



# The Daily Star

www.thedailystar.net

REGD. No. DA 781

VOL. XXX No. 109

BAISHAKH 21, 1427 BS

Your Right to Know

RAMADAN 10, 1441 HURI

12 PAGES PRICE: Tk 12.00

BANGLADESH  
UPDATE665  
New cases in 24hrs9,455  
Total cases177  
Deaths177  
RecoveriesGLOBAL  
UPDATE245,584  
Deaths3,514,030  
Total cases

BANGLADESHI MIGRANTS IN KSA

## 10 lakh face deportation

*May happen over next 3 to 5 years due to coronavirus fallout, policy in Gulf state, says mission in Riyadh*

JAMIL MAHMUD and RASHIDUL HASAN

The coronavirus fallout and slumping oil prices may lead to the deportation of up to 10 lakh Bangladeshi migrant workers from Saudi Arabia in the next three to five years, according to the Bangladesh mission there.

The Gulf country's policy to replace 70 percent of the foreign workers by its citizens within 2030 could be another reason for the deportation, mission officials fear.

The embassy in a report sent to the foreign ministry recently recommended the government seek alternative labour markets, possibly in African countries.

Officials say it might be possible to employ about 40 lakh Bangladeshis in farming, aquaculture, livestock and different factories in African countries.

Saudi Arabia, the most popular destination of Bangladeshi migrant workers, is home to more than 20 lakh Bangladeshis.

The embassy report said Saudi

authorities are introducing monthly fees for dependents of foreign workers and increasing the fees for iqamas or residency permits as they are implementing the "Saudiization policy" which was formulated in 2016.

According to the report, the recent record dip in oil prices would slow the development works in Saudi Arabia. "Many of the projects may get delayed or suspended."

The Bangladesh mission also cited automation and requirement of skilled workers as factors that could lead to deportation of Bangladeshi workers in the future.

In January and February this year, around 1.29 lakh Bangladeshis travelled abroad for employment. At least 95,385 or 73.87 percent of them went to Saudi Arabia, according to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training.

Saudi Arabia is rapidly introducing

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Scores of vehicles are seen near the Kakoli intersection in the capital around 11:30am yesterday amid a countrywide shutdown. The government extended the shutdown till May 16 to curb the spread of the coronavirus. *Inset*, showing disregard for social distancing, people move around the Islampur wholesale market in Old Dhaka.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Climb up the curve continues

665 new cases reported;  
2 more die

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The novel coronavirus appears to be getting a tight grip on the country as the number of infected people reported hit a new high in a single day.

Some 665 new cases were recorded. With them, the number of infected people is now 9,455.

Two people died of Covid-19 over the same period, bringing the number of fatalities to 177.

On April 29, Directorate General of Health Services recorded the highest 641 Covid-19 positive cases.

Of the two deceased, one was aged between 11 and 20, while the other was above 60. One of them was from Rangpur and another from Narayanganj, said Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of DGHS, while briefing journalists via video conference yesterday.

Some 5,368 samples were tested across the country since Saturday, Nasima said.

Sixty-one people have been isolated across the country in the 24 hours, she added.

The authorities reported the first three

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Factories to be shut if many get infected

*Decides inter-ministerial meet; joint body to monitor health measures; Dhaka, N'ganj, Gazipur to be kept isolated*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Readymade garment factories that have resumed production will be shut down in case a significant number of workers get infected with Covid-19, Health Minister Zahid Maleque has said.

The decision came at an inter-ministerial meeting on "reopening industries and commerce on a limited scale" held at the health ministry yesterday -- two days after at least ten garment workers were tested Covid-19 positive in Savar industrial belt.

The minister, however, did not make it clear how many infections would make the authorities consider the number significant.

"By strictly maintaining the health rules, garment sector and [other] industries can be resumed. We have to take care of people's livelihood as well as their health," the health minister told journalists

in an online briefing following the meeting.

Earlier on April 26, the government announced that it would allow opening the garment factories on a limited scale.

Following the announcement, around 1,000 factories across Savar-Ashulia, Gazipur, Narayanganj and Chattogram industrial belts resumed production at a time.

Representatives from different ministries, law enforcement agencies, healthcare organisations, and RMG industry attended the meeting.

Earlier, several important decisions, including the shutdown mechanism for the resumed factories, were finalised at the meeting.

It also decided to form a joint-monitoring committee to monitor the health measures taken by the factories.

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## Country lagging behind in genome sequencing

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Though countries around the world, including Bangladesh's South Asian neighbours, are unraveling and analysing the genome of the coronavirus to better know its nature and behaviour, the country is yet to embark on genome sequencing.

"We do not know how long the virus will stay in our country. We know that the virus behaved differently in different countries," said Mustak Ibn Ayub, assistant professor at the department of genetic engineering and biotechnology at the University of Dhaka.

"To understand the nature of the virus, we need genome sequencing."

A number of institutions in the country have the capacity to carry out genome sequencing of the virus, he said.

"A national committee can be formed for genome sequencing. We have resources and we have to use them."

A genome is the complete genetic material of an organism, in this case, the coronavirus.

Genome sequencing is a powerful tool for tracking diseases through a process called genomic prediction. It helps researchers identify the genetic changes

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TENGRATILA BLOWOUTS

## Niko liable, must pay damages

*Int'l tribunal verdict comes in favour of Bangladesh over the 2005 disaster*

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Canadian company Niko Resources was negligent and thus liable for the blowout that took place at Chhatak gas field in Tengratila of Sunamganj in January 2005 while Niko's Bangladeshi subsidiary was carrying out drilling operations there, a World Bank tribunal found.

The tribunal formed under the Convention on the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) also concluded that Niko must compensate Bapex for direct loss and damage caused by the blowout.

The compensation owed by Niko to Bapex includes the gas that escaped from Chhatak 2 Well. Niko must also pay compensation for direct damages to environment and health of the people in the surrounding area.

The quantum of such compensation is to be determined at the next phase of the pending arbitration case.

Bangladesh, on the basis of reports from international experts, filed a claim for damages before ICSID in March 2016 seeking \$118 million for Bapex and \$896 million for Petrobangla and Bangladesh as compensation for the 2005 blowouts.

Although the tribunal gave the verdict on February 28, Nasrul Hamid Bipu, state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, disclosed it through a video conference with journalists yesterday.

The ministry had a plan to disclose the verdict in early March but the coronavirus outbreak delayed it, ministry sources said.

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## 29 Rohingyas sheltered in Bhashan Char

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

At least 29 Rohingyas, who had been in one of the two boats floating on the Indian Ocean, were sheltered at the Bhashan Char after they reached the shore of Teknaf early Saturday.

"The 29 Rohingyas were taken to Bhashan Char under the supervision of the Navy," Mahbub Alam Talukder, Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), told The Daily Star yesterday.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said the Rohingyas took small boats and swam to the coast of Teknaf. Some of them even fled when locals were rescuing them, he said.

A Rohingya broker said an international NGO gave them between Tk 90,000 and Tk 1 lakh for transporting the Rohingyas to Malaysia. As Malaysia denied to receive those Rohingyas the NGO again asked the brokers to get them back to Bangladesh,

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A man taking his wheelchair-bound wife home after visiting Agargaon Kidney Hospital in the capital. The couple, who live in the city's Mohakhali area, tried to hire a CNG-run auto-rickshaw at the hospital but none of the auto-rickshaw drivers agreed to take an ill passenger. The photo was taken on Begum Rokeya Sarani.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

MISSING JOURNO KAJOL

## Found after 53 days, sent to jail

*First sued for 'trespass', then held under CrPC section 54*

STAR REPORT

Fifty-three days after his disappearance, missing photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol was found in Benapole yesterday on World Press Freedom Day, but was subsequently arrested and sent to jail.

Soon after being found, he was arrested by Benapole police -- initially on charge of trespassing, and then later in the evening under section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure -- and sent to Central Jashore Prison to await trial.

The photojournalist went missing on the evening of March 10 after leaving his office in Hatirpool. Several days after his disappearance, his mobile phone was found active in Benapole, Sub-inspector Munshi Abdul Lokman, investigation officer of his disappearance case, told The Daily Star.

HOW HE WAS FOUND

The Raghunathpur unit of Border Guard Bangladesh claimed that they discovered Kajol in a paddy field in Raghunathpur village of Sadipur union.

The spot where he was found is directly adjacent to the border and the Benapole Land Port.

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## Swiss soldiers fight Covid-19 armed with Bluetooth app

AFP, Chamblon

Swiss army conscripts are taking the fight to the coronavirus pandemic by field-testing a Bluetooth-based smartphone app aimed at stopping a resurgence of Covid-19.

The rapidly-created app traces people who have inadvertently crossed paths with someone infected with the virus.

It uses wireless technology with each phone registering the others it has come into close proximity with for a sustained period of time.

For the field test, the infantry recruits went through a normal day: physical training, theoretical study and shooting at targets 300 metres away.

“What we did before was lab tests. Now we’re gathering data on how this app performs in real life,” Simon Rosch, a software engineer with smartphone app developers Ubique, told AFP.

The military base makes a good testing ground because, unlike civilians, soldiers are still allowed to congregate in numbers in close proximity.

Furthermore, they are isolated from the rest of the population inside their barracks at Chamblon, overlooking Lake Neuchatel in western Switzerland.

If an app user tests positive for the virus, a coded message is sent to others who might have been exposed to that person, with information as to what they should do next.

The aim is to break the chains of transmission and thereby suppress any spread of the virus as lockdown restrictions are gradually lifted.

## Bangladesh 9th

FROM PAGE 1

the economies across four potential sources of peril -- public debt as percentage of GDP, foreign debt (both public and private), cost of borrowing and reserve cover.

It also calculates their foreign payments owed by the countries this year (their current-account deficit plus their foreign-debt payments) and compares them with their stock of foreign-exchange reserves. A country’s rank on each of these indicators is then averaged to determine its overall standing.

Bangladesh is not weak in terms of any of the four criteria.

The strongest countries, such as South Korea and Taiwan, are overqualified for the role of emerging markets, said the report titled “Which emerging markets are in most financial peril?”

Many bigger economies, including Russia and China, also appear robust. Most of the countries that score badly across all the indicators tend to be small. The bottom 30 account for only 11 percent of the group’s GDP, and less than a quarter of both its foreign and its public debt, the Economist report said.

Over the course of 2020, the 66 economies will have to find over \$4trn to service their foreign debt and cover any current-account deficits.

Excluding China, the figure is \$2.9trn. But this leaves out the buffers that emerging economies have accumulated. The governments hold over \$8trn in foreign-exchange reserves.

Half have enough reserves to cover all of their foreign-debt payments due this year and any current-account deficits, the report added.

## Climb up the curve

FROM PAGE 1

Covid-19 cases in the country on March 8 and the first death on March 18.

Of the infected people, 68 percent are male and 32 percent female. The death rate is also higher among male as 73 percent of the deceased were male.

Around 42 percent of the deceased were above 60, around 27 percent between 51 and 60, about 19 percent between 41 and 50, and around 7 percent between 31 and 40. The rest were below 30, according to Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research website.

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

As of yesterday, 4,499 cases -- 56.53 percent of all cases -- were detected in Dhaka city alone.

More than 83 percent of the cases were in Dhaka division, said IEDCR.

At the briefing, Prof Nasima said a newly formed Clinical Management Committee of the health authorities gave a fresh guideline mentioning the criteria based on which a patient could be termed cured or discharged from hospitals after recovery.

However, she did not elaborate on the new guideline.

As per the criteria, 1,063 people have so far recovered from the disease, she said.

Of them, 624 were released from Dhaka city hospitals and 439 from other hospitals in Dhaka (excluding the city) and other divisions.



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

**A tarpaulin is all Minara Begum has got to shield herself from the rain. The elderly homeless woman, who has made the footpath in front of the capital’s Suhrawardy Udyan her home, waits for a helping hand to ease her hardship amid the nationwide shutdown. This photo was taken on Saturday.**

## Country lagging behind

FROM PAGE 1

that occur in a virus when it spreads through the population, experts said.

This sequencing will help scientists understand, for example, why some countries are suffering more from Covid-19, how fast the virus is mutating, and how a vaccine can be developed for a particular population.

Three serotypes of coronavirus have been found so far and they are -- A, B, and C -- said Sharif Akhteruzzaman, professor of genetic engineering and biotechnology at DU.

“In Europe and the US, A and C serotypes were found in large numbers whereas in Southeast Asian countries, the B serotype is more dominant,” he said.

Genome sequencing will help scientists devise a proper strategy and predict the future of the outbreak, he added.

Government officials said they are now focusing on testing and reducing fatalities, but have plans for undertaking genome sequencing.

“We are also thinking of genome sequencing but now our priority is to do more tests and reduce the spread and deaths,” said Abul Kalam Azad, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services.

As this virus will not go away soon,

“we will do the sequencing once the situation improves”, he said.

Neighbouring India, Pakistan, and Nepal, as well as countries around the world have been reporting genome sequences of the virus from patient samples.

In New York, for example, scientists deduced from sequencing samples of the virus that the viral strain dominant in the city arrived from Europe.

Covid-19 has so far infected more than three million people in 210 countries and territories around the world and caused over 2,45,000 deaths.

The first case in Bangladesh was reported on March 8 and as of yesterday, 177 have died with the virus and 9,455 cases were detected.

Sources in the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) said the institute has no plans for genome sequencing right now.

“Globally, around 13,000 genome sequences were done so far but no major differences were found. We will do it soon,” said ASM Alamgir, principal scientific officer at the IEDCR.

He, however, could not say when the work of genome sequencing will begin.

## 29 Rohingyas sheltered

FROM PAGE 1

Momen said.

“The broker did not name the NGO.”

They were then taken to Bhashan Char, an island in Noakhali. Bangladesh Navy has built a housing facility of 120 cluster villages on the 40sqkm island under a Tk 2,312 crore project for accommodating one lakh of the nearly 1 million Rohingyas sheltered at cramped camps in Cox’s Bazar.

However, the authorities were considering shelving the relocation plan after the UN and other aid agencies opposed the plan, saying there were risks of flood and cyclones and also that it did not have facilities for accommodating the aid agency officials.

The foreign minister yesterday said the government did not want to “pollute” the Rohingya camps during coronavirus pandemic by sheltering new members there. Therefore, the rescued Rohingyas were taken to Bhashan Char.

“Any new Rohingyas, if there are, will be sheltered at the Bhashan Char,” he told The Daily Star.

Earlier on April 16, some 400 Rohingyas were rescued by Bangladesh authorities. They were, however,

quarantined in the Rohingya camp healthcare facilities.

Rights bodies then said there were two boats carrying about 500 Rohingyas drifting in the sea as Malaysia and Thailand refused their entry to their territories.

The UN and many other global and regional rights bodies then called for Bangladesh to rescue and shelter the Rohingyas. Momen had then requested the UN and rights bodies to ask the other regional countries to rescue and shelter the Rohingyas.

Momen also wrote a letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet citing the international law that surrounding countries of the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea have a role to share the responsibility of helping the distressed people in the deep sea.

He said so far there is information that the two boats were in the Myanmar territory of the Bay of Bengal, and that the UN should tell Myanmar to rescue and shelter the Rohingyas.

On Saturday, European Union in a statement asked the regional countries to rescue and shelter the drifting Rohingyas on the Indian Ocean, following the example of Bangladesh that has been sheltering more than a million Rohingyas.

