatory, recommended experts.

They said a home-quarantined returnee puts family members at risk of contracting the virus. At the same time, the process is also not socio-economically feasible, as most do not have living spaces that can follow proper guidelines.

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former Southeast Asia regional director of World Health Organization, explained the flaws of home or self-quarantine process for returnees.

"Many of us cannot follow quarantine guidelines at home. This is because most people simply don't have accommodations that provide separate rooms and bathrooms for the quarantined person during the 14-day period," he said.

Additionally, there is hardly any surveillance infrastructure in place to track whether the said person is indeed maintaining self-quarantine, which renders the whole process doubtful.

As an example, the public health expert cited Vietnam, one of the most successful countries in containing the spread of Covid-19, despite being a neighbour to the first epicentre, China. Prof Muzaherul said Vietnam simply did not allow any passenger to stay in home quarantine.

"Rather, they arranged institutional quarantine for every Vietnamese returning from abroad. For example, a woman who escaped from the airport was tracked and sent to institutional quarantine by police," he said.

Meanwhile, a doctor working at the health desk of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) tested positive for coronavirus on April 23, said Dr Nusrat, who works at the health desk.

Following that, she said, 10 of the doctor's co-workers -- four doctors and six sanitary inspectors and nurses -- were advised to go into home

quarantine.

The infected doctor last worked at HSIA on April 15 -- involved in screening 337 Saudi Arabia returnees. He developed Covid-19 symptoms on April 19, Dr Nusrat added.

Of the 337 Saudi returnees, 309 were sent to the institutional quarantine facility at Ashkona Hajj camp, while 28 were allowed to go home after they were advised to be under home quarantine for the mandated two-week period, doctors at HSIA's health desk said.

According to HSIA sources, around 3,000 Bangladeshis returned to the country through special flights since March 16 -- the day the government had imposed a ban on flying of passenger flights to and from Dhaka to contain the spread of Covid-19.

According to the health desk, of the 3,000 Bangladeshis, only 590 were sent to institutional quarantine and the rest were advised to stay in home quarantine.

### A FAULTY PROCESS?

Dr Jahirul, a doctor at the health desk, said passengers who showed medical certificates stating that they were tested negative for Covid-19, were allowed to go home with advice of staying in self-quarantine for 14 days.

But officials of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) said there are flaws in the process.

For example, they said 290 Bangladeshi migrant workers returned from Oman on April 24 and were allowed to go home instead of keeping them in institutional quarantine.

"The workers showed a common medical certificate, stating that they are not infected with Covid-19, which cannot be accepted," said Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman, chairman of CAAB.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, he said, "We have strongly advised the authorities concerned that from now on, none will be allowed to go home from the airport if they fail to show medical certificates stating they are Covid-19 negative."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

## 'They're not locusts'

Specialists confirm insects in Teknaf are grasshoppers

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Ctg

A high-level expert team comprising of plant protection experts, entomologists and agricultural scientists visiting Teknaf upazila have identified the locust-like insect reported in Teknaf as spotted grasshopper.

The 10-member team came up with the findings after visiting the infested spot yesterday.

The insect swarm was first spotted in a deserted farm at Sadar union of Teknaf upazila on April 18, raising fears of a locust attack.

Nasir Uddin, coordinator of the team and additional director (acting) of Department of Agriculture Extension (Chattogram region), told The Daily Star that they identified the insect as spotted grasshopper, following thorough investigation.

"It is not locust. There should not be any fear among countrymen about the insect, as it can't fly and spread like locust. It is not as destructive as the locust. All it eats is the leaf, leaving the venation of wild plants. It was not seen to attack other common vegetative species", Nasir told this newspaper.

The scientific name of the grasshopper is Aularches miliaris, belonging to family Pyrgomothphidae, he described.

The team also observed the insect did not spread from the farm and any increase in number. It can be easily killed by using pesticides, they said.

Nasir also urged people to immediately contact the concerned agriculture office if anyone of any part of the country comes across such insects.

On April 18, people of Lombori village of Teknaf Sadar union discovered the insects eating the up leaves of trees at an abandoned poultry farm, prompting them to contact the local agriculture office, which later collected samples and sent those to the agricultural research centre in Chattogram.

## Sketch leads to arrest of rapist in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After a six-year-old child was raped in the city's Kadamtoli area a week ago, police managed to find clues on the perpetrator from CCTV footage. They suspected an youth, but could not identify him as he was wearing a mask.

Then, an officer commissioned a professional artist for a sketch of the suspected youth, and pasted it in different points of the city to get information on him.

Finally, a local identified the youth. Based on a tip-off, a team of police carried out a raid and arrested Tutul (22) from Muradpur in Kadamtoli on Friday night, said Shah Alam, assistant commissioner (Shyampur Zone) of DMP.

"In primary interrogation, Tutul admitted that he raped the girl on April 25," said Shah Alam, who led the drive.

Tutul told police that he took the child to the rooftop of a building, the AC added.

After the child was rescued from the five-storey building, her father filed a case with the local police station.

Police collected footage from 16 CCTV cameras of nearby areas and one partially shows a man wearing a mask standing in front of the building, holding the child's hand.

As per the suggestion of Wari Division's Deputy Commissioner Shah Iftekar Ahmed, the AC sought help from an artist for a sketch, which led to the arrest, he said.

## VIRTUAL HEARING OF CASES

### 40 lawyers, magistrates, officials being trained

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 40 magistrates, lawyers and court officials of Dhaka are being given training for holding virtual court hearing of urgent cases including bail petitions in need.

The representatives from the Judicial Reforms Committee of the Supreme Court and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are providing the training for few days through video conference which is expected to end today, Supreme Court Spokesman Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the committee and UNDP are also working to develop a software in this regard with the assistance from the government's Access to Information (a2i) programme.

Once the software is developed a manual will be

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## M'SINGH UNIV STUDENT MURDER

### Dying declaration prompts arrest efforts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Law enforcers are trying to arrest the killers of a university student in Mymensingh based on the victim's dying declaration.

Towhidul Islam Khan (24), an honours final year student of finance and banking at Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University in Trishal, died at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital on Friday, hours after he was stabbed in his house at the city's Teenkona Pukurpar.

Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mahmudul Islam said, "He [the victim] talked to them at the hospital before his death and we are conducting drives following his information."

The OC, however, did not disclose the statement for sake of investigation.

Towhidul, who was from Netrakona's Rameswarpur village, used to live alone in a rented room on the second floor of a two-storey building in Mymensingh city.

Around 3:30am on Friday, unidentified miscreants entered his room, as the door remained open during sehri time, said the police officer.

They stabbed him in the chest and other body parts, he added.

Hearing screams, his landlord and neighbours rushed to the spot, and took Towhidul to the hospital where he died in the morning.

Victim's father Saiful Islam Khan filed a case with the police station accusing unknown persons, the OC told this newspaper.

Talking to The Daily Star, the university Proctor Dr Uzzol Kumar Prodhon demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of the killers.



After a long break, development work around the city has started here and there. As some of the busiest roads of Dhaka now remain empty due to the shutdown, workers are fixing the street in front of Shapla Chatter, left, while heavy machinery is being used to reconstruct part of Manik Mia Avenue, top right. Meanwhile, a group of workers tend to the rain-damaged Bijoy Sarani, one of them submerged in the freshly-dug hole, bottom right. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED, PRABIR DAS





## 2 Rohingya 'robbers' killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Cox's Bazar

Two Rohingya men, suspected to be robbers, were killed in a "gunfight" with Rab near Jadimura Hill in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar early Friday.

The dead are Abdul Hakim, 30, and Rashid Ullah, 35, said Abdullah Mohammad Sheikh Shadi, assistant director (media) of Rab-15.

Acting on a tip off, a team of Rab-15 conducted a drive in the area where a group of robbers were preparing to commit a robbery, he claimed.

Sensing their presence, the "robbers" opened fire, forcing the Rab personnel to retaliate. After the "gunfight", Rab officials found two bullet-hit bodies lying on the ground, the Rab official added.

Rab also claimed to have recovered 15 pistols, 28 rounds of bullets and huge numbers of machetes from the spot.

Two Rab men were injured in the "gunfight", the Rab official said.



A long row of rickshaws parked on the side of a road in Badda recently. With the countrywide shutdown in place to contain the spread of Covid-19, survival has become quite an uphill battle for most rickshaw-pullers. Keeping that in mind, law enforcers have allowed them to wait for passengers in the area this way by maintaining distance.

## Laying Covid-19

FROM PAGE 3

She said after being disinfected, a body is put in an airtight bag and then into a coffin. "It is then taken to the graveyard. We are being utmost careful and sincere while performing our duties so that there is no chance of spreading the virus."

They also dig a four feet grave rather than 2.5 feet one. "The germs will get destroyed within a few days after burial," she said.

The chief social welfare officer said it's a joint effort. "Al Markazul brings the bodies and places those at the grave while our people dig the graves and take care of other procedures to complete the burial."

There are also three imams as well as members of Al Markazul who conduct janazas before the burial, he added.

Tanzin said the Khilgaon-Taltala graveyard has a burial capacity of 2,500.

"We will also visit the Rayerbazar graveyard (90,000 capacity) this week to take necessary measures in case we need to use it."

Initially four burials took place outside the Khilgaon-Taltala graveyard. Apart from that, all burials of Covid-19 positive persons in the capital were conducted at this graveyard, she said.

## Shouldn't make

FROM PAGE 3

Health experts, however, raised questions about the certificates.

Prof Muzaherul said passengers with certificates stating negative test results may also be infected if the virus is in incubation period.

"Therefore, we should not repeat the mistake we made at the beginning and allow Bangladeshi expatriates to stay in home quarantine, as it caused a disaster for us," said the health expert.

"We must take lessons from the mistake," Prof Muzaherul warned.

## Khairun Nesa passes away

STAR REPORT

Begum Khairun Nesa, mother of Bangladesh Handball Federation treasurer Jahangir Hossain, passed away at a Dhaka hospital on Friday at 85.

She left behind three sons, two daughters and a host of well-wishers.

She was buried in Azimpur on Friday after a namaz-e-janaza held at Malibagh Jam-e-Mosque.

The handball federation and other organisations mourned the death of Khairun Nesa.

## 40 lawyers

FROM PAGE 3

prepared for the virtual court hearing and then it will be distributed among the judges, lawyers and court staffers, said Saifur.

On April 26, Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain at a meeting with Supreme Court judges decided to amend Appellate Division and High Court Division rules to holding such hearing online and via video conference.

SC Spokesman Saifur Rahman said he is not aware of the development of amending the rules.

## Sugarcane is just not paying

FROM PAGE 12

Like Abdul and Mahedi, around two lakh sugarcane growers have been waiting for months for their dues from 15 state-owned sugar mills in the country.

Although most mills completed this year's sugarcane crushing by January, they have not paid the farmers in full.

Mozaharul Haque Prodhan, president of Bangladesh Sugar Mill Farmers Federation, said the 15 sugar mills in total owe around Tk 250 crore to all the sugarcane growers in the country.

Before the shutdown began, his organisation sat with the chairman of Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industry Corporation (BSFIC) about payment of the farmers' dues.

At the meeting, the chairman of BSFIC said the dues would be paid upon sale of sugar, recounted Mozaharul, also the lawmaker of Panchagarh-1.

Managing directors of several mills, wishing anonymity, told the Daily Star that BSFIC instructed them to pay the farmers by selling sugar, as the mills have been incurring losses every year.

Till last year, the total accumulated loss of all state-run sugar mills had been Tk 7,000 crore, of which Tk 1,008 crore was for 2018-2019, said a source in BSFIC.

None of the mills ever made any profit since their inception, he added.

Officials of BSFIC said at least 14,07,139 tonnes of sugarcane worth Tk 495.56 crores have been procured from farmers at the start of the 2019-20 crushing season by all 15 mills.

At present, the mills have 64,000 tonnes of unsold sugar worth Tk 385 crore at the warehouses. Of the annual demand for Tk

1,008 crore tonnes sugar in the country, only 65,000 tonnes are produced by the mills. The rest are imported, said the officials.

Demand for refined imported sugar is much higher than the local variety, they added.

Meanwhile, because of slow payment by the mills, growers are losing interest in producing sugarcane.

"Sugarcane cultivation area dropped by almost 60 percent in the last ten years due to the slow payment system," said Wahid Karim, president of Natore district Sugarcane Growers Association.

Although Dinajpur and Thakurgaon sugar mills paid 95 percent of their dues to farmers, Natore and North Bengal sugar mills still owe Tk 74 crore to local sugarcane growers.

Abdul Karim, president of Sugarcane Growers Association of Natore Sugar Mill, said most growers in the district are suffering because of the delay in bill payment.

"We don't know how to force the authorities to pay our dues under the current condition," he said, adding that unlike previous years they cannot hold demonstrations amidst the shutdown demanding payment.

Sanat Kumar Saha, chairman of Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industry Corporation (BSFIC), told The Daily Star over the phone on April 27 that BSFIC has sought funds from the government to pay the farmers' bills.

"It is not possible [to pay the farmers] until BSFIC gets funds from the government," he said.

[Bulbul Ahmed and Azibor Rahman contributed to this report]

## 3 journos

FROM PAGE 12

Speaking to The Daily Star, Johirul said, "Senior officers of the district police were angered by the publication of such a fabricated and baseless news with my comments. So, I filed the case against the three journalists under the Digital Security Act to protect my dignity."

Meanwhile, Mazharul Parvez Monti, general secretary of Narsingdi Press Club, yesterday condemned the arrest of the three journalists.

## US approves

FROM PAGE 12

Abeytina in Madrid's Chueca district who got up a 7am to enjoy some time outside. "Yesterday, I was like a child on Christmas Eve."

In the city's Retiro park, many residents were out to running, sometimes in groups, as a policeman used a loudspeaker to urge them to keep out of deserted avenue and on the pavement.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez however said masks would be obligatory on public transport from Monday.

Spain, Germany, Austria and Scandinavian nations are all slowly easing lockdowns as the virus cases slow though they will keep in place social distancing measures, demand the use of masks or increase testing to try to track infections.

## Biman

FROM PAGE 12

Earlier, the Biman board of directors in a meeting last week approved the proposal of seeking the loan, Sajjadul Hassan, chairman of the board told this correspondent.

Biman sources said it got the loan under the prime minister's recently announced stimulus package for the sectors affected by the coronavirus.

Biman will use the money to meet expenses of its permanent operation cost, including the salaries of its several thousand employees, Biman Managing Director and CEO M Mokabbir Hossain, earlier told this newspaper.

The airline incurred a loss of around Tk 450 crore in the last two months as it has been running with "no income" following the Covid-19 outbreak, M Mokabbir Hossain, said.

