

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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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“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

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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

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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.