## Factories to be shut

FROM PAGE 1

Led by the representative from the health ministry, leaders of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitting Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), representatives from industrial police, and Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) will be included in the committee.

The other decisions include keeping Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Gazipur isolated from the rest of the country and limiting the movement of the RMG workers.

It was also decided that the factory owners in coordination with the health ministry would increase Covid-19 testing and quarantine facilities for workers.

The health minister asked the garment factory owners to strictly follow the health safety guidelines as workers are being infected after the reopening of factories.

He suggested that the factory owners build zone-wise coronavirus centres for the workers in the industrial belts.

Noted virologist Prof Nazrul Islam, former vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), recently told The Daily Star, “Reopening economic activity is important for us. But we

have to maintain health rules for this. Otherwise, reopening may bring another danger.”

BGMEA secretary Hatem Ali, following the meeting, said they informed the minister that the factory managements have been running their units following the health protocols prepared by the BGMEA.

The protocols were prepared following the guidelines of the health ministry, World Health Organization and International Labour Organisation, sources said.

BGMEA has multiple audit teams who are making surprise visits to factories to check their health and safety monitoring systems, according to a recent update circulated on the association’s website.

The audit teams are headed by the board of directors of BGMEA and the reports are being evaluated every day, it said.

On May 2, 49 factories were audited conditions in 46 factories were found to be satisfactory.

Including them, a total of 196 factories were audited and 190 of them passed muster.

As of yesterday, 11 workers of garment factories were tested positive for Covid-19 in Savar and Ashulia industrial areas, according to Dhaka Industrial Police-1 and Savar health administration.

## Niko liable, must pay damages

FROM PAGE 1

“After ten years of complex and prolonged proceedings, the tribunal has now concluded that the blowout was caused by Niko’s breaches of its obligations as an operator under the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) between Niko and Bapex,” the ministry said citing the verdict.

“The tribunal found that Niko was liable because of its failure to conduct operations diligently and in conformity with the standards of the international petroleum industry,” it mentioned in a press statement.

The ICSID’s verdict came more than two years after the High Court in August 2017 declared illegal and void the two deals Niko Resources Bangladesh Limited, a subsidiary of Canadian explorer, had signed with Bapex and Petrobangla, as those were procured through corruption.

The HC also directed the authorities to “revert back” to the state the assets Niko possessed through the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) and the Gas Purchase and Sales Agreement (GPSA) signed in 2003 and 2006.

Several other cases now pending with national courts regarding the granting of the gas fields to Niko.

**NIKO AND ICSID’S VERDICT**

It all goes back to 1997, when Niko entered Bangladesh during the second round Production Sharing Contract bidding for oil and gas exploration. But with just 10 years’ experience in the field, the firm failed to qualify in the bid both on technical and financial grounds.

But it continued lobbying. In 1998, it submitted an unsolicited proposal for developing the Chhatak and Feni gas fields.

However, Bapex refused to sign the deal as it found that Chhatak was an unexplored field, and not used one as Niko falsely claimed, according to case documents obtained by this newspaper.

Niko, however, managed to sign a Joint Venture Agreement with Bapex in October 2003 to develop two gas fields, which the High Court later said “were procured through corruption”.

The Daily Star on April 7, 2017 ran an investigative report revealing how the Canadian explorer left behind a

hard-to-miss corruption trail, won an unsolicited energy deal and dodged responsibility for the subsequent blowouts by bribing influential people linked with the last BNP-led government.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and former BNP ministers Moudud Ahmed and AKM Mosharraf Hossain are accused in one of the pending criminal cases. They, however, refuted the allegations.

The first blowout at the Chhatak field in Tengratial took place in 2005, just a few days after Niko started drilling.

The government-formed probe committee blamed “faulty and negligent operations of Niko for the disaster”.

But Niko was quick to act. On May 23, 2005, it presented Mosharraf with a Lexus SUV and reports of this bribery scheme led to his resignation on June 18. Mosharraf, however, refuted the allegation.

Meanwhile, as Niko was drilling a relief well to contain the fire from the first blowout, another blowout occurred at the same field on June 24.

The gas field burned for years, causing a loss of tens of crores taka for Bangladesh. It also caused damages of environment and surrounding areas.

In November 2009, the HC, following a separate law suit, prevented government from making payments to Niko until it pays the compensation for the blowouts.

In 2010, Niko Resources Bangladesh Ltd files two cases with ICSID -- one seeking an order clearing it from the liability for the two blowouts in Tengratila and the other demanding outstanding payments for the gas it supplied from the Feni gas field to Petrobangla.

In June 2011, Niko Canada pleaded guilty before a Canadian court to bribing Mosharraf Hossain with a luxury SUV and a trip to New York and Calgary mainly for damage control following the blowouts. The company also agreed to pay \$9.5 million in fine, which went to the Canadian government fund, according to the documents obtained by The Daily Star.

After around 10-year-long legal

battle and hearings in London and Paris, the WB tribunal gave the verdict in February this year.

The tribunal will now conduct further proceedings to determine the amount of compensation Niko must pay, said Barrister Moin Ghani, who along with US-based law firm Foley Hoag LLP represented Bangladesh side.

“This decision has finally ended Niko’s 10-year-long effort to have an international tribunal declare that it was not liable for the blowout caused in 2005,” Barrister Ghani told The Daily Star.

More importantly, in Bangladesh’s 40 years of independence this is only our second victory for Bangladesh before the ICSID, he added.

“The case thus sends a clear message to international investors that Bangladesh can now put up a fight to assert her rights before international tribunals. Investors cannot just expect to get a walk over any longer.”

Asked whether Niko can appeal against the decision, Moin Ghani said: “There is no appeal from this decision or the final award to be issued after the next phase of the case. But Niko can seek annulment of the final award from ICSID on very limited grounds.”

Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud represented Niko before ICSID. The Daily Star could not contact him last night for comments.

**COMPENSATION FOR OTHER LOSSES**

State Minister Nasrul Hamid said apart from the direct loss, Bangladesh will realise compensation from Niko for the loss the country incurred for rehabilitation of people from the affected area and health, land and environment related losses.

He said the country faced huge losses as the then BNP-Jamaat alliance government, with an ill motive, had engaged an incompetent company like Niko to extract valuable natural gas.

Although Chhatak gas field was a virgin one, the then government even tried to label it as used one, he said.

But the hard-work of the incumbent government has proved at ICSID that Niko was responsible for blowouts, the state minister added.

## 10 lakh face deportation

FROM PAGE 1

robotics and automation in all sectors, and even cleaning and maintenance jobs are being taken over by automation.

Between 70 and 80 percent of cleaners in the country are from Bangladesh and a large number of them are likely to be deemed redundant in the next few years, said the embassy report.

It said the Covid-19 fallout came as the last straw. “This will further hit Saudi crude oil prices... meaning, the suspension of many ambitious projects in the Kingdom, and a large number of migrant workers will be deported immediately.”

The Daily Star has a copy of the report.

Saudi labour ministry officials in a recent meeting made it clear that they will soon be recruiting only the skilled workers with valid certificates.

Bangladesh Ambassador in Saudi Arabia Golam Moshhi said the

government should look into the matter seriously and form an expert committee to explore alternative labour markets.

“We cannot sit idle under such a situation,” he told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh officially earns around \$3 billion a year in remittance from Saudi Arabia. The amount may be around \$7.5 billion if illegal money transfers are counted, he said.

Due to mainly six reasons, including the oil price dip and the Saudization policy, the Saudi government is likely to deport Bangladeshi workers, Moshhi told The Daily Star over the phone.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the Saudi authorities have been deporting migrants from different countries.

Besides, there are around two to three lakh Bangladeshis staying in Saudi Arabia illegally. “Most of these Bangladeshis have not earned anything in the last two months.”

The Saudi government is planning to send all of them back in the next

one and half years, Moshhi wrote to the Bangladesh foreign ministry.

Syed Saiful Haque, co-chair of Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM), said losing the biggest labour market is a matter of great concern and a looming threat.

The government should immediately launch diplomatic efforts to stop the deportation, he said.

After the pandemic, the prime minister and foreign minister should consider visiting the countries where there are many Bangladeshi migrant workers.

“Otherwise, Bangladesh may face a disaster,” warned Saiful.

The BCSM recently wrote to the United Nations secretary general calling for steps to prevent forced return migrant workers from several Middle East countries.

He said all stakeholders, including civil society members and government officials, should launch efforts to protect migrant workers.

## Found after 53 days, sent to jail

FROM PAGE 1

The first information report submitted by the BGB Camp Commander Habilidad Ashkek Ali claimed that a night patrol team discovered Kajol walking into Bangladeshi territory at 12:45am. The FIR claimed that when apprehended, Kajol was only a hundred yards away from pillar number 20 along the Bangladesh-India border.

“I was out with my night patrol team when we saw a man walking across the field. The BSF have large rotating flashlights that sweep over Bangladeshi territory at night, and we saw him in that light,” claimed Nayek Abdul Awal of BGB’s Raghunathpur camp.

“We went up to him to ask who he was, what he was doing there, but he was unable to answer anything. We brought him to the camp and handed him over to the police,” he claimed.

The two countries are separated by a barbed wire fence, and when asked whether Awal had inspected any length of the fence for breaches through which Kajol may have entered from India, he said he did not.

Meanwhile in Dhaka, Kajol’s family received a call from Benapole police.

“Around 2:48am in the morning, a duty officer of Benapole Police Station called on my mother’s phone and asked where my father is. I said that he is still missing, and the police officer handed the phone to my father,” said Kajol’s son Monorom Polok.

“The first thing my father said is that he’s alive. He asked us to come and fetch him from Benapole,” said Polok.

As Polok headed towards Benapole, the BGB filed a case against Kajol for “entering Bangladesh illegally from India through Benapole border” because he had no passport or visa when he was found, Benapole Port Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mamun Khan said.

**WHAT HAPPENED IN COURT**

Kajol was handcuffed and brought to the court at 2:47pm yesterday.

When Kajol was brought to the

court in a battery-run three-wheeler, his son Monorom Polok met him in an embrace -- it was the first time the two had seen each other since Kajol went missing.

But their joy was short-lived because Kajol was transported behind bars to the court’s holding cell almost immediately.

According to Section 11(3) of the Passport Act, under which he was arrested, the punishment ranges from a fine of Tk 500 to three months’ imprisonment.

His lawyer Sudipto Ghosh requested bail, which was granted last evening but he was almost immediately shown arrested under section 54.

Magistrate Manzurul Islam of Jashore Chief Judicial Magistrate Court oversaw the proceedings.

Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure stipulates that a person can be arrested without a warrant if there is “credible information” of his involvement with a “cognisable offence”.

Cognisable offences include a gamut of felonies ranging from grave offences like rape to things like “taking part in an unlawful assembly”.

Jashore Kotwali Police Station’s Officer-in-charge Moniruzzaman confirmed to our correspondent the arrest was made by his police station.

“He has been arrested under section 54 because he has three DSA cases and he is being held in prison so that the relevant Dhaka courts can process arrest warrants against him and take him to Dhaka,” said Moniruzzaman.

“He has been sent to Jashore Central Jail where he will be under quarantine for 14 days.”

On the other hand, Polok stated that his father’s arrest in this charge left him in shock.

“My lawyer told me that my father had gotten bail, so he went to the courthouse to get the papers. Suddenly I saw police come, take my father out of the holding cell, and put him into a van. I asked them if they are releasing him, but they said no,” said Polok.



MINIMISING COVID-19 RISK  
Another 385  
prisoners released

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prisons authorities yesterday released 385 more convicted prisoners -- as part of the government's early release plan to ease accommodation crisis and minimise risk of coronavirus infections in the overcrowded prisons.

"We have released 170 inmates on Saturday and 385 more will be released today [Sunday]," Col Abrar Hossain, additional inspector general of prisons, told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

The home ministry, after taking opinion from the law ministry, recently ordered prisons authorities to release 2,884 prisoners who were convicted for one year or less for minor offences but served months in jails.

"The rest will be released in a week gradually," Col Abrar added.

The 170 prisoners released on Saturday served jail term of six months, the other 385 served between three months and less than six months while the rest have been in jail for less than three months, jail sources said.

As per the home ministry order, the prisons headquarters recommended releasing around 5,000 prisoners under three categories.

There are more than 3,000 prisoners in the first category who were sentenced to two-year imprisonment.

The second category includes 1,413 life-sentenced prisoners who served more than 20 years in jail, and there are 36 prisoners with physical disabilities under the third category.

"We did not get any decision about 1,413 life-sentenced prisoners and 36 disabled prisoners," said an official of the prisons headquarters.

There are around 90,000 prisoners

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



REMINISCING RAMADAN AT DU

After all, what more can one do if the countrywide shutdown for coronavirus leads to complete desertion of one of the capital's most happening iftar spots? A photo from last year, right, shows the booming iftar scene at the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University, where people sat in circles with their friends under the open sky and bonded over peyaju, beguni and jilapi. That very field now remains empty, above, save for the overgrown grass.

PHOTO: COLLECTED, STAR



Iftar gatherings  
that once were

Dhaka University's TSC deserted during Ramadan amid coronavirus shutdown

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

What was once one of the most happening, liveliest places in the city, full of youth, life, and culture, now remains almost deserted amid the nationwide shutdown. Dhaka University's Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) would be especially buzzing during Ramadan, as students as well as visitors would gather there to have iftar with friends.

Just last year, it was a common scene to find diverse groups sitting in a circle, with traditional iftar items, or biryani packets in hand, waiting for the azaan with hundreds others around them.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, DU authorities on March 16 suspended academic activities till March 28 and asked students to vacate the hall by March 20.

They later announced suspension of academic activities for indefinite period.

Also, to contain further spread of the coronavirus, on April 23 this year, the Ministry of Religious Affairs passed a statement banning any form of gatherings during iftar.

Such directives have left one of the city's most happening iftar hubs empty.

"We used to gather at TSC half an hour prior to iftar no matter wherever we were throughout the day. It was a must. Shared so many moments of joy while bonding with friends over peyaju, beguni, jilapi and other iftar essentials. All I can do is reminisce these moments staying at home," said Jobol E Rahamat, a student of theatre and performance studies department.

Iftar has always been an occasion for old friends to reunite, and TSC used to bring together many former students of DU during Ramadan.

"The iftar we used to have together at TSC was very special. We did not have proper plates, so we would use old newspapers to hold the iftar items. I would go back for experience again and again after leaving the campus. Hopefully the shutdown will be lifted one day and I will sit with my friends to have iftar under the open sky at TSC," said Sonia Afrin Ishita, who graduated from the university two years ago.

Meanwhile traders, staff of dormitory canteens, food shops and tea stalls, who used to sell iftar items for this time of the year to make extra money, are facing severe crisis this year.

"I normally sell, but during Ramadan I would sell some iftar items too. This year I am not being to able run my regular business, let alone getting extra income," Swapan mama, a popular tea vendor at TSC area, told The Daily Star with a heavy heart.

Grameen Telecom  
giving masks to a  
million people

CITY DESK

Grameen Telecom is providing non-medical face-masks, made from cloth, to one million underprivileged individuals free of cost, said a press release.

Already 72,000 masks have been distributed through various organisations. According to international researchers and announcements by Directorate General of Health Services, coronavirus transmission can significantly reduce by using masks made of cloth, especially knitted fabrics.