"Biman was forced to suspend its routes one after another since January and it incurred a liability of Tk 1,300 crore in the last three months," he said.

## Govt restricts entry of toxic ship

FROM PAGE 12

Daily Star yesterday.

"We have also informed the director general of the environment and explosion division regarding the matter. There is no way the ship is coming to Bangladesh," he added.

The ship started from Batam of Indonesia towards Chattogram on April 18 and was supposed to reach Bangladesh on May 7.

Following the report published by this newspaper, the Chattogram chapter of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) issued a protest statement.

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 the 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.

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

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

The 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 the Indonesian authorities appear not to have informed Bangladesh about the presence of hazardous waste and

material in the vessel in violation of article VI of the Basel Convention.

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 the 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."

## Health centre at each thana

FROM PAGE 12

BANGABANDHU'S FOUR-DAY VISIT TO NORTH BENGAL

Bangabandhu will leave for North Bengal on a four-day visit on May 8, 1972. He will visit Bogura, Rajshahi, Pabna and Rangpur on the tour. Tofael Ahmed, political secretary of the prime minister, will accompany him.

GOVERNMENT PLANS HEALTH SYSTEM OVERHAUL

The government declares today that the healthcare system will be overhauled. Under this scheme, all the 14 health service departments including family planning, TB control and rural health will be brought under a single authority. The government

will also set up a health centre at each thana. At present there are 65 rural health centres in the country. These centres will be upgraded to thana health centres. There will be 20-25 beds in each health service centre.

BANGLADESH FOREIGN MINISTER CALLS ON INDIRA GANDHI

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad calls on Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on May 2, 1972. Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh and Chairman of the policy planning committee of the Indian external affairs ministry DP Dhar were also present at the meeting. They discuss various bilateral and international issues including recently

concluded Indo-Pak emissary level talks.

SEVERE SHORTAGE OF FISH IN CITY MARKETS

There has been an acute shortage of fish in the city markets for the last couple of days. Whatever fish are available, are priced very high. For example, the price of a half a kilogramme of hilsa is not less than Tk 4. Fish production in the country has fallen drastically this year. On top of that, the supply remains poor due to weak transportation system.

SOURCES: May 3 & 4, 1972 issues of Ittefaq, The Bangladesh Observer, Azad, Morning News, Dainik Bangla and Purbodesh.

## Two cops die from Covid-19

FROM PAGE 12

Last month, POM assistant sub-inspector Abdul Khaleq, Dhaka North Traffic constable Asheq Mahmud; and Wari Division constable Jasim Uddin died with Covid-19.

A total of 741 members of police tested positive for the virus as of yesterday. Of them, 356 are from the DMP, according to police headquarters.

Most of the rest are from police departments in Narayanganj, Gazipur and Dhaka District, sources in the police headquarters said.

Only 57 members of police have recovered so far.

As more and more police personnel get infected, the Central Police Hospital now has about 450 patients against its 250 beds, Director Haider said.

"It will be almost impossible for us to treat members of the police force if the infection among them continues to rise," said another official of the facility.

DMP has been using at least seven hotels and several schools to keep its members in isolation and in quarantine after the barracks became overcrowded.

## 7 garment workers test positive

FROM PAGE 12

Sushanta Sarker, additional superintendent of Gazipur industrial police, said the management reopened the factory on a limited scale to maintain social distancing. Therefore, all the workers were not allowed to join work.

Those who could not join work would receive 60 percent of their gross wages for April, he said.

Informed about this, the agitating workers withdrew the blockade around 11:00am, said police.

WORKERS ASKED TO CARRY ID CARDS

The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) yesterday asked factory workers to carry their factory identity cards if they needed to come to their workplaces in and around the capital.

Shibnath Roy, inspector general of DIFE, in a circular said the workers would have to show their identity cards to the authorities, if needed, on way to Dhaka.

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Otherwise, they would not be allowed to enter Dhaka and its nearby areas, according to the circular.

It said the factory managements have been discouraging the workers from coming to Dhaka until further notice.

## Abductors kill one hostage

Demand Tk 20 lakh for 2 others

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Criminals abducted three farmers in Teknaf and killed one of them after his family members failed to pay ransom for his release, police said yesterday.

The abductors earlier were demanding Tk 3 lakh in ransom, but are now asking for Tk 20 lakh to set the two other farmers free, law enforcers said.

The values you set will always remain with us



(02.01.1947-30.04.2020)

In everlasting memory of  
**Amanullah Chowdhury**

Vice Chairman & Founding Director- Rangs Group  
Director- Reliance Insurance Ltd.

Your dedication, diligence and contribution will continue to guide us. You were our source of inspiration, strength and nurturer. Your fond memories will always be cherished by us.

In reverence & remembrance-  
**The Management and all Officials of  
Reliance Insurance Ltd.**

## IN MEMORIAM

**Syed Tanweer Murshed**  
1938-1988

Loving father, devoted husband, always in our thoughts and prayers. May Allah grant him maghfirat and eternal peace.  
Ameen.

**Yasmeen, Maher and Madiha Murshed**

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# India to monitor workers with app

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has mandated that all public and private sector employees use a government-backed Bluetooth tracing app and maintain social distancing in offices as New Delhi begins easing some of its lockdown measures in lower-risk areas.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government on Friday said India - the country with the largest number of people in lockdown - would extend its nationwide control measures for another two weeks from Monday to battle the spread of the coronavirus that causes the COVID-19 illness, but allow "considerable relaxations" in lower-risk districts. India has reported over 37,000 cases and 1,218 deaths from the virus.

As part of its efforts to fight the deadly virus, India last month launched the app Aarogya Setu - meaning Health Bridge - a Bluetooth and GPS-based system developed by the country's National Informatics Centre. The app alerts users who may have come in contact with people later found to be positive for COVID-19 or deemed to be at high risk.

"Use of Aarogya Setu shall be made mandatory for all employees, both private and public," India's Ministry of Home Affairs said in a notification late on Friday.

It will the responsibility of the heads of companies and organizations "to ensure 100% coverage of this app among the employees," the ministry said.

Officials at India's technology ministry and a lawyer who framed the privacy policy for Aarogya Setu told Reuters the app needs to be on at least 200 million phones for it to be effective in the country of 1.3 billion people.

The app has been downloaded around 50 million times on Android phones, according to Google Play Store data. The app's compulsory use is raising concerns among privacy advocates, who say it is unclear how the data will be used and who stress that India lacks privacy laws to govern the app.



People wear face masks as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus as they use a phone app to scan a code required to prove their health and travel status before being allowed to enter a shopping mall in Beijing, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC LATEST UPDATES

### NEARLY 239,000 DEATHS

More than 238,810 people have died worldwide since the epidemic surfaced in China in December, according to an AFP tally at 1100 GMT yesterday based on official sources. In all, more than 3.3 million cases have now been reported in 195 countries and territories. In the United States, which has the highest toll, 65,068 people have died. Italy is the second hardest-hit country, with 28,236 dead, followed by the United Kingdom with 27,510, Spain 25,100 and France 24,594.

### GREEN LIGHT FOR REMDESIVIR

American authorities approve an experimental drug for emergency use on patients, in the latest step in the global push to find viable treatments and a vaccine. Remdesivir, an antiviral drug initially developed to treat Ebola, is given the green light after a major trial finds it boosted recovery in serious COVID-19 patients.

### BLOOD PRESSURE NOT A FACTOR

In reassuring news for millions of people, three major studies say commonly used blood pressure medicines do not heighten susceptibility to infection, or increase the risk of becoming seriously ill with the disease.

### SPANIARDS ALLOWED OUTSIDE

Spain's nearly 47 million people, under strict lockdown since March 14, are allowed outside for walks or sport. Many restrictions remain however. In towns of more than 5,000 inhabitants, children and the elderly cannot leave home at the same times.

### EUROPE CASES PASSES 1.5M

Over 1.5 million cases of coronavirus have been recorded in Europe, just under half the worldwide total, according to an AFP tally at 0850 GMT yesterday. With at least 1,506,853 infections, including 140,260 deaths, Europe is the hardest-hit continent.

### SRI LANKA EXTENDS LOCKDOWN

Sri Lanka on Friday extended its anti-virus lockdown for a second time, through May 11, as health authorities warned that the crisis was not yet under control in the island nation. The South Asian country has officially recorded 690 infections and seven deaths.

### CASES SURGE IN RUSSIA

Russia yesterday reported its largest increase in coronavirus cases with the new infections rising by nearly 10,000 in a single day. New infections jumped by 9,623 to 124,054 cases. Fifty seven people died over the past 24 hours, bringing the total death toll to 1,222.

### FRANCE EXTENDS EMERGENCY

France yesterday decided to extend a health emergency imposed to fight the new coronavirus for another two months until July 24, Health Minister Olivier Veran said. A proposal to go before parliament from Monday says the lifting this month of the emergency, which began on March 24, would "be premature" and "could see a risk of the outbreak" intensifying.

SOURCE: AFP, NEWS SITES

# Two more years of pandemic misery!

Experts say Covid-19 not going to stop until it infects 60 to 70 percent of people

CNN ONLINE

The new coronavirus is likely to keep spreading for at least another 18 months to two years—until 60% to 70% of the population has been infected, a team of longstanding pandemic experts predicted in a report released Thursday.

They recommended that the US prepare for a worst-case scenario that includes a second big wave of coronavirus infections in the fall and winter. Even in a best-case scenario, people will continue to die from the virus, they predicted.

"This thing's not going to stop until it infects 60 to 70 percent of people," Mike Osterholm, who directs the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP) at the University of Minnesota, told CNN.

"The idea that this is going to be done soon defies microbiology."

Osterholm has been writing about the risk of pandemics for 20 years and has advised several presidents. He wrote the report along with Harvard School of Public Health epidemiologist Marc Lipsitch, who is also a top expert on pandemics;



Dr. Kristine Moore, a former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention epidemiologist who is now medical director for CIDRAP; and historian John Barry, who wrote the 2004 book "The Great Influenza" about the 1918 flu pandemic.

Because Covid-19 is new, no one has any immunity, they said. "The length of the pandemic will likely be 18 to 24 months, as herd immunity gradually develops in the human population," they wrote.

Their predictions are different from models presented by groups such as the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at

the University of Washington or the models produced by Imperial College London, whose report predicting millions of deaths in the US and UK helped galvanize responses by both governments.

The CIDRAP-led team used those reports, historical data on past pandemics, and published reports about the medical details of Covid-19 to put together their forecast.

"I have said for a long time that when you are trying to understand how infectious disease is going to unfold, you should rely on history as well as models," Lipsitch told CNN. For instance, pandemic infections don't tend to die down in the summer, like seasonal flu does, he said.

"Because of a longer incubation period, more asymptomatic spread, and a higher R0, COVID-19 appears to spread more easily than flu," they wrote in the report. R0 is the average number of other people infected by each patient.

"A higher R0 means more people will need to get infected and become immune before the pandemic can end," they add. "Based on the most recent flu pandemics, this outbreak will

likely last 18 to 24 months."

They said government officials should stop telling people the pandemic could be ending and instead prepare citizens for a long haul.

Three scenarios are possible, they said:

Scenario 1: The first wave of Covid-19 in spring 2020 is followed by a series of repetitive smaller waves that occur through the summer and then consistently over a one- to two-year period, gradually diminishing sometime in 2021.

Scenario 2: The first wave of Covid-19 is followed by a larger wave in the fall or winter and one or more smaller waves in 2021.

Scenario 3: A "slow burn" of ongoing transmission. "This third scenario likely would not require the reinstitution of mitigation measures, although cases and deaths will continue to occur."

A vaccine could help, the report said, but not quickly. "The course of the pandemic also could be influenced by a vaccine; however, a vaccine will likely not be available until at least sometime in 2021," they wrote.



## 'So what?' Says Bolsonaro as 6,300 die in Brazil

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Rarely have two words ignited such a firestorm of controversy.

"So what?" said Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on Tuesday when a journalist asked him about the fact that more than 5,000 Brazilians had died of the coronavirus.

The far-right leader's off-the-cuff comment has been sparking anger ever since, with governors, politicians, healthcare professionals and media figures all weighing in to express their outrage at his lack of empathy.

Bolsonaro is no stranger to controversy. But his latest remark sparked such a fury because Brazil is facing a seemingly uncontrollable outbreak of the disease and is still several weeks away from the peak of the pandemic, with a death toll that threatens to surpass even the most dire predictions.

There have been more than 91,000 officially confirmed cases so far but scientists warn the real figure could be 15 to 20 times higher.

With a death toll that has already topped 6,300, the giant South American country is facing as grim a scenario as Italy or the United States.

"So what? I'm sorry. What do you want me to do?" Bolsonaro said Tuesday when questioned about his country passing the 5,000-death mark, more than China. He joked that even though his middle name is Messias, or Messiah, "I don't do miracles."

The head of the doctors' union in Sao Paulo, Eder Gatti, called on television for "a more serious attitude from the president of the republic."

# Virus 'natural in origin'

Reiterates WHO as Trump says it originated from Wuhan lab

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization reiterated Friday that the new coronavirus was of natural origin after US President Donald Trump claimed he had seen evidence it originated in a Chinese lab.

Scientists believe the killer virus jumped from animals to humans, emerging in China late last year, possibly from a market in Wuhan selling exotic animals for meat.

Trump claimed Thursday that he had seen proof that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was actually the source of the outbreak, although he refused to give details.

Asked about Trump's claim during a virtual press conference, WHO emergencies chief Michael Ryan stressed that the UN health agency had "listened again and again to numerous scientists who have looked

at the sequences" of the virus.

"We are assured that this virus is natural in origin," he said, reiterating a stance the UN agency has expressed previously.

Ryan said countries must lift lockdowns gradually, while still being "on the look-out" for COVID-19 and ready to restore restrictions if the virus jumps back.

Even if the virus is coming under control, communities must know to still follow physical distancing and hygiene measures, and testing of suspect cases must continue, he said.

"It's really important that as countries ease those measures that they are constantly on the look out for a jump in infections and in particular are dealing with transmission in special settings," Ryan told a news conference.

His comments came after WHO's

emergency committee, made up of 19 independent experts, met for the first time since making its declaration three months ago.

"While maintaining the global alert level, the experts made a range of general recommendations on how the WHO and countries should adjust their response to the pandemic.

It called among other things for broad cooperation to "identify the zoonotic source of the virus and the route of introduction to the human population." It also called on WHO to "update recommendations on appropriate travel measures" linked to the outbreak, and to consider "the balance between benefits and unintended consequences," such as the difficulties of transporting humanitarian aid when so many flights are grounded.