Grameen Telecom has taken the initiative to reach out to the difficult-to-reach population and those who cannot afford masks. These two-layer masks made of knitted fabrics can prevent coronavirus from spreading.

The masks are being produced at the facilities of Grameen Fabrics and Fashions Ltd. So far, 2.05 lakh masks have been produced, with two lakh produced every week.

Individuals and organisations interested in acquiring masks for distribution at their own initiative can reach out through email at info@grameentelecom.net.bd.



Help is on the way  
Ctg man gives free bike rides to patients,  
emergency commuters

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Srijon Roy, a resident of Chattogram's Jamal Khan Road, was in a rush to deliver some emergency medicine to his ailing mother on Tuesday. This meant he would have to scour for vehicles amid the transport shutdown, to reach his village home in Hathazari's Nandir Hat.

Fighting through the situation, he managed to hire a rickshaw and reach Muradpur intersection, but ultimately, couldn't find the next vehicle that would take him to the village.

Then he remembered. One Kamrujjaman had made a Facebook post, offering to transport people in emergencies to their destinations on his motorbike.

Srijon quickly found Kamrujjaman's number and made a call, asking for help. In 10 minutes, Kamrujjaman was present at Muradpur, cordially inviting Srijon to hop on the bike.

"I was in big trouble. I couldn't find any vehicle to go home," Srijon told The Daily Star. "I want to salute Kamrujjaman for this noble deed."

"I've come to know that he voluntarily helps patients, their attendants, and blood donors by taking them to hospitals," Srijon added.

Kamrujjaman, however, doesn't think of himself as a hero. An employee of an import company in the city, he has been involved in social activities since school



Kamrujjaman, ready on his motorbike.

days.

Talking to The Daily Star, Kamrujjaman, who resides in the city's Oxygen Shitol Jharna area, said when the shutdown started in late March, common people started to suffer, some for lack of food, others for transport issues.

"I wanted to stand by those who are suffering. But how? I'm not from a well-off

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

PPE sought for  
healthcare heroes

Rights body asks four govt officials to comply with HC directives within 3 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A rights organisation yesterday sent a legal notice to four government officials, requesting them to provide necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) and medicine to doctors, nurses and health workers of all government hospitals in three days in line with the High Court's March 22 directives in a bid to properly treat coronavirus patients.

Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) sent the notice to Health Secretary Md Asadul Islam, Additional Health Secretary (Hospitals) Md Shirajul Islam, Director General of Directorate General of Health Services Prof Dr Mohammad Abul Kalam Azad, and Director of Central Medicine Store Department Brig Gen Shahidullah through emails.

Advocate Manzill Murshid, who served the notice on behalf of HRPB, told The Daily Star that he will move a contempt of court petition before the HC against the four officials if they don't comply with the notice.

Following a writ petition filed by HRPB, the HC on March 22 ordered the health secretary to purchase/procure/collect the PPE, surgical mask, gloves, shoe covers, gowns, sanitiser and other necessary equipment in seven days for treatment of coronavirus patients. The HC asked the officials concerned of the government to send all those to doctors, nurses and staff members for their safety.

In the legal notice, Murshid said healthcare providers are reportedly facing a shortage of PPE. Not providing PPE to them is a violation of the HC directives and also a contempt of court.

Dhaka Bank  
donates Tk 1cr to police

CITY DESK

Dhaka Bank Limited has donated Tk 1 crore to Bangladesh Police to procure personal protective equipment (PPE) and masks, says a press release.

The donation came on April 28 to ensure safety of police personnel, who are working at field level from the beginning of coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Beximco Pharmaceuticals Limited has produced international standard PPE and masks for police from the donated amount, the release says.

Police have been at the frontline during Covid-19 pandemic and doing commendable job to make citizens stay at home and maintain social distancing, it further says.

They are not only providing relief to people in need but also taking the affected persons to hospitals.

So, in discharging their duties, police personnel are getting exposed to the risk of being infected with the deadly virus, it adds.

AUG 21 ATTACK CASES

Pandemic causing  
delay in HC hearing

ASHUTOSH SARKER

The coronavirus outbreak has caused an unusual delay for the High Court to start hearing on the sensational August 21 grenade attack cases although it has accepted the appeals of the convicted accused more than 15 months back.

The offices concerned of the HC of Bangladesh Government Press were working to prepare the paper books of the cases, but they could not finish it as their functions have been postponed since March 26 due to the shutdown enforced for curbing the Covid-19 pandemic.

A paper book that contains all details of a case, trial proceedings, statements, evidence, orders, verdict and other relevant documents is necessary for the HC to hear and dispose of a death reference or an appeal.

"The authorities concerned were about to finalise preparation for the paper books... It would be completed if the offices could get one week," Supreme Court Spokesman Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star recently.

The paper books will be readied in few weeks after the offices resume working and the HC will start hearing the appeals and death references of the August 21 grenade attack cases, he said.

Attorney General (AG) Mahbubey Alam told this correspondent that his office will take necessary steps after reopening of the courts for the hearing.

He, however, could not specify the update and details of the cases.

Law Minister Anisul Huq on January

1 this year told The Daily Star that the Bangladesh Government Press will publish copies of the paper books of August 21 attack cases very soon, and then the government will take necessary steps through AG's office for the hearing.

The death references on the cases reached the HC on November 27 last year for examination of the trial court's verdict.

The HC on January 13 this year accepted the appeals filed by the convicted accused. The same day, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman also stayed the part of the trial court verdict that fined the convicts.

The bench passed the order as the appeals filed by the convicts, who are now in jail, were included in its cause list, the then Assistant Attorney General Md Yousuf Mahmud Morshed had told The Daily Star.

The HC will hold hearing on the appeals after relevant procedures are completed, he added.

A Dhaka court on October 10, 1018 sentenced 19 persons -- including former state minister and BNP leader Lutfozzaman Babar to death, and 19 others -- including BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, to life imprisonment in the two cases filed for the August 21 grenade attack.

At least 24 people were killed and around 300 injured in the grisly attack on an Awami League rally on the capital's Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004.

Sheikh Hasina, now the prime minister and the then opposition leader in parliament, narrowly escaped the attack with an ear injury.

Free, responsible  
media can take  
country forward

Says info minister on World Press Freedom Day

UNB, Dhaka

The role of free, independent and responsible media is very crucial in order to take the country forward, said Information Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud yesterday.

In addition to that, he said, independent and responsible media is important in building a multifaceted society.

The minister made the remarks while speaking from his office at the Bangladesh Secretariat on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2020.

He said the country's journalists and others engaged in media are working with a great risk amid this global coronavirus pandemic. He also spoke about journalist Humayun Kabir Khokon who died from coronavirus infection he contracted while on duty and prayed for the salvation of his departed soul.

The minister said the present government believes in freedom of the press. This is why the media saw huge progress and expansion after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina came to power in 2009, Dr Mahmud added.

The number of dailies in the country increased to 1,294 in 2020 from 445 in 2009, while that of weeklies to 1,208 now from 208 in 2009, he said.

He said the number of state-run televisions was two in 2009, but it is now four. The number of private television channels was 10 in early 2009; now 45 private television channels have got permission to operate, said the minister, adding that there was no FM radio in 2009, but now 24 FM radio stations have got permission and most of them are in operation.

There was no community radio in the country in 2009 whereas 32 community radio stations have been given permission now, he said, noting that many of the permitted community radio stations are in operation.

These statistics show that Sheikh Hasina and her government believe in freedom of the media, he added.

Drugstore fined  
for selling not-  
for sale saline

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A mobile court of district administration fined a medicine store Tk 40,000 for selling government saline, which is not for sale, in Cumilla on Saturday night.

The court led by Executive Magistrate Amit Datta fined Nurul Amin Patwary, owner of Inan Medicine Point at the city's Kandirpar.

He sold a bag of sodium chloride solution saline (500ml) at Tk 3,000 to a person, said the executive magistrate.

"We only fined the drugstore owner under Consumer Rights Protection Act as it is his first-time offence," said Amit Datta.

The Institute of Public Health produces the saline for government hospitals where it is applied for patients for free, said Dr Mojibur Rahman, director of Cumilla Medical College Hospital.

"A section of dishonest people is involved in such incident," he said.

When asked about it, Cumilla Civil Surgeon Dr Md Nematuzzaman avoided the question, telling this correspondent that he would "talk about the matter later".

Bidyanondo, SAAF  
team up to support  
22,000 families

CITY DESK

Suhana & Anis Ahmed Foundation (SAAF) has provided Tk 1.05 crore as a special Covid-19 financial support to Bidyanondo Foundation, enabling immediate support to 22,000 families in remote areas of Bangladesh, a press release said.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Bidyanondo Foundation has been one of the first undertaking initiatives to provide food, and medical safety gear to people in dire straits. To date, the organisation has fed an upward of 200,000 families, and arranges food for about 15,000 people daily.

In addition to the need for proper food and nutrition, Bidyanondo has also distributed 5,000 personal protective equipment (PPE) and 20,000 masks. The organisation has connected BGB units, Navy and Coast Guard to cover remote areas of the country.

Anis Ahmed, co-founder, and trustee of SAAF, said, "Partnering with Bidyanondo Foundation is a watershed moment in our Foundation's journey."

Kishor Kumar Das, founder of Bidyanondo, said Suhana & Anis Ahmed Foundation came forward when they were in financial difficulties.



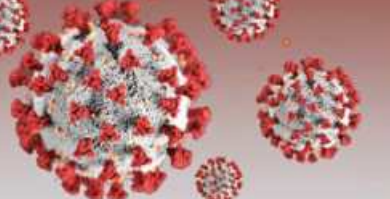
PHOTO: COLLECTED







CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC  
LATEST UPDATES



NEARLY 239,000 DEATHS

More than 244,084 people have died worldwide since the epidemic surfaced in China in December, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally at 1100 GMT yesterday. In all, 3,444,236 cases have now been reported in 195 countries and territories. In the United States, which has the highest toll, 66,385 people have died. Italy is the second hardest-hit country, with 28,710 dead, followed by the United Kingdom with 28,205, Spain 25,264 and France 24,763.

OUTBREAK IN US PRISON

A massive wave of coronavirus infections is blasting through the world's largest prison population (2.3 million) in the United States. One prison in Marion, Ohio has become the most intensely infected institution across the country, with more than 80 percent of its nearly 2,500 inmates, and 175 staff on top of that, testing positive. Officials say they have few options to enforce social distancing rules in crowded cells and facing severe shortages of medical personnel and personal protective gear everywhere.

RARE UNITY IN US CONGRESS

In a rare joint message, Democratic and Republican congressional leaders rejected the Trump administration's offer to conduct rapid coronavirus screening on senators who will return to Washington next week, stating that the tests should be reserved for the public. Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, normally fierce political rivals, issued a statement announcing that Congress was "grateful" for the offer, but that they would "respectfully decline."

10,000 NEW CASES IN RUSSIA

Russia yesterday registered 10,633 new coronavirus infections, marking a fresh one-day record increase. Russia is now the European country registering the most new infections. The country have recorded 134,687 cases in total. Fifty eight people died over the past 24 hours, bringing the total death toll to 1,280.

'PAINFUL' MEASURES IN SARABIA

Saudi Arabia will take strict and painful measures to deal with the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the finance minister said on Saturday. "We must reduce budget expenditures sharply", Mohammed al-Jadaan said in an interview with Al Arabiya TV.

SOUTH KOREA TO EASE RULES

South Korea yesterday said it will loosen social distancing rules this week to allow gatherings and events to take place. It appears to have brought its outbreak under control thanks to an extensive "trace, test and treat" programme that has drawn widespread praise. The South reported 13 new infections yesterday.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

# Britain had contingency plan for PM's death

Reveals Johnson; govt to reveal way out of lockdown

AGENCIES

The British government had a contingency plan for Prime Minister Boris Johnson's death as he battled COVID-19 in intensive care last month, he said in an interview with The Sun newspaper.

The revelation came as reports said the British government is expected to unveil plans to ease the country out of lockdown this week, amid indications of a phased approach to keep infection rates low.

Johnson has said the country was "past the peak" of the outbreak and will outline a "roadmap" for lifting stringent measures imposed in late March.

According to the latest figures, 28,205 have died in Britain, just short of Europe's worst-hit country, Italy. But hospital admissions and infection rates are down.

Asked about the government's plan, as ministers review the lockdown on Thursday, transport minister Grant Shapps said: "It's definitely not going to be business as usual."

Weekend newspaper reports said primary schools could reopen in early June and that commuters taking public transport could face temperature checks. A quarantine period for people travelling to Britain by air has also been suggested.

Johnson, 55, returned to work on Monday, a month after testing positive for COVID-19. He spent 10 days in isolation in Downing Street before he was taken to London's St Thomas' Hospital where he spent three nights in intensive care.

"They had a strategy to deal with a 'death of Stalin'-type scenario," Johnson was quoted as saying in Sunday's edition of The Sun. "It was a tough old moment, I won't deny it."

Johnson said that during the period when he was self-isolating in Downing Street, he had resisted going to hospital.

Johnson was admitted to a ward on April 5 and given oxygen via a face mask and a tube in his nose. He was moved to intensive care on April 6.

At one point, doctors discussed invasive ventilation.

"The bad moment came when it was 50-50 whether they were going to have to put a tube down my windpipe," he said. "That was when it got a bit ... they were starting to think about how to handle it presentationally."

"The doctors had all sorts of arrangements for what to do if things went badly wrong ... The bloody indicators kept going in the wrong direction."



Indian Navy's Chetak helicopter shower flower petals in the premises of a hospital as part of an event to show gratitude towards the frontline warriors fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Visakhapatnam, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Nine killed in Kashmir gun battles

AFP, Srinagar

Five security personnel and four suspected militants have been killed in two gun battles in Indian-administered Kashmir, officials said yesterday.

Tensions are high in the restive Himalayan region contested with nuclear rival Pakistan after New Delhi scrapped Kashmir's semi-autonomous status in early August, with flashes of violence reported regularly.

Four army personnel, including two officers, a counterinsurgency policeman and two militants died after a firefight in the village of Changimul near the Line of Control that divides the disputed territory, said army spokesman Colonel Rajesh Kalra.

Two more militants were killed in a separate incident, police said.

At least 54 militants have been killed in Kashmir this year, including more than 30 since the start of the lockdown from late March, according to an AFP tally.

India regularly accuses Pakistan of arming and sending rebels across the heavily militarised border. Islamabad denies the claims.



## Kim Jong Un didn't undergo surgery

Says Seoul as Koreas trade gunfire

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un did not undergo surgery during his almost three week absence from public life, South Korean news outlet Yonhap said citing a senior government official, as the two Koreas exchanged gunfire around the border yesterday.

The South Korean official declined to provide reasons for believing that Kim did not undergo surgery, but said speculative reports that he may have had surgery, citing some differences in his leg movements, is not true, Yonhap reported.

Earlier yesterday, North and South Korea exchanged gunfire around the South's guard post, raising tension.

Multiple gunshots were fired from North Korea at 7:41 am local time towards a guard post in South Korea that borders the North, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staffs (JCS) said in a statement.

South Korea responded by firing two shots towards North Korea, no injuries were reported.

After weeks of intense speculation about Kim's health and whereabouts, which included one report he had undergone cardiovascular surgery, North Korea's official media published photographs and a report on Saturday that Kim had attended the completion of a fertiliser plant.

Kim was seen in photographs smiling and talking to aides at the ribbon-cutting ceremony and touring the plant. State TV footage showed Kim's leg movements appearing stiff and jerky.

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## ‘Once Upon a Virus’

China mocks US response in Lego-like animation

REUTERS, Shanghai

China has published a short animation titled "Once Upon a Virus" mocking the US response to the new coronavirus using Lego-like figures to represent the two countries.

Washington and Beijing are locked in a war of words over the origins of the disease, which emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan and has grown into a global pandemic.

US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he was confident the coronavirus may have originated in a Chinese virology lab, but declined to describe the evidence.

In the animation posted online by China's official Xinhua news agency, red curtains open to reveal a stage featuring Lego-like figures in the form of a terracotta warrior wearing a face mask and the Statue of Liberty.

"We discovered a new virus," says the warrior.

"So what?" replies the Statue of Liberty. "It's only a flu."

As the warrior issues warnings about the virus and counts off the grim milestones in China's outbreak, the Statue of Liberty replies dismissively with echoes of Trump's press conferences in which he played down the severity of the illness.

"Are you listening to yourselves?" asks the warrior as the statue begins to turn red with fever and gets hooked up to an intravenous drip.

"We are always correct, even though we contradict ourselves," the statue replies.

"That's what I love about you Americans, your consistency," says the warrior.

The United States and other countries have accused China of misleading the world

about the severity of the outbreak, and there are growing calls for an international inquiry into the origins of the virus.

In an interview with Reuters, Trump said he believes China's handling of the coronavirus pandemic is proof that Beijing "will do anything they can" to make him lose his re-election bid in November.

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.

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.

WHO has praised China for sharing information about the virus. Trump has suspended US's funding after accusing the UN agency of downplaying the seriousness of the outbreak and kowtowing to China.

## Venezuela prison riot toll hits 46

REUTERS, Caracas

Human rights groups has called for an investigation into a prison riot in western Venezuela that left 46 people dead and 75 injured, and questioned authorities' explanation that the incident was linked to a failed escape attempt.

The UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCR) said on Twitter it was "gravely concerned" about the incident on Friday at the Los Llanos penitentiary in Portuguesa state. The South American country's prisons are infamous for extreme levels of violence and poor conditions.

The country's prisons minister, Iris Varela, was quoted on a state radio station's website as saying the incident resulted in the deaths of 17 inmates and injuries to the prison's director, who tried to negotiate with the prisoners who were attempted to escape.

"Those responsible, despite being incarcerated, will be judged in accordance with the law," Varela said.

Beatriz Giron, president of the Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons, which advocates for inmates' rights, said the explanation of a frustrated escape attempt was unlikely. She added that 46 bodies had been identified so far, a figure also cited by UNOHCR.

Both Giron and A Window Toward Freedom, another rights group, said the riot came shortly after prison officials barred inmates' family members from bringing them food, a measure to prevent the spread of the coronavirus within prisons.

Such restrictions have prompted riots in prisons in several countries, including Italy. In Argentina, prisoners rioted last month demanding some inmates be freed due to fears of infection.



Armed protesters rally outside the New Hampshire State House calling for Governor Chris Sununu to open the US state, in Concord, Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

# গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ  
পুলিশ সুপারের কার্যালয়  
মানিকগঞ্জ

তারিখঃ ০২/০৫/২০২০খ্রিঃ

## দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

"The Public Procurement Regulation-2008" মোতাবেক ২০২০-২০২১ অর্থ বছরের জন্য মানিকগঞ্জ জেলা পুলিশ বাহিনীর পুলিশ ফোর্সের পোষাক সেলাই, রিবন ক্রয়, যানবাহনের কাঁচামাল ও খুচরা যন্ত্রাংশ ক্রয়, মটরযান মোরামত, জলযান মোরামত এবং পুলিশ হাসপাতালের ঔষধ সরবরাহের নিমিত্তে বাংলাদেশের প্রকৃত ব্যবসায়ী/টিকাদার প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে সীলসাহায্যযুক্ত খামে প্রতিযোগিতামূলক দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

|     |                                     |  |
|-----|-------------------------------------|--|
| ১.  | মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ                   | স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রণালয়।  |
| ২.  | সংস্থা                              | বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ।  |
| ৩.  | দরপত্র সম্পাদনকারী প্রধান           | পুলিশ সুপার, মানিকগঞ্জ।  |
| ৪.  | সংগ্রহ সত্তার জেলা                  | মানিকগঞ্জ।   |
| ৫.  | দরপত্রের বিষয়                      | ২০২০-২০২১ অর্থ বছরের জন্য মানিকগঞ্জ জেলা পুলিশ বাহিনীর পুলিশ ফোর্সের পোষাক সেলাই, রিবন ক্রয়, যানবাহনের কাঁচামাল ও খুচরা যন্ত্রাংশ ক্রয়, মটরযান মোরামত, জলযান মোরামত এবং পুলিশ হাসপাতালের ঔষধ সরবরাহ। |
| ৬.  | দরপত্রের পদ্ধতি                     | উন্মুক্ত (OTM)।  |
| ৭.  | বাজেট তহবিলের উৎস                   | পুলিশ হেডকোয়ার্টার্স কর্তৃক বাজেট বরাদ্দ ব্যাপেক্ষে।  |
| ৮.  | দরপত্র বিক্রয়ের সর্বশেষ তারিখ      | দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশের পর হতে ২৭/০৫/২০২০খ্রিঃ তারিখ ১৪.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত (ছটির দিন ব্যতীত)।  |
| ৯.  | দরপত্র দাখিলের সর্বশেষ তারিখ ও সময় | দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশের পর হতে ২৮/০৫/২০২০খ্রিঃ তারিখ বেলা ১২.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত।   |
| ১০. | দরপত্র ব্যাং খোলার তারিখ ও সময়     | ২৮/০৫/২০২০খ্রিঃ তারিখ বেলা ১৩.০০ ঘটিকায়।  |
| ১১. | দরপত্র সম্পাদনকারীর ঠিকানা          | পুলিশ সুপারের কার্যালয়, মানিকগঞ্জ।  |
| ১২. | দরপত্র প্রাপ্তির স্থান              | পুলিশ সুপারের কার্যালয়, মানিকগঞ্জ।  |
| ১৩. | দরপত্র দাখিলের স্থান                | পুলিশ সুপারের কার্যালয়, মানিকগঞ্জ।  |
| ১৪. | দরপত্র খোলার স্থান                  | পুলিশ সুপারের কার্যালয়, মানিকগঞ্জ।  |
| ১৫. | দরপত্রাদার যোগ্যতা                  | "The Public Procurement Regulation-2008" মোতাবেক সংশ্লিষ্ট কাজের অভিজ্ঞতা।   |

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| ১৬. | দরপত্রের সাথে যে সকল কাগজপত্র জমা প্রদান করতে হবে | দরপত্রের সাথে নিম্নোক্ত কাগজপত্র (৯ম স্কেডের নিম্নে নম্বর এমন অফিসার কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত) দাখিল করতে হবে। (ক) হালনাগাদ ট্রেন্ড লাইসেন্স (খ) হালনাগাদ আয়কর সনদপত্র (গ) ব্যাংক স্বাক্ষরতার সনদপত্র (ঘ) ভ্যাট নিবন্ধন সাটিফিকেট (ঙ) অভিজ্ঞতার সনদপত্র (যদি থাকে)। |
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| ১৭. | লট নং | কাজের বিবরণ  | সিডিউলের মূল্য | দরপত্র জামানত | কাজের সময়            |
|-----|-------|--|----------------|---------------|-----------------------|
|     | ক.    | মানিকগঞ্জ জেলার পুলিশ ফোর্সের পোষাক সেলাই                          | ৭৫০/-          | ৫০,০০০/-      | ২০২০-২০২১<br>অর্থ সাল |
|     | খ.    | মানিকগঞ্জ জেলা পুলিশের রিবন ক্রয়।                                 | ৪০০/-          | ৫,০০০/-       |                       |
|     | গ.    | মানিকগঞ্জ জেলা পুলিশের যানবাহনের কাঁচামাল ও খুচরা যন্ত্রাংশ ক্রয়। | ৭৫০/-          | ৫০,০০০/-      |                       |
|     | ঘ.    | মানিকগঞ্জ জেলা পুলিশের মটরযান মোরামত                               | ৪০০/-          | ৫,০০০/-       |                       |
|     | ঙ.    | মানিকগঞ্জ জেলা পুলিশের জলযান মোরামত                                | ৪০০/-          | ৫,০০০/-       |                       |
|     | চ.    | মানিকগঞ্জ পুলিশ হাসপাতালের ঔষধ সরবরাহ                              | ৭৫০/-          | ৫০,০০০/-      |                       |

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| ১৮. | বিশেষ জ্ঞাতব্যঃ  |
|     | ক. দরপত্র সংক্রান্ত অন্যান্য তথ্যাবলী দরপত্র সংগ্রহকালে নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর কার্যালয় হতে জানা যাবে।                        |
|     | খ. টিকাদারের নিকট হতে সরকার নির্ধারিত হারে ভ্যাট এবং আয়কর কর্তন করা হবে।  |
|     | গ. নির্বাচিত টিকাদারকে ৩০০/- (তিনশত) টাকার নন-জুডিশিয়াল স্ট্যাম্পে চূড়ান্ত স্বাক্ষর করতে হবে।                            |
|     | ঘ. নির্বাচিত টিকাদারকে চুক্তি মূল্যের উপর নির্ধারিত হারে Performance Security দিতে হবে।                                    |
|     | ঙ. দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ হতে ৬০ দিন পর্যন্ত বলবৎ থাকবে।   |
|     | চ. দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্তৃক কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতীত সকল বা যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ কিংবা বাতিল করার পূর্ণ ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন। |

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| বিঃদ্রঃ | দরপত্র সর্বশেষ বিক্রির দিন অফিস বন্ধ থাকলে অফিস ১ম খোলার দিন পর্যন্ত দরপত্র বিক্রি করা হবে, ২য় খোলার দিন ১২.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত দরপত্র দাখিল করা যাবে এবং একই দিন দরপত্র ব্যাং খোলা হবে। |
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রিফাত রহমান শাহীম পিপিএম

বিপি-৭৩০৫১০০৯৯৯

পুলিশ সুপার

মানিকগঞ্জ

ফোনঃ ৭৭১০৪০০০

জিডি-৭৮৭



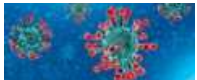
# Remittance's depressing descent in 2020

# Deadline extension for tax matters on the cards

# Factories open in port city with lax health and safety measures

**Garment workers, wearing face masks, flock to the Chittagong Export Processing Zones in droves to join work on April 26 after the government announced to ease the lockdown.**





## TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

# In this moment of crisis, the poor and needy must be aided with cash support via MFS

AHSAN H MANSUR, ABDUR RAZZAQUE and  
BAZLUI KHONDKER

Bangladesh has started dealing with the severe consequences of the global coronavirus pandemic in earnest, with curtailed economic activities manifested in factory closures, cancellation of and/or sharply reduced export orders, falling remittance inflows, and depressed demand for domestically produced goods and services.

The collapse in external demand coupled with the closure of all economic establishments -- micro, small, medium or large -- due to the lockdown have made millions of workers

The poverty rate has almost doubled to 40 per cent of the population, at least temporarily, reversing all the gains achieved in poverty reduction front over more

To bring about a quick recovery from the collapse, the government has declared a stimulus package of Tk 95,619 crore (3.3 per cent of GDP).

The unfolding extraordinary situation requires extraordinary measures and as such the policy intent of the support measures is quite clear and commendable.

While economic recovery will be of utmost importance as the lockdown eases and the spread of the infection is contained, at this moment the priority should be to provide income support to millions of poor and vulnerable households (including the 'new poor' arising from loss of jobs and earning opportunities) who are now faced with serious livelihood challenges and thus need support.

Hunger and deprivation of bare minimum needs could spark social unrest, potentially undermining our hard-earned socioeconomic progress achieved over the past decades.

Although not an easy task, designing and implementing a comprehensive support system directly targeting the poor and vulnerable groups is not impossible either.

How many people (or, number of households) will need immediate support to stave off hunger and fulfil their minimum needs?

Simulation of falling incomes using the distribution of households around the poverty line seem to suggest that 10-12 million households will require direct support.

How much is needed for the cash transfer programme?

A transfer amount equivalent to the poverty line incomes, which Bangladesh officially uses to make the distinction between poor and non-



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*The current government deserves a lot of credit for expanding the MFS in Bangladesh, and it would only be most timely and appropriate for it to use the infrastructure to provide the prompt livelihood support that people need.*

poor, would require providing each beneficiary household with a monthly amount between Tk 8,500-Tk 11,000.

We take the view that it may not constitute a practical approach not only because budgetary costs would be too high but may also result in perverse incentives for the recipients and attract non-targeted households.

In our view, a much lower monthly cash transfer of Tk 3,000 can be quite an effective

support.

This is based on some ground realities as Brac is currently administering such a cash assistance scheme for their identified poor and vulnerable households.

We do acknowledge that this amount is small, but -- based on the expenses related to the basic minimum needs -- this should help the households to survive the crisis.

This amount is unlikely to encourage many non-poor households to seek assistance.

It can be estimated that if a total of 12 million households are to be supported with monthly direct cash assistance of Tk 3,000, the total programme cost for three months will be Tk 10,800 crore, which is calculated as just about 0.36 per cent of Bangladesh's estimated GDP for fiscal 2019-20.

For a longer duration of six months for the same number of households, the computed cost will be less than 0.75 per cent of GDP.

### WHY CASH ASSISTANCE?

We don't undermine the need for in-kind assistance in certain special circumstances.

Otherwise, there exists a huge body of evidence to suggest great advantages of cash transfer programmes over in-kind schemes.

Cash programmes are more efficient as they do not distort consumption choices.

There is evidence that such transfers are 25-30 per cent cheaper than in-kind interventions.

Because of its known advantages, the National Social Security Strategy that Bangladesh adopted in 2015 proposes to transform all welfare-based food transfer interventions into cash assistance schemes.

There is also one more reason for suggesting cash assistance. Given the rapid expansion of mobile financial services (MFS), money can now be sent to even remote places in Bangladesh.

Yearly transactions through MFS exceeded \$50 billion in 2019. There are currently about 1 million MFS agents dealing with 80 million registered accounts, of which 35 million are considered active.

The MFS infrastructure thus stands ready to inject the cash cost-effectively while being much less susceptible to corrupt practices.

Under the current social distancing guidelines, it is also exceedingly difficult to distribute in-kind distribution, let alone the proliferation of thefts and misappropriation of relief materials, as reported frequently in media.

Cash assistance is also important to help people keep their consumption as diversified as possible. This can sustain local-level demand

for diversified goods and services.

Otherwise, many small growers of such items as vegetables, fruits, eggs and dairy products will go out of business.

### HOW TO REACH OUT TO THE BENEFICIARIES?

The National Social Security Strategy called for a national household database to identify the poorest and vulnerable populations groups.

However, even after several years, the proposed mechanism could not be established.

Therefore, using a nationwide database to track and reach the needy households at this time of crisis would remain a missed opportunity.