People hold signs during a protest demanding to reopen the Illinois economy in front of a James R. Thompson Center in Chicago, Illinois, Friday.

PHOTO: AFP



A woman walks past a television news screen showing a picture of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attending a ceremony to mark the completion of Suncheon phosphatic fertilizer factory, at a railway station in Seoul, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Kim Jong Un reappears

AFP, Seoul

North Korea's Kim Jong Un has made his first public appearance in nearly three weeks, state media reported yesterday, following intense speculation that the leader of the nuclear-armed nation was seriously ill or possibly dead.

State television showed Kim walking, smiling broadly and smoking a cigarette at what the North said was the opening of a fertilizer factory on Friday in Suncheon, north of Pyongyang.

Rumours about Kim's health have been swirling since his conspicuous no-show at April 15 celebrations for the birthday of his grandfather, the North's founder -- the most important day in the country's political calendar.

His absence triggered a series of fevered rumours and unconfirmed reports over his condition, while the United States and South Korea insisted they had no information to believe any of the

conjecture was true.

Seoul's unification ministry reacted to yesterday's report by saying "groundless" speculation about Kim had caused "unnecessary confusion", calling for more careful consideration in future.

Kim's sudden death would have left Pyongyang facing an unplanned succession for the first time in its history and raised unanswered questions over who would succeed him and take over the North's nuclear arsenal.

Footage showed Kim in his trademark black suit, waving to hundreds of workers who cheered his appearance and released balloons.

He was flanked by senior officials -- including his sister and close adviser Kim Yo Jong -- and showed no outward signs of ill health. At one point Kim sat in front of a sign that described the event as a factory opening ceremony for May 1, 2020, but his appearance could not be independently verified.

# 'Never happened'

Biden denies sex assault charge

AFP, Washington

US presidential candidate Joe Biden on Friday emphatically denied sexually assaulting a former aide, saying the alleged incident 27 years ago "never happened."

The former vice president thus broke a month of silence on the most potentially damaging claims he has confronted since launching his White House bid a year ago.

Republicans have tried to use them to damage his prospects against President Donald Trump in November's election.

"They aren't true. This never happened," Biden said in a statement addressing the accusations made by Tara Reade, a former staffer in his Senate office.

The campaign of the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee had forcefully denied the allegations, but Biden himself had yet to address them publicly until now.

Biden, 77, said Reade's then-supervisor and former senior staffers in his office "have said, unequivocally, that she never came to them and complained or raised issues."

Reade said on a podcast in March that then-senator Biden sexually assaulted her in a Capitol Hill corridor in 1993, when she was 29. Reade, now 56, alleged that Biden pinned her against a wall when she brought him a gym bag, put his hands "down my skirt" and violated her.

Reade's public account evolved over time. In early 2019, when Biden was preparing his presidential bid, she was among multiple women who accused Biden of touching them inappropriately, or in ways that made them feel uncomfortable. She has since presented a more serious claim of assault to media outlets, and filed an incident report with the Washington police in early April in which she did not name Biden.

Trump, who faces Biden in a presidential election, himself faced more than a dozen accusations of sexual harassment and assault before he became president.

He came out Friday on the side of Biden, telling a right-wing radio host: "I would just say to Joe Biden: Just go out and fight it. It's, you know, it's one of those things."

Table with election results for Bangladesh, including candidates and vote counts.



STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES				
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY	
Closed	Closed	\$1,698.80 (per ounce)	\$26.44 (per barrel)	Closed	2.84% 19,619.35	Closed	Closed	83.95	90.14	103.66	11.74	
								BUY TK	84.95	93.94	107.46	12.35
								SELL TK				

এসআইবিএল-এর সম্মানিত মুদাৱা  
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একত্রে জুন মাসে জমা দিতে পারবেন।  
এমনা ব্যক্তি কোন ফি দিতে হবে না।

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## TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

# ADB now forecasts economic losses of \$13.3b

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

Where does this end? The Bangladesh economy now stands to lose a staggering \$13.3 billion for the coronavirus outbreak, according to the Asian Development Bank, which is more than four times the amount of damage the Manila-based multilateral lender had predicted back in March.

The estimated damage is now 4.9 per cent of the country's gross domestic product, up from 1.1 per cent as previously thought.

This means the announced stimulus packages, which are equivalent to 3.3 per cent of the GDP, would fall short in countering the destruction caused by the highly contagious, lethal virus originating from China.

Some 1.4 million to 3.7 million jobs would be lost for the economic fallout for the countrywide general shutdown enforced since March 26 to flatten the curve on the novel virus, according to the ADB.

The pandemic will affect the economy through three main channels: a slowdown in domestic economies, sharp decline in exports and reduction in remittances, the ADB said in a project document sent to the Economic Relations Division (ERD) of Bangladesh recently.

Subsequently, the Bangladesh government will seek \$500 million in budget support from the ADB board on



Bangladesh is now moving to the fourth stage of infection (community transmission). Millions had already left the cities for their village homes before the lockdown, possibly spreading the infection. It is, therefore, crucial to support Bangladesh's efforts to mitigate the impact and flatten the curve.

May 7 to soften some of the blows from the catastrophe, said an ERD official.

With 20.5 per cent of the population under the poverty line, and 10.5 per cent living in extreme poverty, Bangladesh is especially vulnerable to economic shocks such as the one thrown up by the global coronavirus pandemic.

Any economic shock would push a significant proportion of the near-poor under the poverty line and deepen the poverty of those already poor, reversing previous gains made in poverty reduction, the ADB document said.

Of the total workforce, 85 per cent operate in the informal economy, leading a hand-to-mouth existence, and social distancing and quarantine measures mean their livelihoods are effectively vanquished.

The official unemployment rate is 4.3 per cent in Bangladesh. However, many employed in the garment sector and micro, small, and medium enterprises may already have lost their jobs, and the economic downturn will further dampen the employment market.

The poor are especially vulnerable to infectious diseases such as COVID-19, due to overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and poor access to health services.

As initial support, the ADB has provided

\$350,000 technical assistance grant to address the outbreak of coronavirus disease and potential outbreaks of other communicable diseases.

Complementing these health sector interventions is a \$500 million loan, comprising \$250 million from ordinary capital resources lending and \$250 million concessional loans for countercyclical support to address downstream effects of increased spending on social protection, salary support to workers, low-interest loans to affected sectors, and increased monetary supply.

A technical assistance grant of \$1 million to support strengthening the social safety net and institutional capacity has also been provided.

Bangladesh has undertaken a \$113 million project to fight COVID-19 and improve preparedness, and as part of the project, the ADB on Thursday approved a \$100 million loan.

The project will help meet the government's immediate and medium-term needs to prevent the spread of coronavirus, by supporting emergency procurement and the provision of the most crucial medical equipment and supplies, the ERD official said.

The loan will carry 1 per cent interest rate per annum, with a term of 40 years, including a grace period of 10 years, repayment of principal at 2 per cent per annum for the first 10 years after the grace period and 4 per cent per annum thereafter.

High population density, rapid urbanisation, a large population of migrant workers, and more than 20 per cent of its urban population living in slums without adequate sanitation, make Bangladesh vulnerable to infectious disease outbreaks.

But Bangladesh has limited capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to public health emergencies.

# ICT goes all out to fight COVID-19

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The government has put its best foot forward in using ICT tools to figure out the COVID-19 challenges and has already brought on board popular mobile applications and locally-developed solutions to control the damages caused by the pandemic.

"So far, we have customised and launched a bunch of solutions partnering with global communication platforms and now we can predict what will be the scenario after 15 days," said Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for information and communication technology.

The ICT division of the government has already established partnerships with all four popular mobile communication applications -- Messenger, WhatsApp, Imo and Viber -- and is offering different services using the channels.

As part of a series of initiatives, the ICT division yesterday declared its partnership with Viber, which has 1.5 crore active users in Bangladesh, and through online self-assessments, users can now find out if they are running the risks of coronavirus infections.

"We earlier launched coronavirus assessment tools on Messenger and some websites but our target is to offer ICT support to all the citizens of the country and that's why we have introduced the same service on Viber with extensive information," Palak said.



About 1.67 lakh people have so far taken services from a government website -- livecoronatest.com, said Ashraf Abir, managing director and chief executive officer of MCC Ltd, a local ICT firm that developed the site.

"We have shared all the contacts with the Directorate General of Health Services and doctors are talking with the patients who seem to bear high risks of contagion," Abir said.

Palak said there are options to call 333 or 16263 and use other platforms of the government to get coronavirus-related information and services.

Earlier the government sent short messages to mobile phone users and launched an interactive voice response service for the same purpose, he added.

Gathering all the information in a data analytics platform, the government is inching towards new estimation through the use of artificial intelligent and big data analytics, Palak added.

"A good number of local data analytics experts with the support of some non-resident Bangladeshi are trying to get an idea what the future holds for us," he said.

The state minister said though there is no data privacy act in the country, users should not worry about privacy protection as there will be no leakage of information.

In the next phase, the government needs to go for contact tracing, a method used to slow down the spread of infectious outbreaks, according to Palak.

The ICT division earlier launched bot on the WhatsApp platform to disseminate coronavirus-related information easily and introduced a healthcare call centre on Imo for 22 lakh Bangladeshi expatriates living in Saudi Arabia.

The government is taking support from Facebook and Google to spread the government's messages on coronavirus.

Palak said they are now trying to put in place a mechanism to run educational programmes on mobile phones as schools are closed because of the pandemic.

Stay Home Stay Safe  
Hotline: 01713 656565

# Garment workers' salary disbursement from stimulus package starts from today

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Workers of the export-oriented industries can take a sigh of relief as banks would be disbursing their wages from today from the government's stimulus package of Tk 5,000 crore.

A good number of companies hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic have applied to 38 banks for the soft loans. The Daily Star spoke with at least 11 of the banks, which are now taking preparations to disburse the wage to the workers.

The BB has released Tk 2,000 crore to the respective banks soon after it got the loans applications, said its spokesperson Md Serajul Islam. The 38 lenders had claimed Tk 2,566.19 crore from the stimulus package.

"The rest of the claimed funds will be given out in the quickest possible time after getting approval from the finance ministry," he added.

To get the fund, the industries had to submit the loan application

to their respective banks within May 2.

The owners of the export-oriented industries, which are allowed to enjoy the loans, will have to pay back the fund within two years after a six-month of grace period starting from July. Or else they will be considered as defaulters, according to a BB notice.

The interest-free loan will carry a 2 per cent service charge.

The BB is depositing the funds with the banks in three phases from April to June. And the lenders, in turn, will deposit the funds to the bank or mobile financial service (MFS) accounts of the workers such that the factory owners cannot misuse the funds.

Since April 6, the MFS providers have been scrambling to open as many accounts as they can for implementation of the stimulus package. So far, about 30 lakh workers have opened MFS accounts.

The government should widen the volume of the stimulus

BANKS	NO. OF COMPANIES	AMOUNT CLAIMED (TK CR)
EXIM	122	540
Bank of Commerce Ltd.	150	480
DBBL	60	300
Bank of Dhaka	83	188
Bank of Asia	40	125
Bank of China	48	302
Bank of East Africa	45	210
Mutual Trust Bank Ltd.	45	200
BA	50	300

SOURCE: RESPECTIVE BANKS

package as the number of loan applications and the claimed fund is too high, said another managing director of a bank wishing not to be named.

The existing package will not fulfil the industries' demand for the next two months -- May and June.

Besides, banks should release the funds cautiously as the number of workers in some industries has increased suddenly last month.

There have been some difficulties in paying the wages smoothly as the BB has asked lenders not to give any funds to those that have temporarily or fully shuttered their plants, said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank.

"It is difficult to identify those," he added.

Both the central bank and the finance ministry have taken prompt measures to implement the stimulus package, putting a positive impact on the country's economy, said M Kamal Hossain, managing director of Southeast Bank.

# Cheer for maize farmers amid the gloom

SOHEL PARVEZ

An early harvest of maize has come as a stroke of luck for farmers as they are getting better prices amid low imports as the coronavirus pandemic has fractured the supply chain, according to farmers.

Once little known to farmers, maize has emerged as the second-biggest crop after rice over the past decade sending wheat to the third place as farmers expanded acreage to profit from the burgeoning demand from mills that cater to the gigantic poultry, aquaculture and dairy sectors.

It is now selling for about Tk 17 each kilogram at the farm level, up 6 per cent year-on-year.

"It is good to see that the prices are better than the previous year's. The crop has also been good," said Muhammad Ali, a grower in Sherpur of the northwest district of Bogura,

over the phone.

He started harvesting his crop grown on two acres by the end of last month and sold one maund at Tk 700 recently.

The grain is bringing higher prices for farmers at a time when many vegetable and seasonal fruit growers are crying out for fair prices as they are finding it hard to send their produce to cities because of the ongoing shutdown.

Sanjoy Kumar Roy, a farmer at Patgram of Lalmonirhat, one of the main maize-producing districts, said if the current price trend continues for a while it will benefit them.

"But it appears that the prices may decline," he said.

The higher prices may not persist once the harvest begins in full swing as the shutdown has hit the poultry industry hard, said Moshir Rahman, president of the Bangladesh Poultry Industries Central Council.

The demand for feed is likely to drop by up to 40 per cent this year and so is the requirement for maize, said Rahman, who also has feed mills that produce more than 60 lakh tonnes of feed for poultry, fish and dairy.

Farmers bagged 47 lakh tonnes of the grain in fiscal 2018-19, a surge by a factor of six from a

decade earlier, according to the agriculture ministry.

Maize is planted in two seasons -- winter and summer, while the winter yield is the biggest and farmers cultivated the cereal on 4.57 lakh hectares this time.

The Department of Agricultural Extension expects that the total

production will hit 50 lakh tonnes, enabling the nation to cut back on imports.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently predicted that Bangladesh's corn import might fall 29 per cent year-on-year to 10 lakh tonnes in the May-April period of the marketing year of 2020-21 from a year ago.

Its estimates were based on the assumption of higher domestic production and slow progress in the feed industry's recovery from an economic loss in the poultry and feed sector as a result of the pandemic.

Bangladesh imports about 30 per cent of its total consumption needs, it said.

"Corn demand in the feed industry will be highly volatile in the upcoming marketing year of 2020-21 as a result of COVID-19," the US agency said in a report on Bangladesh.