International experiences drawn from Brazil, Chile, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Thailand, and from many other countries seem to suggest cash assistance delivered directly through digital financial services work in an extremely efficient manner.

The basic principle of our proposed approach is to set up an Emergency Cash Allowance Programme (ECAP) for 10-12 million households.

Households in need of assistance should self-identify or self-register for the allowances.

They can register by sending SMS to dedicated mobile numbers. The registration

process should be simple enough so that most potential beneficiaries can apply without needing much assistance.

During the registration, they should provide names of the household head and household members along with their NID numbers, family address, and information on their preferred MFS account for making payments.

Payments should be made through mobile phone accounts using any MFS providers of their choice such as bKash, Rocket, Nagad, SureCash, etc.

If households need assistance in registering, they may use the services of more than one million MFS agents scattered across the country. It is possible that many applicants currently do not have MFS accounts.

However, since e-KYC is currently in operation in Bangladesh, opening such accounts using NIDs takes only a few minutes.

It is possible that certain beneficiaries either do not have their NIDs or have misplaced/lost them.

Under those circumstances, they may be registered using their birth certificates.

Opening of e-KYC accounts without NIDs can be temporarily allowed -- as is the case with the garment workers -- and these accounts, if needed, can be terminated later.

There are already some solid examples of the currently existing MFS infrastructure being an efficient means of delivering cash transfers.

Between 6 and 20 April, about 2.6 million garment workers could open their MFS accounts to receive their salaries.

Under a social security scheme, the Primary Education Stipend Programme (PESP), some 14.4 million primary students are enrolled and their 10 million-plus mothers receive monthly allowances through MFS.

Therefore, opening accounts using MFS and delivering cash assistance are already well-established in the country.

Introducing a perfect system for cash transfer perhaps will not be possible.

We have to acknowledge some scope of leakages/mistargeting. That is why we suggest that a relatively low amount of transfer be made each month.

Given the low financial literacy of most of our poor people, regular monthly payments could help with better management of household cash flow.

The measures suggested above may need further refinements to make them operational, but certainly doable.

Finally, the proposed cash assistance programme should be regarded as complementary to already declared intervention measures.

The expansion of the safety net programmes, as already announced by the government, should be implemented in addition to this cash assistance programme to make the support system more impactful.

Time is of the essence here in delivering critical support to the poor and needy.

The proposal outlined here shows that implementing a vast cash assistance programme -- to meet the basic needs of 50 million people (including family members) -- is very much within our fiscal and technological means and thus should be pursued immediately.

The current government deserves a lot of credit for expanding the MFS in Bangladesh, and it would only be most timely and appropriate for it to use the infrastructure to provide the prompt livelihood support that people need.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director, Abdur Razzaque, research director and Bazlul Khondker, director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh (PRI). This article is produced as part of PRI's Policy Advocacy Initiative on Digital Financial Services in Bangladesh.

## The question hounding mobile users: how do we top-up amid shutdown?

*MFS, digital channels step in to fill vacuum*

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

Mobile phones have long ago become an integral part of people's life and its utility is being strongly felt every minute as people in Bangladesh have physically been cut off from their neighbourhood and from the rest of the country because of the movement control order put in place to contain the deadly coronavirus.

For Tawhidul Islam's family, mobile data usage has increased two-fold to carry out various tasks, including working from home, facilitating children to attend online school, keeping in touch with relatives, online shopping, utility bill payment and consulting doctor via telemedicine.

The family of the 35-year-old private sector employee is not alone; due to the ongoing lockdown, many other families, who form the country's 16.61-crore-strong mobile subscriber base, are using mobile phones several times more than in the past and the device has become one of the most reliable means to carry out emergency tasks and maintain social communication.

Mobile data usage has increased by 15 to 20 per cent, according to the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh.

About 45 million people have used bKash to top up mobile balance in April, which was 32 million in January, an increase of 40 per cent,

according to data from the country's leading mobile financial service (MFS) provider.

But keeping mobile devices with sufficient balance is not easy as recharge points and customer service centres are largely shuttered owing to the ongoing lockdown and the difficulty in collecting money from these outlets in exchange of digital balance.

As a result, about one crore mobile connections in Bangladesh have no balance at the moment.

The entire mobile industry is suffering from this challenge and state-owned telecom operator Teletalk is getting the biggest hit.

Teletalk sent a letter to the telecom ministry informing the policymakers about the challenges, saying its revenue declined about 40 per cent because of the situation.

"Our business has been impacted because of the unavailability of our recharge points," said Shahab Uddin, managing director of Teletalk. Bandwidth consumption has increased but earnings have not. "Besides, we will have to pay the bills to third parties."

Collecting money from retailers and topping up their balance has become tough for the mobile operators' sales representatives. As a result, recharge points are running without balance.

Due to the enforcement of the lockdown, several balance recharge agents' points are



SK ENAMUL HAQ

not fully operational across the country, Grameenphone said in a statement.

As a result, many people can't recharge or are facing difficulties to recharge. Hence, Grameenphone is providing balance transfer free from one user to another.

Telecoms Minister Mustafa Jabbar

acknowledged the challenges. "It is true that most parts of the country are locked down because of the coronavirus."

"Even a few days ago, this challenge was severe. The situation has improved after we took some measures."

Mobile operators are using Nagad, an MFS

of the postal division run by a private entity, to collect money for them.

The carriers can also consider using postal services to move money as most of the post offices are located in the remote areas and they are open, the minister said.

Though the government has included telecom as an emergency service, recharge points and customer care centres have been facing challenges in running operations.

This prompted mobile operators to switch to online recharges through MFS and online banking channels. They are even using some city-centric platforms like Pathao. Any Pathao deliveryman can make recharge.

Balance top-up through MFS and internet more than doubled to 30 per cent from less than 15 per cent before the coronavirus reached the shores of Bangladesh.

"Our digital recharge has gone up significantly in the last one month and we are promoting all the possible digital channels for recharging customers account," said a senior executive of Robi.

Considering the overall situation and keeping customers' convenience in mind, Banglalink is not disconnecting connections that have run out of validity due to recharge difficulties at this moment, said Taimur Rahman, chief corporate and regulatory affairs officer of Banglalink.



The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY MAY 4, 2020, BAISHAKH 21, 1427 BS

# Indiscriminate use of Digital Security Act against journalists

## Is it for justice or intimidation?

We are worried at the way the Digital Security Act has increasingly been used to arrest and intimidate journalists across the country. In a recent incident, three journalists were sent to jail by a Narsingdi court in a case filed under this draconian law over quoting a police official without contacting him. According to our report, two local newspapers in the district, one of them online-based, published reports about a man’s death in police custody in which they quoted a police inspector allegedly without contacting him. The police inspector immediately filed a case against the journalists under the Digital Security Act to “protect his dignity.”

If the journalists were indeed guilty of publishing “fabricated and baseless” news, or if they included the inspector’s comments in the reports without contacting him, the police could have addressed the issue in other ways. They could have simply sent a protest letter or rejoinder to the newspapers to address this. But instead, the police official sued them under the Digital Security Act. The speed at which the arrests were made leaves us wondering about whether the act is being used to get justice or as a tool of intimidation.

We feel that the so-called Digital Security Act has been used more to stifle the voices of the journalists and create fear among them. Very recently, four journalists, including bdnews24.com Editor-in-Chief and jagonews24.com acting editor, were sued under this very law for reporting on alleged embezzlement of aid for coronavirus victims. There had been many other instances of the “misuse” of this law in which journalists were targeted.

As journalists across the country have been going through a hard time, there is a positive development that gives us some hope: photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol who went missing on March 10 from Dhaka, has been found in Benapole, Jashore, 53 days after his disappearance. The Benapole Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) deserves our heartiest thanks for finding him and connecting him with his family. A case was filed against him along with 31 others under the Digital Security Act just a day before he went missing. Now that he has been found, we would like to know the reasons for his disappearance and what happened to him during this time. We demand to know the truth.

# Police personnel need more protection from the virus

*They are the frontline fighters*

It is disturbing to learn that the police hospital in Dhaka has been overwhelmed by patients due to the number of COVID-19 infected police personnel. As of the time of writing this editorial, one hundred and thirteen police personnel have tested positive for Covid-19 across the country, according to statistics reports of the Police Headquarters. Of these, 93 are members of the DMP. The total number of infected policemen now stands at 854. And unfortunately, we have lost five infected police personnel so far. It may not be remiss to suggest that the matter of PPE for personnel engaged in the frontline of the battle has, particularly, not been adequately addressed.

The type of work the police are doing at this time, the chances of their catching the coronavirus are perhaps more than any other citizens—they being in the thick of the battle to prevent the spread of the virus. Unlike the other citizens, stay at home order does not apply to them and they have to be on the job 24/7. But even considering their susceptibility, when they are engaged in ensuring social distancing, with most people preferring to disregard the instructions, and people coming out in droves in markets, the infection figure among the police, which is nearing a thousand, is indeed too many. The cramped living conditions in the police lines increase the chance of spread of the virus among the police.

We believe that firstly, adequate and appropriate personal protection equipment should be provided to the police, particularly to those who are on the streets. Secondly, testing for the virus should be carried out on the members of the law enforcing agencies, so that the positive cases can be segregated. Thirdly, their living conditions must be made more hygienic. Last but not the least, the efforts and resources of the police hospitals in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country must be supplemented so that fatalities can be kept to a minimum. The country can ill afford the police overtaken at any time, more so now.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Pay teachers their dues

A friend who once served as a faculty member at private universities recently informed me that selective private universities are not paying teachers their due salaries, while some have managed to pay a certain percentage of the total amount for the month of March. This has gotten them worried as to whether they will now receive their salaries for April. It is not only the teachers of these universities who face such crisis, but other staff as well.

This lockdown has created a variety of problems for people from all walks of life. To make matters worse, prices of goods and essentials have also gone up. In such a situation, how will the teachers provide for their families? Even if the students are not paying tuition fees, the authorities are capable of paying the teachers from their funds. But unfortunately, they have not. I urge the government to take necessary measures to ensure that the teachers get paid.

Mizanur Rahman, Madaripur



MACRO MIRROR

FAHMIDA KHATUN

SINCE the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic we have begun to analyse, forecast and speculate the impact on economies, societies, political systems, governance mechanisms, and on many more areas. We have started to imagine a world after COVID-19 through a variety of lenses based on our own understanding and experiences. The innumerable research that are being carried out on the impact of COVID-19 throughout the world have flooded our minds, and sometimes made us confused as to what life after COVID-19 would look like.

The implications of COVID-19 on the global economy and on individual countries are becoming obvious as time goes on. The shutdown of almost all economic activities have brought miseries to economies of all strata and phases. Production and supply chains have been disrupted, exports and imports decelerated, transportation system collapsed and service sector interrupted. These have changed the lives and livelihoods of people across the world. Unemployment has soared, poverty has surged, food insecurity has increased, and above all, loss of lives is increasing by the hour.

Barring a few, most governments have undertaken policy measures to address such a rapid and massive impact of corona pandemic at large scales. Health expenditures have been topped up to mitigate the health risks. Stimulus packages for various sectors of the economy have been announced with the objective being increase spending following the Keynesian theory to rejuvenate the economy. Relief packages are also in place in many countries to extend income and food support to the poor to save them from hunger.

These are of course immediate responses to rescue the lives of people and also pump oxygen into the economy. And, hopefully it will work sooner rather than later. Scientists and doctors have shown some rays of hope to tackle the disease. And once health is under control, human beings are smart enough to work through in reviving the economic activities and recover the lost gains to the best of their ability. At least, history has pointed out clearly how economies could get back to life after several crises in the past. The World Wars, the Great

# Life after the pandemic

Depression, the Spanish Flu and many more examples will confirm this.

However, apart from economic recovery, will there be any changes in social, cultural and institutional norms, political systems and governance patterns? Change is a continuous process. It happens for good or for bad. Changes emanated from crises may sometimes become beneficial for humanity. What changes will COVID-19 lead to? It depends on what changes we want to see. And how we work towards that. It is not automatic.

At the onset of COVID-19, people talked about the universal nature of this pandemic. We were reminded of how every person—rich and poor, man

A review of the ongoing discussions with respect to the situation during the post COVID-19 period indicates that there can be three possible scenarios.

First is the business as usual situation. That is, the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic and goes back to where we were before COVID-19—economically, socially, politically and environmentally. We continue to live in whatever good or bad circumstances we had during the pre-COVID-19 period. And we continue to accept and adjust to the existing realities that the world will continue to generate wealth, and economic prosperity of some countries and some people will continue to multiply but these privileges will not be

Organisations and the like decelerates.

Third is the optimistic case. The economies around the world not only recovers but, moves further ahead. Governments invest more in areas such as health, education, technology, climate and work towards ending poverty, improving inclusivity, establishing good governance and creating democratic spaces. Cooperation among nations improves and commitments toward fulfilling the global promises get implemented. This is the situation where crisis will be turned into opportunity by global and national leaders.

What do we expect in Bangladesh during the aftermath of COVID-19? The outcome of the greatest crisis in Bangladesh’s history—the Liberation War in 1971—was regaining our prized possession, that is, an independent country. We faced the crisis in unity and solidarity. And following the war we also got a progressive constitution that upholds the dignity and rights of every citizen of Bangladesh. Social justice and equality are also enshrined in our great constitution. After 49 years of our independence, we however, cannot claim that we could keep our promises to those who sacrificed their lives for the country.

Rather, the spirit of our freedom fighters is being undermined by the way some of us conduct ourselves each day and even during crisis. Politically connected people who steal relief for the flood affected people and get away with such misdeeds are also active now during COVID-19. With shame we observe when people go hungry, these people in charge of distribution of food and support have the audacity to commit such heinous crimes. With frustration we see how public representatives are nowhere to be seen to coordinate the relief work and help their voters to survive. With sadness we note how people behave with the frontline workers of this crisis who are risking their own lives and also how health workers mistreat patients by forgetting the core values of their profession. With discouragement we learn how faulty and corrupt the health procurement is and how the poor are deprived of medicines allocated for them.

And, all of a sudden, it seems everyone has become poor in Bangladesh! The way every business—irrespective of its size and strength, is seeking stimulus packages from the government reminds us of the old story of greed, not need.

One wonders, will people change in their attitude and behaviour or keep repeating their old acts once COVID-19 recedes?

Dr Fahmida Khatun is the Executive Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.



A peanut vendor in Dhaka's Farmgate sits idle at around noon. Typically at this time of the day, he is busy selling peanuts to school children. But due to the outbreak of COVID-19, people are staying away from the streets leaving him with next to no income.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

and woman, powerful and weak—is vulnerable to this pandemic. COVID-19 does not distinguish among race, colour, gender, location, profession, position or riches. But it has been proven wrong when immediate research in many communities in several countries showed that COVID-19 also has a bias against certain groups of people. That is why African-American were more affected in the USA or the underprivileged with weak immune system in poor countries are becoming victims of COVID-19 more than others. This bias is of course not created by COVID-19. Rather it is the outcome of the biases that have been created by government policies which favour the rich and ignores the impoverished.

universal.

The second situation will be such that the global economy slides so much that it takes a long time to recover. Poverty, mortality, morbidity, food insecurity and unemployment increases. All forms of inequality within and among countries accentuates. All global targets—Sustainable Development Goals, providing support to poor countries by developed countries equivalent to 0.7 percent of their gross national income, Paris climate agreement to limit the increase of global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius—fail to be achieved. As a result, countries become inward looking and resort to protectionism. And the effectiveness of global institutions such as the United Nations, World Trade

# Ensuring food security during lockdown

## Saving smallholder and women farmers must be a priority

TANJIR HOSSAIN

THE government has already taken a number of measures to save Robi Cropconsidering the lockdown and because the haor region—especially Sunamganj, Sylhet and some northern districts such Gaibandha, Jamalpur—may suffer flashflood. These measures include regular weather forecast, early warning, arranging harvest machines and so on. These are some of the most important and timely decisions by the government as first steps to ensure food availability.

The government has also issued cyclone early warning for coastal areas and is taking actions to save crops. The Agricultural Loan Department of Bangladesh Bank also declared Tk 5,000 crore for agricultural loan, especially for the horticulture, fruit, fisheries, poultry, dairy and other businesses. This is also a great initiative considering that these small businesses have already been affected due to the pandemic.

The concerns related to food security, however, remains unaddressed by and large due to a number of factors. Everyday food items such as rice, vegetables and other necessary perishables are produced by the smallholder and women farmers in Bangladesh. And these farmers are already suffering. For example, Taslima Begum of Chorgacha, Ghoraghat is a small poultry farmer. Due to the COVID-19 crisis she cannot sell her chickens at the market, so she is forced to sell the poultry items at a loss of Tk 50 per kg to her neighbours in fewer quantity.

Afroza Begum of Fulchari, Gaibandha is a vegetable producer. Because of the lack of market access, she is selling pumpkins at Tk 5 per kg whereas the regular price is Tk 25-30 per kg. It is watermelon season in Bangladesh and farmers normally sell their products at Tk 30-40 per kg. The farmers in Patuakhali are currently selling watermelons at Tk 8-10 per piece whereas their cost of production is over Tk 20 per watermelon. How are these farmers going to recover the loss they are already suffering? We need to take note that these farmers’ livelihoods are depended on their produce and any loss means they will not be able to go into production next season without external assistance.

Coming back to paddy, with the hope that flash flood or other natural hazards will not cause any disastrous situation in any parts of Bangladesh and farmers are able to get their desired harvest, question remains whether the farmers

will be able to sell their crop at a fair price. In 2018 hundreds and thousands of farmers protested across the country demanding fair price. The response from the government was helpful, but it was late and inadequate in solving the matter. At present, even if the government manages to buy the paddy and other ROBI crops, how are those going to be processed and stored? This will mean that the rice mills will have to be re-opened during the crisis, risking the spread of the virus. Furthermore, given that inter-city transportation systems carrying food products are yet to be re-established, unless major changes are made and government facilitates are opened for the distribution and redistribution of food

timely initiative needs to be maintained besides creating interconnectedness between the village market to union market to Upazila market and so on. It is critical to ensure two major things: i) The smallholder and women farmers are getting fair price; and ii) A safeguard mechanism is in place to prevent COVID19 from spreading.

At the short to medium term(1-3 months), considering the flood season and its impacts on agriculture, farmers may lose the rainfed Amandue to early flood or excessive rain during seedling period. It is critical to note that unless we ensure fair price for smallholder and women farmers for their Boro crop, they will not be able to invest in



The policymakers and city dwellers may be buying food from the supermarkets now, but supermarkets do not produce crops and will never do.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

products, a food crisis may be inevitable in the long run. The solution lies in following the right strategy considering different timescales.

For immediate action, it is important to set up an oversight committee headed by the Ministry of Agriculture with appropriate representatives from key relevant ministries and civil society organisations. In each district and Upazila, a committee should also be established where local transportation authority is represented. Government has already taken the initiative to open school fields for local market to operate. This

Amanproduction. Seed and fertiliser supply will become a challenge. The smallholder and women farmers will require access to interest free loans with the option to repay post Aman harvest. This will be the most critical stage of intervention in terms of ensuring food security for the remaining year. Considering the worst case scenario, the government and other actors must map possible solutions including countrywide planning of distribution and redistribution of the products. We also need to ensure quality seeds where community seedbank initiatives can play

a critical role.

Addressing overall market mechanism to support the smallholder farmers will be the key challenge in the medium term. Due to the current travel ban, buyers from distant places are failing to reach the market and the producers are deprived from optimum price of crops especially vegetables and seasonal fruits. Lack of infrastructure to preserve vegetables or perishable products has been one of the biggest challenges for small farmers for a long time contributing to their losses every year. Considering the products that are to be harvested between July to September, the government must take measures including flood preparedness, etc. Given that there could be a global food crisis, the government should strengthen its safety net programme ensuring that food is available, accessible and affordable for the poor and marginalised. Special schemes for the smallholder and women farmers is needed to ensure they survive until the next harvest. The government must also ensure the transportation system is functioning well considering that the COVID-19 crisis may continue. Guaranteeing transparency and accountability throughout the process to stop theft and exploitation by the powerful and the middlemen are must.

In the long term (6-12 months), it will be important to monitor the global food security situation, market system as well as climate condition. We must not forget that Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change and throughout the year, we may face flood, river erosion, cyclone and hailstorm—and dry period at the end of this year. It is important to note that even if everything goes right and there is no climate induced disaster in 2020, we will still continue to carry the loss that we already suffered due to the current crisis. Therefore, the government must be ready to continue prioritising food producers, the smallholder and women farmers, along with the small and medium agricultural businesses.

The policymakers and city dwellers may be buying food from the supermarkets now, but supermarkets do not produce crops and will never do. It is the smallholders and women farmers like Taslima and Afroza who produce the food we eat. If they do not survive, it will be only a matter of time before we face a food crisis in Bangladesh.

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# Economic measures we should take in response to COVID-19

ATIQUR RAHMAN

THE 2020-21 budget of Bangladesh, under preparation now, could have been exciting. The country was having an unbroken run of 6 percent or higher growth rate for the last nine years. In 2019, it reached 8.2 percent. Poverty declined to reach 24.3 percent in 2016 (Wold Bank). Export earnings and remittance income, put together, covered more than three-fourths of the country's import bill, and the country's debt service ratio was at a comfortable level of 5.7 percent (in 2018). The achievements in the social sectors (in child and maternal mortality, in education, and nutrition) were praiseworthy, better than many other countries at similar levels of income.

A number of mega projects involving huge expenditures (such as the Padma Bridge, Deep Sea Port, Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, Karnaphuli Tunnel, Metro Rail Project) were taken up to develop and modernise the country further. The country was looking forward to celebrating 50 years of its independence (towards the end of 2021) in style.

COVID-19 pandemic has put an end to this euphoria. The highly contagious virus, with its high toll of human lives and livelihoods, pushed the world to a recession. The IMF estimates the world GDP to shrink by 3 percent this year. With supply chains broken, factories, trades and businesses either closed or nearly so, unemployment is expected to rise. The level of unemployment has already reached 26 million in the USA and 22 million in EU. The World Health Organisation (WHO) warned that the virus had not reached its peak yet, and that there could be multiple spells of the virus.

Bangladesh has not been spared either. Although the impact of COVID-19 in terms of infection and fatalities (going by official statistics) remains lower than some developed countries, the casualties (which do not

include community deaths and deaths in hundreds of private clinics around the country) can mount in the coming months. Like in most other countries, Bangladesh also imposed lockdown measures. Educational institutions, non-essential services, offices, shops and transportation services, small, medium and large industries including the vibrant and major foreign exchange earner, the readymade garment (RMG) factories, have been closed down. However, some are opening slowly in recent days after the relaxation of lockdown measures.

The World Bank estimates a sharp decline of Bangladesh's growth rate to around 2-3 percent in 2020, and further to 1.2-2.9 percent in 2021 from the 2019 growth rate of 8.2 percent. These are way below the 7-8 percent growth needed to reach the middle income status by 2024.

The lockdowns have seriously disrupted normal economic and social activities in the country. Millions of workers engaged in shops and restaurants, in transport and communication sector, working as domestic help, self-employed as traders, hawkers, day labourers, totalling anywhere between 15-20 million, are expected to lose their livelihoods. With the closure of the readymade garment (RMGs) industry, another four million employees, mostly young women and their families, are expected to face difficult economic and social situation. Their low incomes make them vulnerable even to short periods of unemployment.

Fear of the virus as well as loss of income are driving thousands of these vulnerable low income urban people to their rural roots. Others, who do not have this option, are staying back in urban slums, where congested living can be the breeding ground of the virus.

Given this background of unprecedented economic and social circumstances, the budget of 2020-21



The usually pandemoniac Shahbagh Square wears a forlorn look during the countrywide shutdown enforced since March 26.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

will have to be significantly different from what could have been an "euphoric" budget. Instead, the budget will be one of damage repair, caused by external circumstances and rebuilding.

The emergency measures are expected to tackle the emergencies created by the COVID-19 pandemic (in terms of both halting the progress of the virus and providing medical care to those infected), and supporting people survive through their immense economic hardship. The rebuilding measures, on the other hand, will address the issues of restarting the economy with directed support, subsidies, grants, and helping to build institutions to tackle future pandemics, including resurgence of COVID-19.

The emergency measures will have to focus on expanding the capacity of public healthcare institutions, through infrastructure development, procurement of equipment (PPE, masks, ventilators) and medicines

(both anti-COVID-19 and for curing COVID-19 infection), and of course providing due support to all medical care staff, most importantly to the frontline care staff. And it will also have to beef up the country's poor social protection initiatives (which is lowest in the Asia Pacific Region: UN Asia Pacific Region Report April 13, 2020). Part of the prime minister's cash incentive of about 95.6 thousand crores taka could give the social protection initiative a boost, as well as provide cash incentives to medical workers.

The rebuilding measures, on the other hand, will focus on those sectors which are the main drivers of the economy, i.e. restarting RMGs, facilitating the repatriation of those who might have gotten stuck in Bangladesh. The measures could also include working capital support to small and medium industries, and small loans to traders. Low interest loans could also be provided to small

businesses and industries who would like to configure their factory floors and work spaces to conform to the need for social distancing, to avoid further spread of COVID-19.

Beyond these, it will be immensely worthwhile to support agriculture, especially the smallholder farmers, through small loans to farmers, subsidised inputs, water and uninterrupted electricity supply during the dry season (now) and through ensuring availability of seasonal labour for harvesting.

Microfinance institutions (MFIs), refinanced by Bangladesh Bank, could play an effective role in this area.

RMG sector, a major foreign exchange earner of the country, and employer of nearly four million workers (mostly for women), will need to be beefed up as early as possible. There could be a special fund to provide subsidised loans to the RMG industries on a case by case basis, judged by their ability to restart production, export and re-employment of staff laid off during the COVID crisis.

All these measures, detailed out and costed, will be a very tall order. The critical issue is how to get the budget financed.

The pandemic related crisis will severely restrict the growth of Bangladesh, and also imports, through reduction of economic activities. Both of these will severely reduce the government's ability to raise revenue; the latter through reduction of revenue from import duties. The country will have to borrow: from external sources to the extent they are available, but also from domestic sources. These will create inflationary pressure, both because of reduced supply response and lower imports. The challenge will be to channel support to activities which could quickly respond through increased production.

Dr Atiqur Rahman, economist and former lead strategist of IFAD, Rome, Italy.

# A eulogy for a polymath and a mentor



THE passing of National Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury marks the sudden end of the extraordinary journey of a man who was venerated by thousands of his direct students at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), Brac University and University of Asia Pacific as well as thousands more, who came in touch with him through his professional and pro-bono engagements in diverse fields, to whom he was a quintessential teacher, mentor and philosopher-guide.

Though my stint as a student at Buet starting in late 1979 didn't last long as I went to USA to continue my undergraduate degree in engineering, professor Choudhury's legendary capacity for mental math and photographic memory of people's genealogy and calendar of events already reached my ears as they did to anyone who have ever attended Buet as a student.

After I came back upon finishing my undergrad studies and eventually became an IT entrepreneur here I had the privilege of knowing and working with professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury closely as we shared a common passion to work on policy support for IT development in the country.

Professor Choudhury or "JRC Sir", as he was commonly referred to, will forever be remembered as an institution builder. At Buet the "Computer Center"

that later became "Institute of ICT" flourished under his leadership—which he steered during the formative years in the eighties. He took the mantle of a startup university at the turn of the century and built up Brac University as its founder vice chancellor into the premier institution of learning that it is today. However, he left that prestigious job to focus on his technical leadership role for the design and supervision of the largest bridge of the country—Padma Bridge—where his extraordinary structural engineering acumen saved the bridge from seemingly insurmountable and unique subsoil conditions through hitherto unknown structural solutions. He later joined the University of Asia Pacific as its head and greatly elevated that institution's standing among private universities till the day he died.

In the IT industry he was instrumental in guiding the policy regimen for the development of the

*His memory is everywhere he ventured and his golden touch will be long felt by all institutions and initiatives he helped guide or shape during his illustrious life.*



PHOTO: PROTHOM ALO

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

software industry and shared with the IT entrepreneurs and visionary political leaders of the country a dream of seeing the nation leapfrogging the IT divide and reaping rich dividends from IT services export. The "JRC Report" that he authored in 1996 at the instance of the then commerce minister became the blueprint for jumpstarting the software industry when there were hardly a few firms engaged in software development and professional IT services. Without that initial fillip it is difficult to imagine what would have come of the software industry that today gamers nearly two billion dollars in export and local revenue. I was fortunate to have been one of those few plucky software entrepreneurs that banded together to form Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) in late 1997. To us "JRC Sir" had always been

the champion whenever we needed policy and administrative support at the highest levels and he will forever be the champion in our hearts. It is befitting that BASIS recognised his contributions to the ICT industry by bestowing upon him the "BASIS ICT Champion Award" in 2009.

In 2008 the ICT ministry entrusted professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury to review and update the National ICT Policy that was adopted in 2002. The committee brought together all ICT stakeholders from academia, government, industry and NGOs under his stewardship. I had the privilege of working as the convener of the working group of that committee which included many luminaries such as the current telecom minister, the policy adviser of A2i, and heads of other IT associations and government/defence departments; this working group put together the new structure of the ICT Policy that has been adopted by the government in 2009 and has continued to this day. Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury's foresightedness in guiding the formulation of the revised ICT Policy shall remain a watershed moment in the history of ICT development of the country.

In the short span of three months as an adviser (cabinet minister) of the caretaker government in 1996, professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury created another milestone when he steered the liberalisation of the VSAT licensing that opened up the floodgates of the real-time email service and internet utilities in general.

Professor Choudhury was passionate about anything that would help the country in general and the youth in

particular. Despite extreme demands on his time from his professional engagements as a University VC and technical adviser on very large infrastructure projects, he always found time for pro-bono activities whether it was to guide IT industry associations, math, programming and blockchain competitions, environment and architectural activists, earthquake preparedness and awareness initiatives or education assistance to the underprivileged. It was his intervention that has brought the International Collegiate Programming Competition (ICPC) to Bangladesh for the first time which will be held in this country in 2021. He also helped bring together the stalwarts of the academia, government and the industry in organising the first ever Blockchain Olympiad in the country. The winners of the Blockchain Olympiad Bangladesh 2020 will be declared on May 3 and as the coordinator of the Olympiad I was scheduled to talk to professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury on the morning of April 28—a talk that will never take place. On March 30 he was thrilled to address nearly 500 students online who had registered for the maiden blockchain competition during a blockchain webinar arranged by the Olympiad organisers.