The animal feed sector has started to

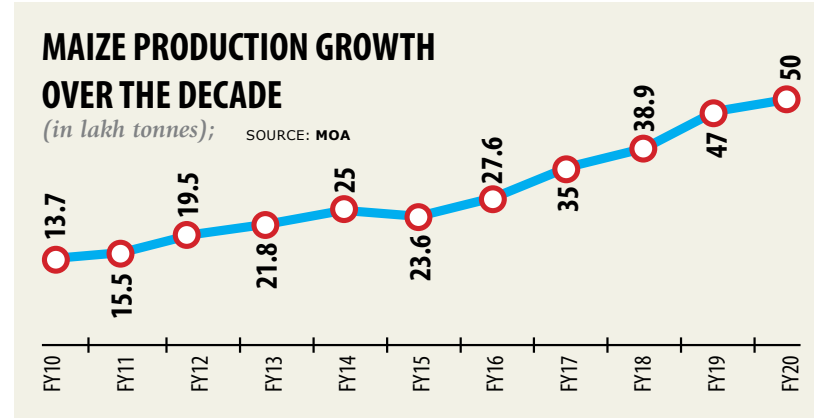
report decreased demand as livestock and poultry operations slowed in response to movement control and other COVID-19 related restrictions.

However, Lalmonirhat's farmer Roy expected that prices may not go below the last year's level.

Wasim Royal, a farmer at Darshana in Chuadanga, another major maize producing district, said production cost for each bigha of maize is Tk 14,000 and he bagged 30 maunds of the cereal for each bigha.

"We are happy with the current prices," he said, adding that import disruptions for coronavirus might have fuelled prices of domestically-grown maize.

"A major problem is uncertainty regarding the quality of seeds. Low-quality seeds increase risks of pest infestations and affect yield," he said, "If field officials of the agriculture ministry remain vigilant, businesses cannot sell these seeds."





**TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE**

# Restaurants' iftar season salvaged by food delivery platforms

MAHMUDUL HASAN

In recent years, Dhaka was developing an eating-out culture for iftar and sehri, like in the cosmopolitan cities in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, with upscale restaurants and high-end hotels putting their best foot forward to lure in customers, who would otherwise be staying away for the whole month.

But the exciting trend was nipped in the bud this year thanks to the choking grip of coronavirus on the normal way of living for the best part of 2020.

As is often said, when life gives you lemon, make lemonade with it, and that is exactly what about 1,000 restaurants in the capital have started doing by reopening their restaurants on a partial basis and taking the

increased manifolds in the last three days.

The number of iftar delivery rose significantly since the reopening, said Nabila Mahboob, head of marketing at Pathao. Now, Pathao Food is making about 1,000 deliveries per day, mostly iftar items.

The demand for local iftar items like jilapi and halim is high. Besides, people are also making orders for dishes such as khichuri, tehari and tikka.

City Bank American Express cardholder will get 5 per cent cashback, up to Tk 300, for making orders through Pathao. There are some discounts and BOGO offers for availing food and products through the delivery platform during the fasting month of Ramadan.

Pathao has more than 7,000 registered restaurants in Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet

iftar item since the beginning of Ramadan, said an assistant manager.

Through Foodpanda, it makes deliveries of an iftar platter priced at Tk 399, which includes chicken slider, achari rice, chicken katsu, chocolate brownie and juice.

Among luxury hotel's restaurants, Le Méridien Dhaka and InterContinental Dhaka are closed, while Amari Dhaka, Hotel Sarina and Westin Dhaka are open for iftar takeaway and home delivery.

Amari Dhaka has come up with takeaway or home delivery set for iftar followed by dinner. It is selling three iftar set meals -- Silver, Gold & Platinum -- for Tk 2,300, Tk 3,300 and Tk 4,500 respectively.

The delicacies include chicken curry puff, chicken makhmali kebab, full egg chop, vegetable spring roll, chicken roast, chicken biryani, mutton or chicken halim, Amari Reshmi Jalebi, Arabic falafel, shami kebab, fish croquettes, coleslaw, mutton or chicken halim.

Apart from these, mutton kachchi biryani, grilled chicken with BBQ sauce, grilled fish or sweet and sour prawn will meet the cravings for dinner.

The platinum menu includes baba ganoush, chicken shawarma, breaded prawns with tartar sauce, eggplant tempura, fish croquettes and mutton.

Credit cardholders of Standard Chartered, Mutual Trust Bank, Midland Bank, Brac Bank and United Commercial bank can get the BOGO offer for Amari's iftar takeaways or home deliveries.

"Although our business is not restaurant-centric, our restaurant is open for takeaways and home deliveries," said Ashok Kejrival, chairman of Amari Dhaka.

The hotel now makes about a dozen deliveries daily using its own transport.

The sales are picking up as the order is increasing, said an employee of the hotel's restaurant section.

"I have been receiving many phone calls inquiring whether we are preparing jilapi and halim this year," said Abdul Awal, director for sales and marketing of the Pan Pacific Sonargaon.

The hotel, which has been closed since April 25, is famous for offering different types of jilapis -- orange and saffron, regular and sugar-free.

Iftar deliveries and takeaways at Six Seasons Hotel, which has 85 rooms, is somewhat better than others.

It makes about 12 to 15 orders per day since the beginning of Ramadan.

Despite the lockdown, the hotel has been open as it has 12 foreign guests staying put at the property for the suspension of flights and



ZINA TASREEN

Customers are enjoying iftar and Ramadan delicacies from eateries amidst the nationwide shutdown thanks to food delivery platforms like HungryNaki, Foodpanda, Uber Eats, Pathao Food and Shohoz Food.



FIROZ AHMED

assistance of the food delivery platforms.

Soon after the Dhaka Metropolitan Police eased some restrictions on eateries on April 28 for Ramadan, restaurant owners rushed to bring back workers, most of whom had left for their villages after being laid off or sent on leave without pay when the government announced nationwide shutdown on March 25.

"In the last three days we have been constantly receiving phone calls from restaurants that have resumed their operations," said Maliha M Quadir, founder and managing director of Shohoz.com.

Now, Shohoz Food, an arm of Shohoz, would deliver food from 1,000 restaurants. Three days ago, just about a dozen of the restaurants registered with the platform was open.

Shohoz Food delivers food from 5,000 restaurants in Dhaka and 1,000 in Chattogram.

"Orders will increase when people will come to know about the opening," said Quadir, adding that the volume of orders has

and Mahboob hopes most of the restaurants will reopen this week.

"We have been getting a lot of orders for the last two days," said AD Ahmad, chief executive and co-founder of HungryNaki, which has presence in Dhaka, Chattogram, Narayanganj, Sylhet and Cox's Bazar.

However, the number of orders is significantly lower than that of last years, he said. Out of 11 city outlets of Star Kabab and Restaurant, seven resumed operations in the last few days.

Star Kabab and Restaurant in Banani caters more than 200 iftar takeaways and home deliveries per day. Its online deliveries are mainly made through Uber Eats and partially by Pathao.

"The number of customers seems high, but it's less than 20 per cent when compared with last year's," said Abdul Rab Selim, the manager of the outlet, which reopened on April 29.

Madchef's Banani outlet has been preparing

closed borders amid the global coronavirus outbreak.

"We have to develop seamless and prompt home delivery system ensuring all safety protocols for the sake of our existence," said Md Al Amin, general manager of the hotel.

Four Points by Sheraton Dhaka is providing BOGO offers for credit cardholders of Standard Chartered, Brac Bank, UCB and MTB. It's also providing free home delivery to Gulshan, Baridhara DOHS and Niketan.

In Chattogram, Radisson Blu Chattogram Bay View has been open for iftar takeaways since the beginning of the fasting month.

The crisis though elicited a rather inspired move from Rumman Ahmed, chairman of Hideout Lounge restaurant in Chattogram.

After a month of recess, on April 26, he reopened the restaurant with 11 employees and he assigned his two staff to make calls to some targeted customers requesting them to avail iftar takeaways and home delivery.

"The response has been tremendous. When they were ensured about safety, most of the customers agreed to take iftar from us," he said.

Hideout Lounge now receives 25 to 30

orders per day and Ahmed hopes it will pick up soon as he is getting stronger response from the customers day by day.

In Chattogram, some restaurants such as Terracotta and Rodela Bikel have recently resumed operations.

Almost all restaurants in Sylhet are closed as the city has imposed strict restrictions to contain the virus.

In recent years, restaurants in Dhaka have witnessed a burgeoning market for sehri, the meal consumed early in the morning by Muslims before fasting, and received tremendous response, especially from the younger generation.

However, this year, no restaurant in Bangladesh is providing the service.

Regardless, the recent spate of restaurant reopening is good news for restaurant workers.

The number of food service establishment is estimated to be about 60,000, including hotel, restaurant and sweetmeat makers, where more than 15 lakh people are working, according to the association and the sector's insiders.

In Dhaka alone, there are about 10,000 restaurants that employ about 3 lakh people.

## IPDC proved to be a maverick NBFIs in 2019

AHSAN HABIB

IPDC, the country's first private sector non-banking financial institution, swam against the tide in 2019.

Its profits soared 25 per cent year-on-year to Tk 56 crore in a year when the majority of the NBFIs suffered due to liquidity crunch and were reeling from the repercussions of the liquidation of People's Leasing Financial Services.

Subsequently, it rewarded its shareholders with 10 per cent cash and 5 per cent stock dividend for the year.

IPDC's revenue rose 15.5 per cent to Tk 216.6 crore thanks to its interest income.

Its net interest income surged 14.4 per cent to Tk 194.3 crore in 2019 although the spread kept decreasing in the sector due to the tightening liquidity situation.

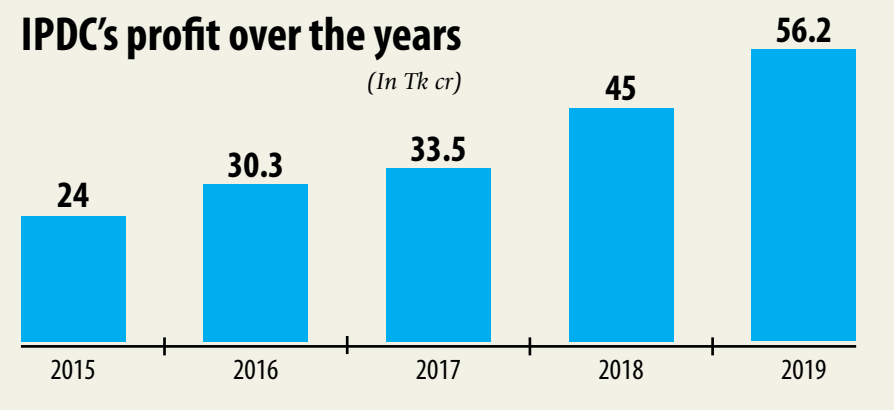
"We have reshaped our business in 2015 and now we are getting the results," said Mominul Islam, Managing Director of IPDC Finance.

In 2019, the banking sector's classified loans hit an all-time high of 12 per cent, while classified loans in NBFIs stood at 10.4 per cent.

However, IPDC saw its classified loan ratio shrink to 1.57 per cent in 2019 from 2.14 per cent in 2018.

Islam simply credits it to IPDC's astute lending practices.

For instance, IPDC gave home loans outside of Dhaka and Chattogram City,



which the others hesitate to do.

It introduced a nationwide home loan product named Bhalo Basha last year.

It also gave loans to supply chains and block chains.

Subsequently, the NBFIs's loans, advances

and lease expanded 14.4 per cent to Tk 5,072 crore, making its portfolio the third largest amongst the NBFIs.

"We were forward-looking. IPDC gave loans based on people, brand and technology, so our profits are rising and

default loans were reigned in, too."

When the whole NBFIs deposit growth became negative, IPDC's deposits escalated 25 per cent to Tk 4,636 crore in 2019.

The company also got relief from the bearish stock market as it largely refrained from investing in the market.

Of its total investment of Tk 157 crore in bonds and equities, almost none were in listed stocks; it poured money in preference shares of many power generation companies.

In 2019, IPDC non-interest income soared 26.5 per cent to Tk 22.3 crore. The non-interest income came from investment income and this investment is mostly in non-listed preference shares.

"The year 2020 is totally different and abnormal for all, so we will try to make sure to continue to support the entrepreneurs," said Islam, also the chairman of Bangladesh Leasing and Finance Companies Association.

If the coronavirus situation can be suppressed this month, IPDC's profits will not be affected much, he added.

IPDC's stocks traded at Tk 22.60 on March 25, the last day of trading before the bourses shuttered in line with the nationwide general shutdown.

The government holds 21.88 per cent shares in IPDC, institutional investors 18.98 per cent, foreign investors 2.88 per cent, retail shareholders 8.22 per cent and sponsor-directors the rest.

## Trade thru Benapole resumes after a month

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Trade through Benapole land port resumed yesterday with the entry of 15 Indian trucks loaded with jute seeds, after a closure for a month due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The Indian trucks went to the no-man's land, where Bangladeshi workers completed the loading and unloading.

Trade started with perishable goods and India will export other products, including garment raw materials later, said Kartik Chakraborty, general secretary of the Petrapole C&F Agent Staff Welfare Association of India.

Some 2,214 Indian trucks are now waiting to enter Bangladesh from India, said Paritosh Biswas, president of the Bongaon Import-Export Association.

In order to reduce the congestion of cargo trucks at Petrapole, business associations, customs and police of the two countries, the Border Security Force and the BGB have decided to load and unload goods imported from India at the no-man's land.

The decision was taken at an emergency meeting at the no-man's land on Wednesday.

If India exports goods and Bangladeshi traders accept those from no-man's land, cooperation will be provided by the port authority, said Mamun Kabir Tarafdar, deputy director of Benapole port.

Trade through the Benapole-Petrapole channel remained suspended since March 23.

Petrapole police are keeping Indian truck drivers bound for Bangladesh in quarantine for 14 days.

## Next year's budget to be Tk 550,000cr

REJAUl KARIM BYRON and JAGARAN CHAKMA

Keeping in mind the devastating impact of coronavirus and long, arduous road to recovery, the government has prepared a draft budget of Tk 550,000 crore for the next fiscal year, up 5 per cent from this year's.

The size of the budget is not final, however, and it would be fixed at a meeting between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal on May 5, said officials of the finance ministry.

The meeting will discuss the size, revenue collection, priorities for fiscal 2020-21 and strategies to be to revive the

economy post COVID-19, the officials said.

The next budget will focus on food security, so the government is thinking about ensuring food at lower cost for the millions of people who have lost jobs suddenly. The agriculture sector would also get additional incentive, an official said.

The finance division has sent earmarked Tk 205,145 crore for the annual development programme (ADP), which is 6 per cent higher than current year's.

Of the total outlay of the development allocation, Tk 134,643 crore will come

from the government's own coffer and the rest Tk 70,502 crore in foreign aid.

The finance ministry has asked the planning ministry to prepare the ADP allocation by May 15.

If the allocation can't be approved at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council, the highest policymaking body of the government, because of the movement control order and social distancing, it would be passed by the executive order of the prime minister.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal is expected to unveil the budget in parliament on June 11. However,

everything will depend on how the coronavirus situation unfolds.

If the pandemic is not contained, an interim budget for short-term may be declared under a special provision of the Constitution.

Social safety net schemes are set to get prime focus in next fiscal year's budget as the government looks to pull the economy and the people out of the crisis.

The budget would incorporate the spending the government would have to incur in order to implement the Tk 95,619 crore stimulus packages, which are equivalent to 3.5 per cent of the gross domestic product.

## MTB employees donate one-day salary for the people in distress

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Employees of Mutual Trust Bank have recently donated their one-day salary for the poor people, who have been suffering because of the ongoing nationwide shutdown aimed

at containing coronavirus pandemic. "The country and its people have given us many successes

and now, this is our duty to stand by our country and its people at this difficult time," said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director and CEO of the bank, in a statement. He also expressed his gratitude to all of the bank's employees for their support towards the cause of the nation.





# COVID-19 must not be a pathogen of repression

## The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SUNDAY MAY 3, 2020, BAISHAKH 20, 1427 BS

## Still no list of those unemployed by pandemic

*Need comprehensive plan and budget to support them*

**A**N overwhelming number of people, both in the formal and informal sectors, have lost their jobs in Bangladesh due to the pandemic, but unfortunately the government lacks any data on the actual number of people who may have been impacted. Although the Labour Policy 2012 says that the government will take steps to maintain detailed information on employed workers based on each firm and sector, it appears that no such initiative has been taken over the last eight years to make a comprehensive database of workers in the country. Informal estimates suggest there are between 1.3 crore to 5 crore workers who have been unemployed as a result of the pandemic.

When *The Daily Star* contacted the Department of Labour (DOL), Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishment (DIFE) and Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation (BLWF) enquiring about a list of unemployed workers, not only were these departments unable to provide any satisfactory answers, but they also seemed to lack any plan of how to help these people tide through the difficult times. Without a comprehensive list, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to design interventions that can provide systematic support to unemployed workers. For instance, the labour ministry has formed crisis management committees at the district level, who are tasked with the responsibility of making lists of affected workers and submitting them to local administration for food aid. However, thousands of unemployed workers have not received anything yet and there's no guarantee if, or when, they will receive any support.

Workers in the informal sectors, who constitute a whopping 85 percent of the working population, have been the worst hit by the pandemic, lacking any social or legal protections or employment benefits. Labour leaders point out that there is a Tk 400 crore fund set up under the Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation Act 2006 to support workers in the informal sector, but thus far, no initiative has been taken to use some of this fund to alleviate the sufferings of those who are now on the brink of starvation.

We urge the government to immediately make a comprehensive list of unemployed both in the formal and informal sectors so that it can come up with a holistic plan and allocate sufficient funds to support them, if need be, by exploring untapped resources, such as the Tk 400 crore welfare fund.

## Reduce test seekers' sufferings

*Expand Covid-19 testing facilities, increase hospitals' capacity*

**I**T is a matter of grave concern that we still do not have enough designated hospitals or institutions to conduct Covid-19 tests. While initially only the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) was conducting the tests, later the testing facilities were expanded to various government hospitals and also to some private ones. However, the capacity of these hospitals to conduct the tests is very limited. One of the most trusted hospitals where suspected Covid-19 patients are thronging to get tested is Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), which has also been struggling to give the expected service to its patients. Every day, around 1,000 people are going there for tests whereas the hospital has the capacity to do only around 250-270 tests a day. According to the hospital authorities, they have only one PCR machine to conduct the tests, and they cannot run their activities in full swing because the DGHS gave them the machine but did not give them the biosafety hoods.

As hundreds of patients with fever, cough and other Covid-19 symptoms are swamping BSMMU to get tested, they are at high risk of contracting the virus (if they are not already infected). Introducing an online ticketing system may reduce the risk they are exposed to. It will also reduce their sufferings as they will not have to stand in queue for hours. At the same time, BSMMU being one of the most trusted hospitals among patients, needs to increase their testing capacity. The government should provide them with all logistical support in this regard.

Given that it takes about a week for a patient to know whether or not they are infected with coronavirus—suspected patients have to wait for 2/3 days before they can get tested and then another 3 days to know the result—there are pretty good chances that those who are infected will spread the virus among others in the meantime. Thus, there is no alternative to getting tested as early as possible. But for that our testing facilities need to be expanded and the other labs, apart from BSMMU and IEDCR, that are conducting the tests at present, have to prove their efficiency to earn people's trust.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Don't take the dengue threat lightly

According to a senior doctor, the number of dengue patients this year is much higher than the previous year. Though it is a rather alarming statement, it is not being addressed properly. We are struggling to cope with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic as it is, and if there is a dengue outbreak now, it will make things much worse for our already struggling healthcare system.

I urge all my fellow citizens to remain vigilant. There are various ways we can take protective measures at home to save ourselves from mosquito bites. For example, we should always make use of mosquito nets before going to bed.

Also, the city corporations need to carry out their duties responsibly to ensure that the spread of Aedes is curbed at all costs. Failure to take timely action could prove disastrous.

Dr M Mahboob Hossain, Dhaka



SAAD HAMMADI

As COVID-19 spreads, repression and disinformation have generally followed in its wake. Governments around the world are justified in their concern that the pandemic is being exploited by some to spread dangerous misinformation about the disease and means to cure it, potentially harming the efforts to combat it. At the same time, however, some governments are themselves exploiting this moment—to suppress relevant information uncomfortable for the government or use the situation as a pretext to crackdown on critical voices.

Today is a week short of two months since journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol left his office in the evening and never reached home. His relatives and friends frantically tried, for hours, to reach him over the phone, but the line went dead each time. They filed a complaint with the police but have yet to hear anything about his whereabouts. As the family gathers to break their Ramadan fast on evenings, Kajol's chair remains empty. Now, his 11-year-old daughter and 20-year-old son don't just fear for their father's safety but worry about his health as well, anxious about whether the virus may have infected him too.

A photojournalist and editor of a daily newspaper, Kajol was also facing the prospect of charges under the draconian Digital Security Act. A day before he was disappeared, a lawmaker from the ruling Awami League accused him of publishing "false, offensive and defamatory" material on Facebook. Three hours after he was last seen, another case was filed against him, under the same act, by a member of the ruling party.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has come to dominate the news, people who have been critical of the government's response have found themselves subject to hostile attention from the authorities. On April 26, an op-ed that questioned why the government had failed to procure low-cost testing kits suddenly vanished from the website it was published on.

Netra News, a Sweden-based platform for investigative journalism, edited by journalist and researcher Tasneem Khalil, reported on a leaked UN internal memo that estimated Bangladesh could see as many as two million deaths as a result of the pandemic without interventions. Netra News' own website has been inaccessible to readers in Bangladesh ever since it reported allegations of corruption involving high-ranking officials, Khalil told Amnesty International. Now, its mirror website has been blocked, too, as was that of BenarNews, an online affiliate of Radio

Free Asia, which carried the Netra News report.

Khalil, who is based outside Bangladesh, said that members of an intelligence agency visited on April 9 the home of his mother and warned her that he was "tampering the image of the country". At least 20 journalists ("It is an attack on freedom of expression", *The Daily Star*, April 29) have been recently intimidated, assaulted or harassed by members of the ruling party, and in some cases detained and accused of criminal offences by the police for reporting pilferage, corruption and lack of accountability in the relief distribution meant for the poor during the lockdown in the country, noted Forum for Freedom of Expression, Bangladesh.

The police registered a case on April

April 23, many governments are seeking to restrict access to information without meeting the basic conditions of legality or necessity. The pandemic, Kaye warned, has led to several incidents of journalists and human rights defenders around the world being intimidated, detained, questioned and harassed for their work.

Social media users in Bangladesh are also being ensnared, targeted for posting comments online about the pandemic. At least 50 people (BBC) now face criminal allegations of spreading "false news" and "rumours". Some Muslim religious leaders in Bangladesh, who have been telling people that they are immune from the virus by virtue of their piety, are unfortunately hardly contested by the authorities for such misinformation that can put lives of people at risk.

Institutions. In the process, people have been faced with prison sentences of up to 5 years simply for expressing their opinions of people in power. Human rights standards are clear that, when a person claims that their honour or reputation has been damaged, it should be treated as a civil matter, not a criminal one.

The growing number of cases filed against journalists and social media users during COVID-19 simply for exercising their right to freedom of expression are anything but rights-respecting. Any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be provided by law and be necessary and proportionate to a pressing social need, as clearly established by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party.



Family members, friends and colleagues of missing journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol form a human chain demanding his safe return.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

17 against four journalists, including the editor of *bdnews24.com*, Toufique Imrose Khalidi, citing "deteriorating law and order" and "false, offensive and defamatory content" after they published allegations that relief funds were being misappropriated.

In the meantime, signed on a letterhead on April 12, the Association of Television Channel Owners issued a notice conveying a "request" from the Ministry of Information to avoid "all negative discussion and criticisms" about COVID-19.

As noted by David Kaye, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, in his report to the UN Human Rights Council on

The incidents described here demonstrate deeply troubling layers of repression exercised by authorities and people in positions of power. The Digital Security Act criminalises legitimate forms of expression under vague and overbroad provisions. There is no clarity about how Khalidi and other journalists could have "deteriorated law and order" by simply publishing a report about misappropriation of relief materials. The journalists, if convicted under the charges they have been accused of, could face up to seven years in prison.

Several cases under the Digital Security Act registered before and during COVID-19 have used defamation charges as the pretext to stop allegedly false or malicious accusations against politicians and State

It is important that authorities urgently respond to dispel disinformation or any rapid spread of rumours, gossip or unreliable information, to protect communities and public health but a disproportionate penalisation hardly meets the objective. Instead, the authorities should invest into promoting access to prompt, reliable, evidence-based and trustworthy information. This is a more effective way to protect public health and ensure that people have a better chance of being able to stay aware of the measures that are being taken to protect public health, address the pandemic and abandon rumours.

Saad Hammadi is Regional Campaigner for South Asia at Amnesty International. His Twitter handle is: @saadhammadi

## Blocking media access during Covid-19

### A self-defeating strategy



BADIUZZAMAN BAY

**P**RESS freedom in Bangladesh has been in decline long before the coronavirus came to our shores. Over the last decade, thanks to increasingly repressive media laws and highhanded

measures adopted by the authorities, the health of journalism has been deteriorating in such a way that even the stalwarts of the fourth estate began to worry if the damage could ever be reversed. Yet, an outcome few would have expected during the Covid-19 crisis—which was expected to unite the people and their leaders against humanity's most dreaded enemy in decades—is the tightening of the noose around free flow of information, which holds the key to this unity. It's a self-defeating strategy that hurts not only the general people and the media, but those tightening the noose as well.

There are plenty of cases to illustrate this point. Take, for instance, the restrictions put in the way of journalists covering daily briefings from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). A report by *Prothom Alo* on April 30 charted the changes in the DGHS' media engagement policy that show how the government has been restricting access to information about the coronavirus. First, the journalists were robbed of the opportunity to ask questions when, on April 8, the online media briefings were repackaged as "daily health bulletins". It is common knowledge that questions are an essential part of any press briefing. They help journalists glean necessary information, challenge statements and demand clarifications if need be. But these so-called live "bulletins", conducted by a top health official, basically offer a bland,

pre-scripted communiqué that demands blind faith on the part of the audience, without any recourse to verification. Then, starting April 11, information on the government's stock of testing kits was airbrushed from the bulletins. From April 24 onwards, information on daily sample collection in each testing laboratory in the country (there are 31 now) was also removed.

Could these be mere acts of omission? Should we take the statements from the administration—which has been roundly criticised for its failure to expand testing, ensure adequate safety gear for all frontline health workers, check irregularities in relief distribution, enforce social distancing regulations so essential to "flatten the curve" of the virus, and to protect the most vulnerable groups in society—at face value? Should we keep our faith in another BTv-like partisan tool of communication?

That certainly seems to be the conclusion of the administration. There is no denying that the coronavirus has created an unprecedented situation in Bangladesh as in many other countries. There is no exit strategy good enough for a crisis of this magnitude. It's also true that the virus is as much a public relations issue as a medical one, given how public perception/response can dramatically change a situation. Manufacturing approval is thus vital to the continuity of the government's efforts. We have ministers who keep telling us how Bangladesh has fared better than the likes of the US, Italy and Spain. However, such optimistic but grossly misleading claims belie the fact that Bangladesh lags far behind even its neighbours in dealing with the crisis. There are growing fears that the actual numbers of infection cases and deaths are much higher than the figures released by the authorities. The flinching response of the authorities has justifiably made the country a case study in what *not* to do in a pandemic.

The list of things going haywire is quite

stupefying, as a cursory glance through any newspaper will reveal. For the media and free speech activists, this essentially meant suppression of vital information, tightening of control of the social media, efforts of the administration to impose its version of journalism, threats of lawsuits, arrests and imprisonment for those speaking out about the crisis, etc.

On April 18, four journalists including *bdnews24.com* Editor-in-Chief Toufique Imrose Khalidi and *jagonews24.com* acting editor Mohiuddin Sarker were sued under the Digital Security Act for reporting on alleged embezzlement of aid for coronavirus victims in Thakurgaon's Baliadangi Upazila. They were charged with publishing "offensive, false, defamatory or fear-inducing data or information," following a complaint filed by a ruling party leader. One of the accused, local journalist Ianvir Hasan, claimed that the lawsuit was filed to stifle journalists so that they do not report on corruption committed by ruling party politicians. "Police have acted swiftly in taking on the case. It's an attempt to stop us from writing about corruption," he told the *Deutsche Welle* (DW).

Since mid-March, according to the Human Rights Watch, the authorities have targeted or arrested a number of individuals including doctors, academics, students and opposition activists for their comments about the coronavirus, most of them under the draconian Digital Security Act. All this adds up to a grave warning: there is a systematic effort in place to silence those who express concerns about the government's handling of the crisis. Often this is done in the name of preventing the spread of "rumours" and "misinformation". As if to bolster the information suppression claims, on April 23, Health Minister Zahid Maleque directed officials not to talk to the media, since it "creates misunderstanding" and "it is against the government's policy." He said this while speaking at the daily online "bulletin".

True, the government has a responsibility to prevent the spread of misinformation about Covid-19. But this doesn't mean it can or should silence those with genuine concerns or criticism of its handling of the situation. According to Brad Adams, Asia director at the Human Rights Watch, "the government should stop abusing free speech and start building trust by ensuring that people are properly informed about plans for prevention, containment, and cure as it battles the virus."