His memory is everywhere he ventured and his golden touch will be long felt by all institutions and initiatives he helped guide or shape during his illustrious life. In his death the country has lost an academic icon and I have lost a mentor.

Habibullah N Karim is CEO of Technohaven Company Ltd and former President of BASIS. Email: hnkarim@gmail.com

QUOTABLE Quote



**SOREN KIERKEGAARD**  
(1813-1855)  
Danish philosopher, theologian, and cultural critic.  
*Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.*

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Heaps

5 Ship poles

10 Billionaire

George

12 Capital of Ghana

13 Office seat

15 Green prefix

16 Dissenter's vote

17 Fall behind

18 Animal suet

20 Flank

21 Get smart

22 Go by

23 Secret supply

25 Blanchett of

"The Lord of the Rings"

28 Mates of harts

31 Singer Redding

32 Go to

34 Sister of Jo, Amy

and Beth

35 Spotted cube

36 Scot's denial

37 Spot for a trim

40 Korean or Thai

41 Berry of

"X-Men"

42 Irritable

43 Blu-ray item

DOWN

1 Useful skill

2 Light, in a way

3 Baltimore player

4 "Mazel --!"

5 Singer Gray

6 German cry

7 Justice Antonin

8 Musical chords

9 Privates' bosses

11 Lady of Spain

14 Tailgating sight

19 Oxford parts

20 Wasn't thrifty

24 Up-to-date, in a way

25 Fighting

26 Comfortable

27 River of Iraq

29 Alaskan peak

30 Slow movers

33 Baseball's jeter

35 Turn down

38 Flying mammal

39 Owned

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

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S | C | A | M |   | S | T | O | I | C |
| N | I | N | A |   | M | E | A | D | O |
| O | D | O | R |   | E | N | T | I | R |
| R | E | D | I | A | L | S | O | N | E |
| T | R | E | A | D | L | E | T | I | P |
| C | R | E | A | M |   | R | A | C | E |
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| E | G | G |   | O | B | O | I | S | T |
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| D | E | V | E | I | N |   | H | O | W |
| D | E | I | S | T |   | I | S | L | E |

BETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



# WORLD BOOK DAY

## What is a book, anyway?

SARAH ANJUM BARI

In the Palace Museum of present-day Beijing, 10 stones of about 90 cm height and 60 cm diameter contain some ancient Chinese symbols. Roughly 300 of these characters are decipherable today, but they're the last remaining survivors from some 700 characters that had been inscribed on the drum-shaped boulders, sometime between the 8th and 4th centuries BCE in the beginnings of China's Qin dynasty. Among the earliest surviving Chinese writing forms, these etchings on the 'Stone Drums' are verses that tell stories of hunting and fishing expeditions, of trees, clear water and smooth land, and generous rainfall that would have allowed for a bustling agricultural economy. This technology wasn't the last of its kind. From the Han dynasty that followed and onwards, flattened stone *steles* (tablets) in China were carved with sacred texts and tales of historic occasions and individual memories. Multiple editions of Confucian classics on stone, canons of Buddhist teachings engraved on *sutras*, and the carving of Taoist literature on *steles* all persisted, one after the other, until the year 708 AD, all because stones would outlive other materials like silks, metal, or bamboo. And yet, soon, wood and bamboo tablets did come into use as writing surfaces before the same civilization invented paper; the tablets were inscribed with vertical Chinese characters running across separate pages,



PHOTO: THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

**The ten Stone Drums are the earliest extant forms of the Chinese seal script, inscribed with verses about Qin dynasty hunting exhibitions and agriculture.**

of yourself, finding your ideas, your most intimate convictions alternately challenged and validated. No, as potent as that magic is, picking up a book is also about having your eyes arrested, across a crowded row of shelves, by a cover artwork that speaks to you. It's about subconsciously appreciating the work of that artist and being won over by the premise offered by the author and her publisher. It's about smelling its pages—clean, crisp, fresh from the printers, or deliciously mouldy from decades of survival!—about carrying its (hardback,

printers and distributors today, or scribes, before movable type had come along. Anne Frank's diary would have remained a diary if it hadn't been published, after all, and that would have left much of the world intellectually and emotionally poorer. Even just with regards to the text, we're familiar with an idea articulated by Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author". "A text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination... The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author," he famously wrote. This is true of most published books today, with their cloying need for promotion, sales, reviews, adaptations. Most books seek out an audience even before they're entirely a manuscript, either because the author has signed a two or three-book deal with the publisher, or because the publisher needs to decide which genre will shape their marketing strategy and cover art. Even at Daily Star Books when accepting a manuscript, we admittedly ask the author, who do you think will read this book?

The same applies, on a far grander scale, to some of the major world religions. The first word in the Quran asks one to "read". It begins with an instruction to read in the name of God and for centuries, Muslims have primarily—second to following Islam's five pillars—practiced their faith by reading, memorizing, revisiting and interpreting the teachings dictated by the book. And yet a large part of 'reading' the Quran, or any holy book, goes against the grain of what we usually mean by 'reading'—a Muslim reader isn't meant to pick and choose what one likes or dislikes in this text, or what suits one's reading preferences and beliefs. It's about accepting the texts entirely especially and even, for many non-Arab speaking Muslims today, when they don't know how to understand the language of the text. Meanwhile in Christianity, before the printing press came along, the role of the scribe had been a revered one. It involved reading and copying manuscripts so that others could read the Scripture. "Since Scripture cannot be read until it is written, it is both profitable and necessary for monasteries to train monks carefully in the art of writing. Of all manual labor nothing is more in accord with the state of monks than the zealous copying of sacred writings," wrote Johannes Trithemius, a 15th century German abbot and polymath, in *De Laude Scriptorum* (published as *In Praise of Scribes* 1974).

Yet the same cannot be said of the famous Lotus Sutras, the earliest surviving relic of Japanese textual printing from the eighth century. Under the orders of Empress Shotoku sometime between 764 and 770 AD, just after she had successfully stopped an insurrection with the help of a Buddhist court, a Buddhist charm or prayer was copied on to roughly one million strips of thick paper, each of which were then rolled into wooden pagodas and placed in the hollow centres of the 10 leading Buddhist temples of Japan. They might have used wood blocks for the printing, but more recent research leans toward bronze or copper plates. What's significant is that these texts, part of the *Hyakumanto* prayer and taken from the sutra *Muki Joku-kyo*, were specifically not meant to be read, written in a now unreadable writing system using Chinese characters that would phonetically replicate the Sanskrit incantation. The project was implemented "on a scale rivaling that of modern best sellers," the *Encyclopedia of Modern and Information Science*, Volume 24 (1978), points out. This early instance of Japanese printing might be a unique example, but it adds to the definition of a book that has been in flux over centuries. Due to its readability or lack thereof, a book can be instruction, enlightenment,



ILLUSTRATION: SHEHZIL MALIK

**Writer Fatima Bhutto and journalist Sanam Maher's 'Stay Home, Stay Reading' series on Instagram engaged renowned authors from around the world in free, virtual book readings.**

protection, and information. What serves simply as popular reading or a form of memorializing a culture in its time—recording hunting expeditions in ancient China or a non-fiction volume about the world we live in today—can transform through the passage of time into a historical artefact ripe with clues for researchers. Margins that were once meant to be scribbled on become off limits to readers centuries after their genesis. As a book of yesterday becomes a rare book of today, binding that was once



PHOTO: DAILY STAR BOOKS

**Book-themed questionnaires floating around Instagram reflect readers' tastes and book rituals.**

meant to hold a book through its being read is now meant to hold it together through its being *unread*. And its value around the world climbs not because it is heavily circulated, but because it's guarded, enshrined, existing in a sole specimen. The Covid-19 disease mushroomed in China in January this year. The rest of the world started getting afflicted from February and here in Bangladesh, most of us who aren't frontline workers or daily wage earners have been forced indoors since mid-March. As food supplies dwindle and streets are left with a haunting solitude, something uplifting is happening inside many of our homes. Just before the world stepped indoors, book sales saw a gust of an increase. According to figures provided on March 27 by NPD BookScan, which prepares and analyses publishing industry data, "year to date" book sales were up by 0.2 percent in New York, the most heavily Corona-afflicted city; the spike was matched in Boston, New Hampshire and Vermont. Study aids saw a 235 percent growth in sales and juvenile non-fiction sales grew by 66.2 percent. Sales of thrillers—a form of escapist fiction—skyrocketed by 93 percent and contemporary romance, contemporary women's fiction, horror, and romantic suspense all saw spikes in sale. Similar figures aren't available for Bangladesh, but before closing down under the government-mandated lockdown, Bookworm Bangladesh, one of our more popular bookstores that delivers in and outside Dhaka, saw a spike in home delivery orders. Readers were huddling towards specifics titles as they prepared for the lockdown, Bookworm shared. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Dean Koontz's *Eyes of Darkness*, Albert Camus' *The Plague*. Social media has been rife with enquiries about home delivery services as bookstores started closing up, particularly after Rokomari, one of the largest of such services providers, also decided to halt

operations, and reading tastes appear to be bending towards classics or feel-good contemporary fiction.

As the virus spread its tentacles and the world stepped indoors, authors, publishers and book bloggers have taken to social media platforms with renewed vigour. Daily Star Books started a virtual book club on Facebook, as did foreign publishers like Vintage Books. Pakistani writer Fatima Bhutto and journalist Sanam Maher started the 'Stay Home, Stay Reading' series on Instagram on March 27—Alexander Chee, Isabel Allende, Deepa Anappara, Nikesh Shukla, HM Naqvi, Aanchal Malhotra, Mohammad Hanif, Arif Anwar, and many other authors from around the world took part by reading aloud from their books on Instagram for free. Seagull Books of Kolkata are releasing seven new e-books on their website every Sunday free for download by all. Literary magazine *Catapult* are giving out free international giveaways of some chosen titles. And readers are busy devouring books. Facebook and especially Instagram are flooded by images of books being read and shelves being repacked. Book-themed bingo templates shared on Instagram stories are reflecting people's reading tastes and rituals—paperback versus audiobook, bookmarks versus dog-eared pages, fiction versus non-fiction. Book reviews and suggestions are flying across virtual book communities like Litmosphere and anecdotes and stories inspired by childhood interactions with books are being written about.

It might seem pedestrian to us because we're living it, but these activities all reflect the many different ways that we are perceiving and interacting with books in this unique period of inertia and numbed panic. Suddenly—especially if you're a dedicated reader—books have become more than one form of escape; it's the *only* form of escape. And because narratives are often better able to inspire empathy than reported facts, books about pandemics, warfare and human strife during this time might be an especially potent way for the fortunate among us to check the privilege that allows us to be indoors, safe and reading, and not starving on the streets. As we hold on to books for comfort during this pandemic, be it by reading one, listening to one, or even writing one, it might be worthwhile to ask ourselves what, in our definition, a book is.

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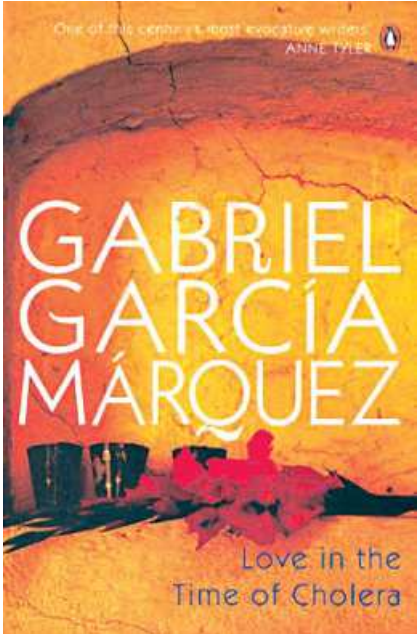
### REJOINDER

In the article titled 'The Women's Movement in Bangladesh Throughout the Years' published in the In Focus section of The Daily Star on April 6, 2020 it was mentioned that "Over three decades ago, in 1988, March 8 was first observed in Bangladesh as International Women's Day." But the fact is that International Women's Day was first observed in this region now called Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) in 1969. On March 8, 1969 East Pakistan Mahila Sangram Parishad (which later emerged as Mahila Parishad on April 4, 1970) organised a meeting to commemorate the International Women's Day. Later in 1975, the United Nations (UN) declared March 8 as the International Women's Day. The UN called on various states to celebrate the day. As a result, International Women's Day has been celebrated nationally in Bangladesh since 1977.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

held together by thongs—a format whose legacy would result in the codex, what we now know as a 'book'. I can guess at the answers I'd get if I were to ask you, what is a book? A collection of bound pages framed by a cover? A PDF or EPUB file on an electronic tablet? A body of text, a story, a narrative? If it's the form that decides the definition, then what about audio books? If it's simply the relaying of a narrative from one person to another, how is a tale passed down by a grandmother different from a book that we listen to on iTunes or Google Play? If it just takes a stamp of recognition from a publisher or an International Standard Book Number (ISBN), what of Homeric classics or, more significantly, divine messages of the Torah, the Bible and the Quran, 'holy' books that long preceded those modern markers? One solution could be to trace the etymology. The Oxford University Press, in a post on their OUP blog, refer to the Old English/ Germanic form boc or the Gothic boka. Both represent "written and/or illustrated pages bound together for the ease of reading." But paper, the printing press and the codex were relatively modern inventions; Anglo-Saxon documents were made with parchment (animal skin), Chinese and Japanese documents with stones, silks, wood and bamboo. The 'khipus' texts of mid-17th century Peru which record rich narratives of stories, names, cultural traditions and life histories do so through a unique writing system—colour-coded knotted strings. From these wealth of 'writing' surfaces and going by the definition that a book can be a document, a letter, any kind of written possession (according to the OUP post on etymology), a book can be...anything. Like many people reading this, I'm fascinated with all that it entails to interact with a book. It isn't just about tucking yourself into the sentences of a text, finding warmth and companionship; nor is it about setting sail with those sentences until you start to soar, exploring alien worlds and parts



**Readers are flocking towards pandemic-inspired classics like Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* and Albert Camus's *The Plague*.**

paperback, e-book, audiobook) weight in your arms and your mind. In the weeks or months to come, it's about mulling over what you like, dislike, or are on the fence about, regarding the book's content, and it's about passing on those sentiments to your surrounding community of readers, either through scribbled annotations, social media posts and published reviews, or through word of mouth. Having long loved all these parts of a book's life cycle, it fascinates me how these very identifying qualities of the book have always been so mercurial and manifold. How these shape-shifting qualities have in turn challenged the working definition of a book across cultures and histories. Regardless of form, the most common prerequisite for a book appears to be its readability. You can't read it if it's not a book and it's not a book if you can't read it; hence the vital need for publishers,





While many of Bangladesh's promising young players have failed to take their talent to the senior level due to a lack of institutional nurturing, India has given their youth teams a platform to shine in top-tier football through Indian Arrows, a club which turned many young talents into future stars.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



# Solutions closer to home?

ANISUR RAHMAN



India sit at around 100 in the FIFA rankings, Maldives and Nepal have been playing competitive football for a long time while Bhutan are also showing potential at international level. These improvements are due to the countries' effective plans that are focused on youth development. India have always been the superior side in South Asia in terms of performances, domestic standards, infrastructure, club structure and youth development. However, the likes of Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan have been progressing, courtesy of the 'educated footballers' coming through youth development. Yet, Bangladesh -- who have

been languishing at the bottom of the rankings -- do not look at these neighbours as development models. Long-serving Bangladesh Football Federation president Kazi Salahuddin has always pointed to European countries as examples whenever the development processes of other South Asian nations were presented before him in the last 12 years, although the BFF boss never imported any ideas from the countries he was so fond of citing above his neighbours. That the federations in India, Nepal and Bhutan operate football academies is not news. It has now been seen that that initiative is paying dividends, but the BFF believes it is the duty of clubs to operate football academies, not the federation, which had suspended a FIFA-supported academy programme despite a group showing promise

by clinching the inaugural SAFF U-16 Championships in 2015). Although nurturing youth is the duty of the clubs in the top-tier Bangladesh Premier League as they are bound by AFC guidelines to have permanent youth development programmes, most clubs have youth programmes only in name. With the clubs not doing their part, the BFF can follow a project such as the All India Football Federation's (AIFF), which is now paying dividends after being started. In 2010, with the aim to provide young players with more minutes against experienced players, the AIFF launched a team titled Indian Arrows, comprising of young players from different clubs and gave it approval to take part in top-tier I-League. India is now reaping the

rewards of that project and their national team now features players like Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Jeje Lalpekhlua, Pritam Kotal, Pronay Halder, Lalrindika Ralte, Halicharan Narzary, who are all products of Indian Arrows. Meanwhile, promising players like Narender Gahlot and Amarjit Singh were in the pipeline of the Blue Tigers. At the start of the professional football league in 2006, roping in at least five U-19 players was mandatory for each club and fielding those players in competitive matches for a certain period was also compulsory, but now there are no such obligations for the result-oriented clubs. Thus, youth footballers have been deprived of quality minutes against hardened players this season and warmed benches most of the time. The BFF can

easily take a pilot project to nurture young players by forming a youth team that will compete in the professional football league as well as international age-group tournaments. They can assign local coaches to coordinate with the national team's foreign coaches to train them and improve physical, technical and tactical development. It is believed that the youth team would not be very expensive for the BFF [which spends approximately Tk 30 crore per year] as the BPL clubs completed their season within Tk one crore each, including payments to foreign players. Apart from their own expenditure, the BFF can also get sponsors for the team and make the nation hopeful about the revival of what was once the country's most popular.