Regardless of the circumstances created by Covid-19, Bangladesh's struggle with press freedom has been a constant challenge. In this year's World Press Freedom Index released by the Reporters Without Borders later last month, the country has ranked 151st out of 180 countries, while its position was 150th last year. It is instructional to take a look at these figures as they remind us how far down the rabbit hole have we fallen. Clearly, the problem hasn't been exacerbated by the coronavirus, but suppression of information and press freedom poses a greater challenge now as it has very real health consequences. This much should be obvious to anyone who cares for their life and that of their loved ones. This goes for those in power as well.

And this is precisely why journalism is more vital now than ever before. The Covid-19 pandemic has placed independent media front and centre in providing reliable, fact-checked and potentially life-saving information. An independent press can ensure our leaders and officials remain accountable and their measures are scrutinised. This will only help improve the government's response to the crisis—as will an emboldened citizenry free to voice their legitimate concerns and grievances. The opposite of it, as they say, is "pure, unadulterated chaos".

Badiuzzaman Bay is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*. Email: badiuzzaman.bd@gmail.com



# A tribute to Jamilur Reza Choudhury

*A man who built Bangladesh with a passion*

KHALID SHAMS

PROFESSOR Jamilur Reza Choudhury, fondly called JRC by his friends, was a soft spoken but a strongly passionate man. As a distinguished civil engineer, his passion was to build a modern Bangladesh. All his expertise, energy and work were dedicated to this single purpose. There was hardly any major or mega civil construction project in the country with which he was not associated. He had the highest professional credentials as a civil and structural engineer. As part of his doctoral thesis he devised a simplified method for analysis of shear walls in tall buildings which has been used all over the world. It is even included in text books on the subject in different countries.

If he wanted, JRC could have lived and worked in the west and acquired fame like Dr FR Khan. Instead, he devoted himself to teaching and working in his own country. But unlike many other academics, he went far beyond the confines of his classroom, ventured into the real world of development—not only the physical structures made of steel and concrete, but more importantly the development of human resources, the young people of Bangladesh. So after Buet, he spent the rest of his life building private universities, i.e. the Brac

University and the University of Asia Pacific.

He was undoubtedly a great human being. Already the human qualities of JRC, his humility, warmth of his personality, his friendly unassuming behaviour, have been highlighted. Having known him and his family since our high school days, I have seen how modest and unostentatious was his living. I have frequented his family bungalow on Elephant Road which contained musty old furniture and shelves filled with books—reflecting the lifestyle of a typical emerging middle class family with academic inclinations. I believe only recently the property has been given to a developer.

What struck me most was Jamil's highly strategic vision for future development of a country that won its independence after a devastating Liberation War. It was a poor country, much derided globally as a basket case. The low lying delta that merged with the Bay of Bengal was vulnerable to frequent cyclones and storm surges. Probably half a million people had perished in the cyclone of November, 1970. The immediate task was to prevent such colossal loss of lives in future. JRC envisioned a ring of multipurpose cyclone shelters all along the 750 km of coastline of the bay. It was almost an impossible mission. JRC led a team of



Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury

experts that planned and implemented a highly successful multi-purpose cyclone shelter programme overseeing construction of 2,500 multi-storied buildings. Various evaluation studies including a very recent one by Kyoto university estimated that these shelters have saved probably hundreds of thousands of lives in recent years.

JRC was also trail-blazer with introduction of new information based communication technologies, which provide the platform for today's "Digital Bangladesh". He was the director of the newly set up Computer Centre in Buet during the period 1982-92. It later on became the Institute of Information and Communications Technology, a real

powerhouse of training, churning out the first generation of computer engineers in Bangladesh. Its graduates were at the forefront of an ICT based industry and trade, both at home and abroad.

I was at that time involved with research on regional development policies at the Asian and Pacific Development Centre in Kuala Lumpur. In 1986 Jamil assisted me in introducing a research project on development of new IT applications—now facilitated by emergence of desktop personal computers—for decentralised rural development. We had scholars like Nitin Patel and Mohan Kaul from India, Samaranyake from Sri Lanka who prepared policy recommendations for using PCs to utilise rural data bases for local and regional development. Jamil, in spite of his quiet unobtrusive ways became a veritable whirlwind, the primary motivating force, the change-maker in the IT sector of our country. He ultimately ended up as the chairman of the task force for developing export of software and data processing as well as convenor of the committee which formulated the national IT policy.

His involvement in different sectors of our national development seemed boundless. He was a bee-hive of energy. A Prometheus unbound. His capacity to motivate and energise others, especially the young, was amazing.

His personal and professional integrity in a country where corruption is rife, was unparalleled. I was impressed by his unique ability to coordinate, to harmonise, to synthesise even highly divergent views. This is also exemplified by his capacity to work simultaneously with both government and non-government organisations like Brac, Grameen Bank, as well as international development institutions. He did this without ever compromising his professional integrity.

Right now we face the unprecedented crisis of Covid-19 and an epic challenge for reconstruction of a devastated economy. We very much needed JRC and his expertise, his bold vision and capacity to coordinate and inspire others to work as a team, in accomplishing this task.

We often complain that Bangladesh does not have a person who could become a role model for our youth. I would like to assert that JRC was a patriot and a great role model for our new generation of young professionals. I certainly grieve at his death. At the same time, I also celebrate, like so many of his friends, colleagues and admirers, the great accomplishments of his life. His name will be emblazoned in our development history as one of the great builders of Bangladesh.

Khalid Shams is a former civil servant and a friend of JRC.

## The 'Extraction' Attraction



SHAMSAD MORTUZA

MY Face-book newsfeed has been experiencing a little tremor ever since the Dhaka-based action movie *Extraction* started streaming on Netflix on April

24. Surprisingly, the ground shaking "thor-thor" is not due to the much hyped presence of Chris Hemsworth and his marvellous reputation as an avenger; instead, social media is abuzz with Dhaka being misrepresented by Hollywood.

Not too often do we get to hear Bangladesh and Hollywood in the same sentence. There was a time when the popular BTV variety show *Jodi Kichu Mome Na Koren* featured a Hollywood based reporter to give media updates in the pre-internet era. There have been documentaries—such as *The Human Scale* (2012) dealing with the problematic expansion of megacity or *The True Cost* (2015) exploring the condition in which clothes are made for the fashion world—that shed light on Dhaka. Dhaka is mentioned in passing in TV shows such as "How I Met Your Mother" where Ranjit the taxi driver is said to be from Bangladesh. Evan Treborn in *The Butterfly Effect* (2004) worries about waking up in a "dirt farm" in Bangladesh. In *Friends with Benefits* (2011) we hear of Bangladesh in a sarcastic list of countries that tops America in work ethics. *Zoolander* (2011) mentions Bangladesh in the context of child labour. In Spielberg's *Munich* employs the comment: "enough food to feed Bangladesh". And in one episode of *Simpsons*, Krusty the clown finds an old record from Bangladesh and is kicked out of the house for playing it! I am sure there are a few odd references here and there that I have missed. Suffice it to say, the presence of Bangladesh in Hollywood films is far from flattering.

The fact that *Extraction* has gained traction in Bangladesh to become number one Netflix choice is no wonder. Never mind that it is a mindless action

movie with endless spewing of bullets running through a ridiculous storyline.

The plot involves [skip if you plan to watch the movie] an Indian drug lord who is in jail. His son stays with his security chief Saju in Mumbai in a massive palatial house. The boy Ovi is kidnapped by a rival drug kingpin from Bangladesh. Asif is a dandy young man who runs a racketeer of drug-peddlers reminding one of the scantily dressed characters with invectives aplenty from *Shamdog Millionaire*.

Saju hires an Australian extractor Rake, a psychological wreck who suffers from the trauma of losing his son to cancer and ends up killing someone with a garden rake to live up to his name. Tyler undertakes this mission impossible to Dhaka with a death wish. Within 16 hours, the entire rescue team takes position in a launch in the Buriganga River, while he alone goes to pay the ransom to free Ovi. Killing spree, high speed car chase, road blockades, and door to door search in narrow alleys ensued as Rake rescues Ovi.

Meanwhile, Saju secretly comes to Dhaka on a chartered plane from Mumbai with an intention of double-crossing the rescue mission. He kills Tyler's rescue party. Don't ask why Saju, who could kill an entire international mercenary gang, bothered to hire secondary forces to deal with some street ruffians? Don't be distracted by the mindless plot—keep watching, and you may even end up being proud of Ananta Jalil.

Tyler and Ovi thus end up being chased by Asif's gang, Asif's pet police (a combination of DMP, RB elite and the army) and Saju. For the first time ever in the history of mankind, we get an insight into Dhaka's box culverts, "the world's worst sewage" through which the duo escaped and was later picked up by a western handler and taken to a safe house. Ovi had to kill the handler to save Tyler from his greedy friend. They are again on the streets in search of the pickup point. After hundreds of cars, CNC wheelers being destroyed, bodies being dropped, rocket launchers being hurled, a helicopter being smashed over Demra bridge, the hero and his foil being dead (Tyler will be dead unless a sequel is required), the boy is saved by Tyler's back

up team. The final action on the bridge is conveniently watched by Asif from his palace with simple binoculars, while his lackey colonel goes in and out of action to coordinate the chase.

The movie has been hailed for its close encounter combats and the daring "oner". Sam Hargrave, the debutant director famed for his stunts in Marvel movies, straps himself on the bonnet of a car to film a long-form "one-shot" spanning 12 minutes to cover a car chase, a foot chase, another car chase, gun battles, knife battles, hand-to-hand combat, and plenty of explosions. Evidently, the "oner" failed to impress our sulky viewers who were in no mood to stomach the negative portrayal of Dhaka.



A still from the movie 'Extraction'.

Some have commented on the yellow filter that has been used to present Dhaka as a sickly, exotic location. Others have been disturbed by the configuration of Dhaka as a failed state where a drug lord can employ a senior army officer to brew a cocktail of armed forces and spray them over the intruders who to be killed like mosquitoes by a wanton boy. There is no meeting of the Defence Ministry or call from the political leadership: a bunch of heavily armoured uniformed men engage in a wild goose chase while being killed by the dozens in the process. Since when are our national security decisions involving foreigners taken inside a criminal's den? Valid question.

Well, mindless action genres set in Bangkok, Lagos, Somalia, Taiwan, Vietnam, Mexico, Brazil and the like need these poverty-stricken slums to catch the imagination of the west. We, the people of The Third World, offer an ugly canvas against which the conflicted hero's moral dilemma can be portrayed. I do not think we have objected to such stereotyping of other countries and races earlier. So what makes us become so sensitive now?

This reminds me of a particular scene from *Rush Hour* in which Jackie Chan greets a black man as "What's up my nigga" and gets attacked. He was trying to be "kool" like his black partner Chris Tucker. I guess it's alright for us to ritually disown our own city, discredit it,

that we can ask is why a film on Dhaka is devoid of Bangladeshi actors. The Dakaiya accents attempted by the Indian actors were gibberish to say the least. Even the way Chris Hemsworth demanded, "proman dao" was better Bangla than any one of those Indian actors. The Hindi songs and cabaret dance too were also out of joint.

We understand the film had a local partner, but their involvement is very hazy. The credit-line shows few locals in the technical team. Indeed we need to ask why the film was not shot in Dhaka except for the footages needed for chroma key compositing. The involvement of our local actors, agencies would have made it a much more credible production. We need more efficient translators, creative writers, bi-lingual actors, film critics so that the west takes us seriously. The anthology *Sincerely Yours, Dhaka* (2018) on Netflix and some other non-mainstream movies are slowly generating a trickle of cultural capital that we need for future ventures.

There is no point in being angry at an angry movie. Let us take a step back: think of better ways of branding Dhaka. I think Turkey can be a good role model. Turkish Airlines has used Ridley Scott to make *The Journey*, which is now being used as a promotional video for Istanbul. Then there are some wonderful Turkish movies and serials on Netflix that show the modern and urban sides of the country. If we think that the only way we can represent Bangladesh before the western world is by presenting our villages and poverty at the Cannes film festival, then the west will also not think of us as anything more than an exotic location caught in a time-war. Finally, a note on the market. If we are mindful about what we consume and patronise, the market will yield a different representation. Mind it, it is our custom that has made *Extraction* the number one Netflix choice in Bangladesh. If we can prove to the world that we have a sensible market large enough to patronise Hollywood, surely there will be substantial change in the way we are represented.

Shamsad Mortuza is a professor of English, University of Dhaka (now on leave). Currently, he is Pro-Vice-Chancellor of ULAB. Email: shamsad71@hotmail.com

**ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY**

**MARGARET THATCHER ELECTED PRIME MINISTER OF BRITAIN**  
May 3, 1979

On this day in 1979, Margaret Thatcher of the Conservative Party was elected British prime minister, becoming the first woman in Europe to hold that post and later the longest continuously serving British premier since 1827.

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Con man's con
- 5 Impassive one
- 10 Ship of 1492
- 11 Grazing area
- 13 Smell
- 14 Whole
- 15 Responds to a busy signal
- 17 Low digit
- 18 Sewing machine part
- 19 Waiter's reward
- 20 Veto vote
- 21 Lab runners
- 22 Coffee add-in
- 25 Daytona entrant
- 26 Farm fowl
- 27 Ventilate
- 28 Mayo ingredient
- 29 Orchestra

**DOWN**

- 1 Desisive sound
- 2 Apple drink
- 3 Battery end
- 4 Island group that includes Guam
- 5 Rank
- 6 High-strung
- 7 Granola bit
- 8 Foolish
- 9 Ornamental molding
- 12 Three-hanky film
- 16 First person
- 21 Strolling Mexican musician
- 22 Enjoyed some gum
- 23 Entertained lavishly
- 24 Etch
- 25 Mob revolt
- 27 Not present
- 29 Caravan stop
- 30 Farm sights
- 31 Fish with a net
- 32 Good judgment
- 36 Architect I.M.

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

**TUESDAY'S ANSWERS**

ASTRAY SLOP  
LAHORE PANE  
ADEPTS IONTA  
RITES PETAL  
MEAD DESIRE  
M I C E R A I D  
M A N O A M A N O  
T A N E L S E  
A L I G N S R E S T  
M A M A S B O R E R  
E R A S D E B A T E  
R I L E E D I S O N  
S A S A S C E N D

HERE'S YOUR COFFEE, SARGE

COFFEE IN A BOWL?

EASIER DUNKING

I'M HOME! IT'S PAPPY-BONDING TIME, KIDS!

WHAT ARE WE DOING? TEA PARTY? BABBIES? COLORING?

I'M CENTERING MY CH.

DO YOU NEED A SPOTTER?