## 'Coronavirus made me psychotic'

AGENCIES

Juventus midfielder Blaise Matuidi has revealed that his coronavirus diagnosis made him 'psychotic'. Matuidi was one of three Juve players to contract the infection. The Frenchman has since made a full recovery, but admitted the condition left him in 'shock, total panic'. "Honestly, it's tough," he told YouTube channel Bros Stories. "When I tested positive, I couldn't even go out shopping. It made me psychotic. "You always try to make sure people aren't too close, you have to be mentally strong. It'll take time, this is a new situation for all of us. "I had no symptoms but, as soon as I heard the news, I was in shock. I was in total panic, I feared for my family and friends. It was difficult for them, but I was able to reassure them. It's not a good time, we really want this to end as soon as possible. I ask myself what will happen to football and everyday life."



The Crown Taverners Cricket Club in Camberley was scheduled to be swarmed from next weekend, when the Hampshire cricket league was scheduled to begin. But with all sport shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic, this scarecrow is as close to a batsman as the pitch can expect to see in the near future.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'Have to fight with a little margin for error'

AGENCIES



BCCI President Sourav Ganguly compared the coronavirus pandemic to a Test match on a dangerous wicket. The former India skipper opened up on life amid lockdown in India due to pandemic while speaking on 100 Hours 100 Stars, an initiative started by Fever Network. "This situation is a Test match on a very dangerous wicket. The ball is seaming and spinning as well - the batsman has very little margin of error," the former India captain said. "So, the batsman has to score runs and keep his wicket safe with this little margin of error, and win this Test match. This is very difficult, but we hope that we will win this match together," he added. Ganguly said that he is enjoying the time he is getting to spend with his family. "It's been a month. I didn't mind it earlier. Earlier, I wouldn't get time at home like this. My lifestyle involved travelling for work everyday. For the past 30-32 days, I have been at home with my family, spending time with my wife, daughter, my mother and my brother. I have got a time like this after long, so I am enjoying," he said. "But I am also really upset seeing the current situation, because so many people are suffering outside. This atmosphere all over the world has really bothered me. We don't know how, when and where it came from - we all were unprepared for this. "People are being affected by this so much. There have been so many deaths. This situation upsets me, and I also feel

sad. People come to my house to deliver groceries, food, so I feel a little scared as well. So it's a mixed feeling. I just want this to end as quickly as possible," he continued.

Speaking about what he is doing at home, Ganguly added: "I have been working from home - BCCI and ICC work and my own work. But my own work is a little less right now."



## Serie A stars to resume training

AFP, Milan

Players from several Italian football clubs were on course to resume individual training as the country prepared to gradually roll back its lockdown. The Italian government has been feuding for weeks with regions about which activities will be allowed when the nation begins to emerge the lockdown on Monday. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte is lifting 'stay-at-home' orders but has delayed announcing a restart to the Serie A season. Several regions that have avoided the worst of the outbreak say they will use a loophole to individual players to start training on Monday. The voluntary sessions will affect teams such as Napoli in the south and the central Emilia-Romagna region's Bologna. Serie A clubs unanimously voted on Friday to finish the 2019-20 season -- suspended since March 9 with Juventus leading Lazio by a point. But Sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora noted this week the chances of a restart were "increasingly narrow".

## 'Stir-crazy' Roy desperate for cricket

REUTERS, London



England's Jason Roy is ready to play in empty stadiums if the post-coronavirus situation demands, so said the opener who got a taste of it in his last outing. Roy played a Pakistan Super League match on May 7 which took place behind closed doors in Lahore just before the pandemic halted sport across the globe. "There was no atmosphere, simple as that," the Durban-born batsman, a key figure in England's World Cup winning squad last year, told British media. "It was very strange. As a batsman when the bowler's running in you learn to block out the crowd, but as soon as the ball is done you can hear them going absolutely berserk. "[In Lahore] there was just dead silence. You could hear your mate calling ones and twos, so you don't just have to work off each other's body language. It was hard to get up for it. But it was something we knew we had to deal with." Playing without fans has been suggested as one possible way to resume cricket as soon as the pandemic subsides and Roy was ready to adjust. "I'm more than happy to play behind closed doors. It would just be nice to get out there. I feel like a kid again," he said, adding he was "going a bit stir crazy" in the shutdown. The global health crisis and the restrictions it has forced have clouded the outlook for this year's Twenty20 World Cup scheduled in Australia.

"If players aren't able to prepare in the right way and are unable to get over to Australia, then it makes sense to postpone it," Roy said of the tournament scheduled in October-November. "But if it goes ahead and we're told we have three weeks to prepare all the boys will be putting in the hard yards to make sure we're ready." He also said he had not given up on Test cricket although he averaged only 18.70 in five Tests last summer before being dropped for the final Ashes Test. "I worked very hard to crack the nut in



Test cricket and for it to get taken away that quickly was really heartbreaking," he said. "I'm going to be trying my hardest to get back into the side." "Scoring the weight of runs in white-ball cricket and then not being able to do that in Test cricket was upsetting for me, because I really felt like I could. I still feel like I can, but I need to fight for my position again, get back in there and prove to myself that I can actually do it."

## Minister backs resumption of Bundesliga

AFP, Berlin

Germany's minister for the interior and sport said Sunday he supports a resumption of the country's football season this month. "I find the schedule proposed by the German league plausible and I support the restart in May," Horst Seehofer told Bild, three days before a meeting of German authorities to discuss the issue. The German Football League (DFL) backs a resumption of matches without spectators around mid-May, which would make it the first major European championship to make such a move. Seehofer, who plays a key government role on the issue, has emphasised that the teams and players must respect several conditions. "There will continue therefore to be risks for the schedule of matches and for the classification," if there is any contamination. But he said clubs would not have any special testing privileges denied to the rest of the population. Some sides had suggested carrying out frequent tests of their players as a preventative measure against the virus.





# Primary dropouts can increase

No stipend for 6 months, no school feeding for over a month

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Risk of poor students dropping out from primary schools is growing as the government stipend distribution remains halted for six months and school feeding programme withheld for over a month.

About 1.37 crore students of government primary schools across the country haven't received the help since October, while over 30 lakh vulnerable children of poor families are out of the school feeding programme from March 17 when all educational institutions were closed to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP) officials argue that the project extension work remains stopped due to the ongoing government holidays announced to fight the Covid-19 outbreak. They also said a proposal on extending the project has been awaiting Ecneq nod since December, when the third phase of the project ended.

Officials involved in the school feeding programme said they were planning to reach 50 packets of fortified biscuits to each beneficiary in one go, to save them from malnourishment.

Manzoor Ahmed, senior adviser at Brac University Institute of Educational Development and also the university's professor emeritus, said chance was there that the dropout rate might go up if vital benefits like stipend and feeding programmes remained unavailable.

Directorate of Primary Education Director General Md

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Ignoring the government's directives on social distancing, a few hundred garment workers leaving their Ashulia factory in flocks. The reality here appears to be contradicting the factory owners' promises of strictly maintaining health rules. The photo was taken around 3:30pm yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Hundreds of RMG workers stage sit in for arrears

STAR REPORT

Hundreds of workers of a garment factory yesterday staged a sit-in inside the factory in Gazipur's Sreepur, demanding their arrears.

Workers of MHC Apparels Ltd at Bhangnathi said 1,900 out of 3,000 workers entered the factory in the morning but did not work.

The factory authorities did not pay their dues for the last three months, the workers said, claiming that they had not been getting their overtime bills since last August.

Although the authorities assured them of paying their arrears several times, they were yet to get their dues, they said.

They also alleged that the authorities had threats issued to them by local musclemen.

But the authorities denied the allegation.

SR Azad, assistant general manager (admin) of MHC Apparels Ltd, however, said Tk 4,000 was sent to each worker through mobile financial service accounts as part of March salary.

The remaining dues will be paid on May 13, he told The Daily Star by phone.

Regarding the arrears for the month of February, Azad said some eight to

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## Govt suspends all hajj activities

Cites poor response from people wishing pilgrimage; advice of KSA

RASHIDUL HASAN

The government has suspended all hajj activities following lukewarm response from intended hajis and advice from Saudi Arabia amid the coronavirus outbreak.

So far, only 66,000 intended hajis have got registered against a quota of 137,198 Bangladeshis to be allowed by Saudi Arabia to perform this year's hajj, according to the religious affairs ministry.

"Upon the expiry of the fourth deadline for hajj registration on April 30, we found that only 66,000 intended hajis completed their registration for performing hajj. That's why we have decided not to extend the deadline further... All hajj activities have been suspended," Nurul Islam, secretary at the ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Last month, the Saudi government advised us not to proceed further with this year's hajj plan," said the secretary.

"There is uncertainty over this year's hajj due to the coronavirus pandemic. We are now waiting for Saudi government's message to decide on our next course of action," added Nurul.

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

### 'Work as a servant of the people'



A delegation of Indian National Congress calls on Bangabandhu at his official residence and hands over some books on May 4, 1972.

May 4, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

#### BE AWARE OF THE CONSPIRATORS

Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declares today that the machinations of the foreign agents would not be able to undo the hard-earned freedom of Bangladesh. Speaking at a meeting organised by secretariat employees, the prime minister tells them to be aware of these conspirators and prevent these elements from tarnishing the image of the country.

Bangabandhu urges government employees to devote themselves to the reconstruction of the country. He reminds them that they are not masters but servants of the people. Old bureaucratic, time-consuming methods will not just do anymore, he adds. He declares

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## Be ready to live with coronavirus

Says Delhi CM, announces relaxations of lockdown

NDTV ONLINE

Delhi is "ready to lift the lockdown" Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said yesterday, announcing a list of services and industries which have been given restricted relief as the nationwide lockdown is set to enter its third phase.

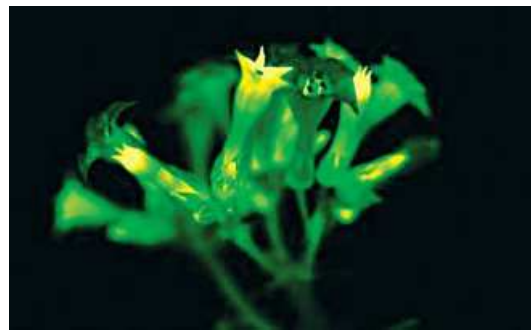
"The time has come to re-open Delhi. We will have to be ready to live with coronavirus," declared the chief minister at a press conference yesterday evening.

Delhi has so far seen 4,122 cases of coronavirus, of whom 1256 patients have recovered, 64 have died.

Indicating a phased removal of the lockdown, the chief minister said Delhi is prepared to ease restrictions "in places other than containment zones".

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## Scientists create glowing flowers



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have created glowing flowers after editing the DNA of a plant.

The researchers spliced DNA from a glowing mushroom into a tobacco plant and found that it was possible to make them glow with a "pleasant green aura that emanates from their living energy".

The researchers say that the discovery could be used to create glowing flowers or other ornamental plants, and change the make-up of the plants that surround us.

It can also be used by scientists to learn more about the plants they study, watching the glow to see their inner workings.

The new research is published in Nature Biotechnology, and was conducted by scientists from Russia, the UK and Austria.

The new plants can produce more than a billion

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## 'Drug dealer' killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A suspected drug peddler was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Chatkhil upazila of Noakhali early yesterday.

The dead Sayem Feroz, 41, was accused in 12 cases related to drugs, arms and robbery, said Alamgir Hossain, superintendent of Noakhali police.

Anwarul Islam, officer-in-charge of Chatkhil Station, claimed a police team conducted a drive in Khilpara area around 2:00am on information that some men were smuggling a consignment of drugs there.

Sensing police presence, the gang of drug peddlers, including Sayem, opened fire, prompting the law enforcers to retaliate in "self-defence", the police official added.

At one stage, Sayem suffered bullet injuries while his cohorts managed to flee.

He was rushed to Chatkhil Upazila Health Complex where doctors

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Wearing personal protection equipment (PPE), staffers at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital receiving coronavirus patients. The establishment has recently been turned into an isolation unit.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## COVID-19 VACCINE, TREATMENTS

# Europe pledges to raise money

Prepares for more lockdown easing

AGENCIES

The European Union will set up an international medical programme to lead the global response to fighting coronavirus with an initial pledge of raising \$8bn (£6.3bn) to find a vaccine and treatment for the pandemic.

The virtual pledging conference, due to take place today, was organised following Donald Trump's suspension of US contributions to the World Health Organization (WHO) after accusing the organization of colluding with the Chinese government in hiding the initial outbreak of the disease.

Heads of states and senior officials of the European Union, writing in The Independent, have declared their support for the WHO while unveiling the plan to work with scientists and international welfare organisations, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust, to counter the contagion.

The EU states will be joined by Norway in filling the immediate global funding shortfall estimated by the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB). Vaccines and treatments, say the leaders, will be made available throughout the world to developing nations with an emphasis on states in Africa.

The urgent need for international unity in the crisis, and the warning that no country can go it alone, is stressed in an article in The Independent signed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel; French President Emmanuel Macron; Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte; Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg; European Council President Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission.

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