# Key to controlling the spread of COVID-19

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Contact tracing to rapidly isolate people who could be infected with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) reduced the length of time people were infectious in the community over 4 weeks (from 14 January to 12 February 2020) in Shenzhen, China, according to a study published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases journal.

In Shenzhen, authorities identified who to isolate based on their contact with confirmed cases, as well as isolating people who already had symptoms. The new study finds that contact tracing increased the speed at which new cases were confirmed by 2 days (an average of 5.5 days initially, reduced to 3.2 with contact tracing). It also reduced the amount of time it took to isolate infected people by 2 days (from an average of 4.6 days down to 2.7). There were only three deaths in the study group during the study period.

On January 8, 2020, authorities began to monitor travellers from Hubei province for symptoms such as a fever and cough, and after 2 weeks expanded to monitor people without symptoms as well as the wider community. Suspected cases and



their close contacts provided nasal swabs, which were tested for coronavirus at 28 local hospital and 12 other centres. People with symptoms were isolated and treated in hospital before their test results were known, and those without symptoms were quarantined at dedicated facilities. Close contacts who tested negative were quarantined at home or in a dedicated facility and monitored for 14 days.

"The experience of COVID-19 in the city of Shenzhen may

demonstrate the huge scale of testing and contact tracing that's needed to reduce the virus spreading," says Dr Ting Ma from the Harbin Institute of Technology at Shenzhen, China. "Some of the strict control measures enforced here, such as isolating people outside their homes, might be unlikely to be replicated elsewhere, but we urge governments to consider our findings in the global response to COVID-19. To achieve similar results, other countries might be

able to combine near-universal testing and intensive contact tracing with social distancing and partial lockdowns."

For people who were isolated because they showed symptoms of COVID-19, it took an average of 4.6 days for them to be isolated following the first signs of infection. Contact tracing reduced this to an average of 2.7 days. For people diagnosed with COVID-19 after being contact traced and tested (87 people), a fifth (17 out of 87 people) had

not yet developed any symptoms, and 30% (25 out of 87) did not have a fever.

Contact tracing also reduced the length of time between someone first experiencing symptoms and being diagnosed. It took an average of 5.5 days if people were only tested after they reported symptoms, but with contact tracing there was only a delay of an average of 3.2 days between the first symptoms and a confirmed diagnosis.

In this study, transmission was most likely between people who shared a household, but not all close contacts caught COVID-19, with only 11% of close contacts of this kind developing the disease. Of close contacts who travelled together with an infected person (for example on a plane, bus, train or boat), an average of 6% developed the disease. Of close contacts who shared a meal with an infected person, an average of 9% developed the disease.

The authors note that these transmission rates will be higher in other countries, where measures such as isolation outside the home might not be as strict or rapid. These data do not give any insights into why some cases cause higher levels of transmission than others.

## TUBERCULOSIS

### The COVID-19 pandemic must not divert attention

If resources are diverted away from child and adolescent tuberculosis (TB) programmes in order to fight COVID-19, the consequences for the estimated 400,000 children and adolescents in the African region needing TB and multidrug-resistant TB care each year could be devastating, warned the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) recently.

As the coronavirus pandemic makes its way into the African continent, there are concerns about its potential impact on the large number of children and adolescents living with TB infection or disease across the region. TB is both curable and preventable but remains a major cause of morbidity and mortality in children and adolescents and has only recently been afforded the attention that was long overdue.

An estimated one million children fall ill with TB every year, and one-quarter of all people with TB disease in the world live in Africa. In 2018, of all the people living with HIV in the world who developed TB, 72 percent of them were in Africa. And Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 82 percent of all HIV-associated TB deaths that same year.

Worldwide, 90 percent of children who die from TB do not receive the standard treatment that could save their lives. This oversight is due to various challenges in TB detection in children and because standard diagnostic tools are less effective. TB is an often undiagnosed or misdiagnosed cause or co-morbidity of common childhood illnesses such as pneumonia, malnutrition and meningitis. Adolescents with TB are also neglected, despite being identified as a high-risk age group for developing highly infectious TB, and having age-specific challenges to accessing diagnosis and care.

The Union is calling on donors and partners to continue to support TB care and prevention responses – including a focused effort on child and adolescent TB. The Union is also calling on national TB programmes and ministries of health to keep TB and comorbidities on the agenda during the COVID-19 response.

## HEALTH bulletin



### The intelligent knife: new approach to cancer surgery

Scientists have developed an 'intelligent knife' that can tell surgeons immediately whether the tissue they are cutting is cancerous or not. An international team speculated that the metabolic status of tissue, as assessed by mass spectrometry, might aid in this process.

A handheld diathermy device was applied to tissue from the cervix to create a small "surgical aerosol" of compounds that was transferred through a suction tube to a mass spectrometer and analysed immediately. Evaluated tissue samples included 16 healthy cervical specimens, 50 human papillomavirus (HPV)-positive specimens (with or without cervical intraepithelial neoplasia), and 21 cervical cancer specimens. The mass spectrometry patterns (particularly lipid metabolite analysis) distinguished the three types of tissue with 100% sensitivity and specificity.

The authors envision a future where a diathermy wand with a tube sucks aerosolised tissue into a mass spectrometer in the operating room and identifies tissue that should be biopsied or resected, in real time. To reach that goal, this technique first will have to be tested on many more samples to confirm its accuracy and to determine the circumstances in which it is most useful. Finally, it remains to be seen if this technology can aid in identifying other precancerous lesions and other types of cancer, beyond cervical cancer.

## Role of Zinc and Selenium in boosting immunity

FAHMIDA HASHEM

Almost all nutrients in the diet play a crucial role in maintaining an optimal immune response, and both insufficient and excessive intakes can have negative consequences on the immune status and susceptibility to a variety of pathogens. Among the most important ones are zinc and selenium.

Zinc is a vital trace mineral for the immune system. The ability of zinc to boost immunity in certain disorders has been backed up by numerous studies over the past few decades. A study conducted by Ohio State University has found that zinc can stop the immune system from getting out of control and causing serious problems after 'sepsis' which is a life-threatening condition in which the body attacks its own organs and cells falsely to fight off infection.

We have no specialised zinc storage system in our body which means we must take it every day. Zinc is present in a wide variety of foods, but it is important to remember that phytates can bind zinc and inhibit its absorption. Phytates are found in whole-grain bread, cereals, and legumes. This means that zinc contained in grains and plants is not as well absorbed as zinc found in seafood and meat. Examples of foods that are high in zinc are oysters, beef, crab, lobsters, fortified cereal, pumpkins seeds, yoghurts, cheese, oatmeal, and peas etc.

So what evidence is there to support taking zinc for COVID-19? There have been hundreds of studies investigating zinc for the common cold. Zinc can inhibit the binding

of the cold virus to cells within the nasal mucosa and suppress inflammation. COVID-19 is a new disease, and we are still learning about it, so to date, there has not been any specific studies of zinc for COVID-19, and we can only look at its effects in other conditions. A Cochrane review of 18 studies found zinc lozenges (at least 75mg/day) administered within 24 hours



of the onset of symptoms reduced the duration of cold symptoms in healthy people. Zinc also showed to inhibit the activity and replication of another coronavirus (SARS-CoV which caused an outbreak in 2002) in the laboratory.

Selenium is basically another trace element naturally present in the human body. Dietary selenium has been found to play a role in the immune treatment of viral and bacterial infections. Selenium acts

as an antioxidant in the extracellular space, the cell cytosol, in association with cell membranes and specifically in the gastrointestinal tract, all with the potential to influence immune processes. Selenium influences both the innate, 'non-adaptive' and the acquired, 'adaptive' immune systems. Foods high in selenium include nuts, tuna, oysters, beef, chicken, tofu, whole wheat pasta,

shrimp, and mushrooms. Scientists have found that people who are malnourished or follow poor diet habits depleted of essential nutrients are more prone to develop infections and diseases than those who do not. So, following a healthy diet is very important as our immune system needs adequate nourishment and nutrients to fuel itself and fight off foreign intruders and disease.

The writer is a nutritionist. E-mail: fahmidahashem60@gmail.com

## How COVID-19 patients can avoid ICU management

PROF M KARIM KHAN

We know that intensive care unit (ICU) is for critically ill patients. We also know that we have a scarcity of ICU beds as well as specialists in critical care management in Bangladesh. There are approximately three beds for every 1 million population. Needless to say that it is also very expensive. Data states that about 20% of COVID-19 patients need hospital management and out of 20%, only 5% needs ICU management. Unfortunately, 87% of the patients died who received ventilatory support.

If COVID-19 patients do not have any serious comorbidity they do not require hospital management. Home quarantine for fourteen days and supportive treatment as per symptoms, light exercise, gurgling with lukewarm water, and nutritious food intake is enough to cure them. Those who develop pneumonia need broad-spectrum antibiotics, similarly used in community-acquired pneumonia. But those who develop respiratory distress need hospitalisation and high flow oxygen. Nebulisation with bronchodilators may also be needed. COVID-19 is very contagious but it is not deadly if we take adequate precautions. We need mental strength, proper hygiene practice and supportive treatment if affected.

So to avoid the need for ICU care we need abundant oxygen supply, nebulisation machines and timely supportive treatment in case of hospitalisation. COVID-19 does not have any vaccines or specific treatment to date, so stay home and stay safe.

The author is a Professor of Paediatrics at Community Based Medical College, Mymensingh. E-mail: mmukhan@gmail.com



## HOW TO HOME QUARANTINE

The home quarantined person should:

Stay in a well-ventilated single-room preferably with an attached toilet

Needs to stay away from elderly people, pregnant women, children

Restrict his/her movement within the house

Under no circumstances attend any social/religious gathering

Wash hand frequently with soap and water or with alcohol-based sanitizer

Avoid sharing household items like dishes, glasses, cups, utensils, towels, bedding

Wear a surgical mask at all time. The mask should be changed every 8-8 hours

Dispose off used mask in a closed bin and bin should also be handled responsibly

If symptoms appear, he/she should immediately inform the nearest health centre

In Search of Excellence





## 'Want players to return hungrier than ever'

The sporting world, much like other arenas, has come to a standstill for months due to the coronavirus pandemic. While fans are counting days to catch their favourite games live, players are trying to stay fit with indoor activities, preparing for when times get better. Bangladesh batting consultant Neil McKenzie, who is currently back in South Africa, mentioned that the players must take this downtime positively and use it to prepare both physically and mentally as to how they want to approach the game once normalcy returns. The South African took more of a philosophical approach as he answered questions sent out by The Daily Star's Ekush Tapader via voice notes.



The Daily Star (TDS): How are you spending your time back home?

Neil McKenzie

(NM): It is an unprecedented situation. Yes we all love sports and cricket but nothing is happening at the moment. But we just have to look at the bigger picture. A lot of people are losing their lives and livelihoods which is obviously a dreadful and frustrated period to be in. We have been in lockdown for over a month now. But I am just trying to look at the positives now. I think it is now time to reflect on your life, time to be with your family, time to check on friends and time just to reflect on who you are in your life and what you want to achieve or what you have achieved. It is not easy being confined but the positive thing is that we are with our family. It is actually time to do things as a family, contact with friends. In this era it is very easy to keep in contact as we have videocalls, Zoom calls, Whatsapp. And let's just hope that the vaccine for this virus is found soon and we can go back to normality.

TDS: Do you feel it has been too long without cricketing activities, especially for the cricketers and supporting staff?

NM: Yes, it has been too long. Rugby, soccer, golf, tennis, cricket and whatever it is; it is very hard to

find on TV at the moment. I think in normal times, the breakaway from reality for people is sports. In Bangladesh, people are mad about cricket. It gives them a break from the normal and routined life. But that is not the bigger picture here. As much as we want cricket in our life, we would not want to see more people die and suffer.

It is not an ideal situation. I can feel for the players. As coaches, we are jumping at our bit to help the players. We have tried a lot of things, we have sent out a lot of fitness requirements, some programs for players to keep

what they want to change. And when lockdown eventually is over, I want all the players to return hungrier than ever.

TDS: What can be the impact on a batsman when he is not amidst preparation for long time?

NM: I think it is not easy for anybody, be it bowlers or batsmen. When it is all over, I think they will just get back to it [playing]. It is like riding a bike -- you just get back on it. I want the players to be more hungry than before when they finally get back to the field. I think we will see some hungry sportsmen around

It is frustrating for the coaches but it is more frustrating for the players. As for matches against Australia, you always want to match your skills against the best in the world. Australia are one of the bests in the world, so it would have been a great series.

strong. It is a frustrating time for players. Especially for these young and fit athletes who want to be out there showcasing their talents and instead they are cooped indoors. But as I said, the situation can be a lot worse. So, our challenge as coaches is just to try and keep them fit physically and more importantly the mental side too at this time. I think it is time for all the players to reflect on their careers, reflect if they are happy with where they are at the moment, and

the world coming back with a new vigour and a new realisation that you cannot take life for granted.

TDS: Have you maintained any communication with prominent Bangladesh batsmen like Tamim Iqbal or Liton Das? What is your advice to them?

NM: There has been communication but not with everybody individually. As a group and as a team the coaches have been in contact with each other just to



discuss where we want to take the team. We and the medical staff have put together certain programmes for the players to follow. We use Shrinivas Chandrasekaran [Shrinivas Chandrasekaran] a lot who is obviously our video analyst. Players have got access to their footage and other people's footage and to whatever they really want. And I think it is just more of a self-reflection at the moment for players. But obviously if a player needs me then just gives me a phone call or

sends me a video or asks me what they think and obviously I reply. And if I have got some information to add on to any of the players then I just pass it on. Hopefully when they come back they will have questions about not only how to be good but also about how they can be world class.

TDS: Ireland tour and Australia series have been suspended recently. How frustrating is this for you?

NM: It is frustrating for the

coaches but it is more frustrating for the players. As for matches against Australia, you always want to match your skills against the best in the world. Australia are one of the bests in the world, so it would have been a great series. Ireland trip is always quality. It is sort of an opportunity for the players to tour the world and see what is out there. So yes, opportunity is missed but to be honest you cannot control it.

TDS: Do you have any new findings about Bangladesh batsmen? What can they improve and how can they prepare themselves while they are stuck at home?

NM: I think we have identified with the Bangladesh players in whole in terms of where we see the opportunities in the ODI format, T20 format. For us coaches it is just role clarification. It is to let the players know what is expected of him, what he can deliver. There is a lot of competition for players in the Bangladesh side. There are a lot of talented seniors, youngsters and a lot of players coming through now. We just hope that someone jumps up like Liton Das has done in the last series and pushes the standards really high. Hope that the players come back with a clear mind knowing how they are going to take their game forward and thrive, not just to be a good Bangladeshi player but to be a great world class player.

## Khawaja hits out at board's cashflow crisis

AGENCIES

Usman Khawaja has expressed disappointment at Cricket Australia's financial "mismanagement", admitting he was shocked to learn of its cash-flow woes.

Khawaja is determined to return to Australia's Test XI, suggesting it is better placed to bounce back from this week's contract snub compared to the same setback in 2014.

Speaking about CA's financial crisis, he said: "I was very shocked. Because I knew our projections for revenue were still very high and I think they still are, depending on what happens with the India series," Khawaja said.

"It's a bit confusing. I don't have all the financial information in front of me, but it seems like it's more of a cashflow problem. There's a little bit of mismanagement there somewhere, with the portfolio and putting a lot of money into the share market."



Cristiano Ronaldo went hiking with his son in the hills of Madeira, posting this snap on his Instagram page yesterday.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

## Transfer ban on Saif SC

SPORTS REPORTER



FIFA imposed a transfer ban on Saif Sporting Club for not paying fines imposed on the club regarding complaints from three foreign players.

The ban -- which means the club can sign neither local nor foreign players -- will be enforced until the club pays off the amount of nearly 100,000 US dollars to FIFA through the BFF.

The decision was relayed after the club failed to pay the Macko Villiam of Slovakia, Sava Gardasevic of Montenegro and Goran Obradovic of Serbia within the April 14

deadline. The club's managing director Nasiruddin Chowdhury claimed that the three players took advantage of the club's lack of understanding of FIFA statutes.

"The three players were brought on trial by our former coach Nikola Kavazovic. They didn't have ITCs (international transfer certificates), they were not even registered. They were poor in quality and were undisciplined. So we released them in less than a month. However, they must have taken agreement papers with the club to FIFA," Chowdhury told The Daily Star, adding that the club had failed to pay the fine due to complications related to banking transactions due to the pandemic.

## No showering, no shaking, no sharing

AFP, Paris

No shaking, no showering, no sharing, no signing.

Welcome to what the world of tennis could look like once restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic have been lifted.

On Friday, the International Tennis Federation, issued guidelines for local and national competitions.

The guidelines include arriving at a venue already dressed and leaving immediately after the conclusion of a match. "Do not use the locker rooms or showers," say the ITF.

Masks are to be worn while off-court, players and officials should maintain two metres between each other. Handshakes are also off limits.

Each player will use their own set of balls and ball boys and girls will wear rubber gloves.

The players were also discouraged from signing autographs or taking selfies with fans.

## Labuschagne ready for 'heaps of cricket'

REUTERS, Sydney



Australia's Marnus Labuschagne is bracing for "heaps and heaps of cricket" once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, the prolific top order batsman said on Saturday.

The global health crisis has halted international sports, postponing several bilateral cricket series and jeopardising this year's Twenty20 World Cup scheduled in October-November in Australia.

"There is going to be a lot of tours that will need to be made up," Labuschagne told Australian Associated Press (AAP). "There's going to be a whole heap of cricket in a very short time frame. We'll be making up for missed time, that schedule is just going to be packed. It's going to be a bit different to what we're used to. We're going to have to be ready coming out of this break to play heaps and heaps of cricket."

The South Africa-born Labuschagne has been a revelation since stepping up as Steve Smith's concussion substitute at Lord's in last year's Ashes series in England.

In the subsequent series against Pakistan and New Zealand, the 25-year-old smashed four centuries in five Tests, including a maiden double hundred in Sydney earlier this year.

Labuschagne felt his Glamorgan stint helped him get better as a batsman and lamented not being able to reunite with the county as professional cricket remains suspended in England until at least July 1.

"I really enjoyed it last year. I loved Glamorgan, hence why I signed a two-year extension," he said.

"It's disappointing to see them and England cricket in trouble. It's our responsibility, cricket on the whole, to make sure once this period is over that we get games on television and get the sport started again. We need to support each other."

## Martinez to stay at Belgium

REUTERS, Brussels

Belgium coach Roberto Martinez has extended his contract through to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, ending weeks of speculation about a new deal, Belgian media reported on Saturday.

There was no official confirmation from the Belgian football association but newspapers said Martinez would stay in charge through to the next World Cup after negotiating a new two-year deal.

His contract was up after this year's Euros, which has been shifted back a year because of the coronavirus.

Martinez, 46, had already said in interviews over the last weeks he wanted to stay in charge in order to take Belgium to Euro 2021, where they are drawn in Group B and will play Denmark, Finland and Russia.

The team, who are top of the FIFA world rankings, had qualified in imposing fashion, by winning all 10 qualifiers, scoring 40 goals and conceding just three.



Virat Kohli posted this picture of himself and his wife Anushka Sharma alongside an endearing message on her birthday, which she celebrated on Sunday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

## Tributes pour in for Chuni Da

AGENCIES



Heartfelt tributes poured in from all corners for former India football captain Subimal 'Chuni' Goswami, who died at the age of 82 in Kolkata on Thursday.

Legendary singer Kabir Suman recalled memories of the former football captain.

Suman recalled in a Facebook post: "When I came to Kolkata, I was 4 years old. After coming to Kolkata, I came close to football. Chuni Goswami was a favourite player of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal as well. Chuni was from undivided Bangladesh so it was a pride for East Bengal supporters. He was an icon for me. His smiling face was a positive power for us. There were talks that he didn't score goal against East Bengal, because he was a 'Bangal'. I wrote a song on Manna da and Chuni. I never played football but it was a dream for me. I

met him in a program and went to touch his feet for blessings. He felt uneasy but I said, 'you are my icon'. So, people think of Uttam Kumar, Manna De as icons but you are my icon. Chuni motivated me to bring variety in my singing skills. He played football and cricket simultaneously, so I felt I can also sing variety of songs. From my childhood to teenage he was like a role model for me."

From Sunil Gavaskar to Sunil Chettri, cricket and football stood united in grief for the loss of Goswami, considered a colossus in Indian sports.

Born in Kishoreganj district of undivided Bengal, the striker played 50 international matches between 1956 and 1964, including the 1960 Olympics in Rome.

Besides captaining India to the Asian Games gold medal in 1962, he was also a part of the silver-winning team in the 1964 Asia Cup in Israel, which remains India's best



performance in the continental showpiece till date.

He was among the rare few players who played multiple sports. Apart from leading the Indian football team to victory in the 1962 Asian Cup, Goswami also played 46 domestic matches in the Ranji Trophy.

"Today is a truly depressing day. First Rishi (Kapoor) and now Chuni da have left us.

Both champions and legends in their craft. The world will be the poorer for their departure to the Heavens. RIP," said cricketer great Gavaskar.

"Chuni was a fantastic dribbler. His close control was superb. But those weren't the biggest attributes of his game. His greatness lay in his brain. Great players play with their brains, which sets them apart with regards to decision-

making. And decision-making separates a great footballer from a good one," Tulsi Das Balam, Goswami's India teammate and a part of Indian football's 'Three Musketeers' - PK Banerjee, Chuni and Balam - told The Indian Express.

Former India captain Bhaichung Bhutia called him the first superstar of Indian football.

"It's a big loss for Indian football in two-three months. First PK Banerjee (who died on March 20) and now Chuni Goswami. He was a true sporting icon. He was the first superstar of Indian football."

Former cricketer Dilip Doshi, who played under Goswami in the Bengal team, said he learnt a lot from the versatile athlete.

"He was India's all-round sportsman and much to learn from in fitness and fighting spirit. I had the privilege to play with him for a few years when I made my debut for Bengal."



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# Sugarcane is just not paying

Growers leaving occupation due to poor payment by sugar mills; 15 factories owe them Tk 250cr

KONGRON KARMAKER

For the last one month, sugarcane farmer Abdul Salam has not received a penny from the state-owned Mobarakganj Sugar Mill in Jhenaidah district's Kaliganj upazila.

He supplied sugarcane worth Tk 4.5 lakh to the mill in batches between December and mid-March and only received a total of Tk 1 lakh in installments.

"The latest installment of Tk 5,300 was paid through mobile banking on March 22," Abdul told the Daily Star on April 28.

"I already used the Tk 1 lakh to repay loans and other dues. Now I have nothing left to feed my family during this shutdown," said the farmer from Kaliganj's Gobordanga village.

Mahedi Hasan, another sugarcane grower from Chhoto Ghighati village, received only Tk three lakh out of Tk 10 lakh that the mill owes him.

"I do not know when I would get the rest of the dues. I am borrowing money from different people to feed my family," he said, declaring that he will never cultivate sugarcane again.

It takes almost a year to cultivate sugarcane and farmers often have to wait two to three months to receive payment from the sugar mills, he explained.

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Children apparently unaffected by the crisis plaguing the world enjoy running around in the rain near Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## DIGITAL SECURITY ACT 3 journos sent to jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Three journalists were sent to jail by a Narsingdi court yesterday in a case filed under the Digital Security Act over quoting a police official without contacting him.

The journalists are Ramjan Ali Pramanik, 45, news editor of local daily Dainik Grameen Darpon, Shanto Banik, 35, a reporter of the newspaper, and Khandaker Shahin, 32, publisher and editor of web portal "Narsingdi Pratinidin".

Jahangir Hossain, inspector of Special Branch of Narsingdi police, said the three were picked up from their houses on Friday morning.

Inspector Johirul Alam, in-charge of Ghorashal Police Outpost, filed the case with Palash Police Station on Thursday night.

According to the case statement, the online version of Dainik Grameen Darpon ran a report on Thursday under the headline "Youth beaten dead by police on charges of stealing" and Narsingdi Pratinidin published a report headlined "Man dies in Ghorashal police custody; allegation made against police about beating him to death".

Both the reports quoted comments of Inspector Johirul, but no reporters from those outlets contacted him, said the case statement.

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## Two cops die from Covid-19

250-bed police hospital struggling with patients; 741 cops infected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two sub-inspectors died with coronavirus in the last two days at Central Police Hospital in the capital, raising the Covid-19 death toll among law enforcers to five.

Sultanul Arefin, 44, of Public Order Management (POM) at Dhaka Metropolitan Police, died around 7:00am yesterday at the Intensive Care Unit and Nazir Uddin, 55, of Special Branch, died Friday morning.

Sultanul was admitted to the hospital on April 27 with breathing difficulties and persistent cough. He tested positive for the virus later, said hospital Director Hasan ul Haider.

Sultanul left behind his wife, two daughters, and a son. He was buried after a namaz-e-janaza at his village in Jamalpur.

The other victim, Nazir, showed symptoms over a week ago, Haider said, adding that he had asthma and other underlying conditions. The report that he tested positive came on April 25.

Nazir, who was from Pabna, joined Bangladesh Police in 1983 and had been with the Special Branch since 2013.

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

### Health centre at each thana



Representatives of the All India Peasant Union call on Bangabandhu on May 3, 1972.

May 2&3, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

#### BANGABANDHU VISITS DEFENCE MINISTRY

On May 2, 1972 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visits defence ministry.

He meets with the senior staff of the ministry. He is accompanied by defence secretary, Chief of Staff Colonel Shafiqullah and Colonel Khaled Mosharraf, among others.

#### JAPANESE DELEGATION CALLS ON BANGABANDHU

A Japanese delegation calls on Bangabandhu on May 2, 1972 at his official residence. They discuss various issues related to the reconstruction of war-torn Bangladesh, rehabilitation of the displaced people and trade between the two countries.

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## 7 garment workers test positive

STAR REPORT

Seven garment workers in Savar tested positive for Covid-19 on Friday, according to sources at Savar Upazila Health Complex.

The local administration did not disclose whether the workers, aged between 28 and 36, came from outside Savar to join work.

The sources at the health complex said 51 samples were sent to a lab on Thursday for Covid-19 testing. Eight of them tested positive for novel coronavirus.

Dr Shayemul Huda, Savar upazila health and family planning officer, said most of the seven garment workers were from Savar's Ulaila area.

He said the area was put on lockdown and the workers were sent to a hospital in Dhaka.

Parvejur Rahman, upazila nirbahi officer of Savar, said houses of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## Biman gets Tk 1,000cr loan to stay afloat



RASHIDUL HASAN

Sonali Bank has approved a loan of Tk 1,000 crore to Biman Bangladesh Airlines, which sought Tk 1,500 from the state-owned bank as it was reeling from a fund crisis due to ongoing global travel restrictions thanks to Covid-19 pandemic.

The board of directors of Sonali Bank gave the nod at a meeting on April 30 on condition that the national flag carrier will give a sovereign guarantee, Mohibul Haque, senior secretary at the civil aviation and tourism ministry told The Daily Star yesterday.

The finance division has already given the sovereign guarantee to the bank on behalf of the national airliner, he said.

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## Govt restricts the entry of toxic ship

Star report prompts action

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday directed all departments concerned not to allow the highly toxic ship "J Nat" to enter Bangladeshi territory.

This ship, currently on its way to Chattogram from Indonesia, is illegally carrying around 1,500 tonnes of mercury mixed waste.

The government also warned all members of the Bangladesh Ship Breakers and Recyclers Association (BSBRA) not to purchase the ship.

The Daily Star published a report on April 30 titled "Toxic ship heading for Bangladesh".

"After seeing the newspaper report, we have already requested the Bangladesh Navy and the armed forces divisions not to allow the ship into Bangladeshi territory," AKM Shamsul Arefin, additional secretary, ship recycling wing, told The

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Hundreds of workers of a garment factory demonstrate on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway at Targach in Gazipur city after a rumour that the management was planning layoffs yesterday. Many readymade garment manufacturers have laid off their employees in recent weeks.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## US approves use of anti-viral drug

Spain, more US states ease strict lockdowns as France extends emergency until July 24

AFP, Madrid

American authorities have approved an experimental drug for emergency use on coronavirus patients, as more US states eased pandemic lockdowns despite another spike in deaths from the disease.

The measure was the latest step in a global push to find viable treatments and a vaccine for the coronavirus, which has left half of humanity under some form of lockdown, hampered the world economy and caused more than 3.3 million confirmed infections.

The virus has killed more than 239,000 people since it emerged in China late last year.

With signs the pandemic in their hardest-hit nations is slowing, European countries have begun to lift restrictions and to try to inject life into economies battered by weeks of closure.

Spaniards were allowed out of their homes to exercise and walk freely after 48 days of confinement yesterday while others like Russia faced a spike in new infections.

In Madrid and Barcelona, Spaniards took to the streets to exercise and walk freely as the government eased seven weeks of strict lockdown in a country with one of the highest number of fatalities at nearly 25,000.

"After so many weeks in confinement, I badly wanted to go out, run, see the world," said financial advisor Marcos

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