



# The Daily Star



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## Eskayef first in the country to produce remdesivir

The leading pharmaceutical company successfully produces the drug to treat coronavirus

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Leading pharmaceuticals company Eskayef has successfully produced remdesivir, the drug used for treating Covid-19 patients, and preparations began yesterday morning for distributing the drug.

Simeen Hossain, managing director and chief executive officer of Eskayef Pharmaceuticals Ltd, said that at this crucial time the company is happy to give the people the good news that it has successfully completed all the steps in the manufacturing of remdesivir, globally recognised as the only effective drug for treating Covid-19 patients.

Eskayef is the first drug manufacturing company in the world to successfully manufacture generic remdesivir. The brand name for remdesivir, manufactured by Eskayef, is Remivir.

Its sample will be submitted to the National Control Laboratory of drug administration for approval as per the rule,



Eskayef said.

The company will start distributing it a few days after getting the approval for marketing.

This drug, manufactured by US company Gilead Sciences Inc, has created a sensation all over the world. Last week, the US Food and Drug Administration

(FDA) approved remdesivir for treating Covid-19 patients. The drug administration in Japan gave its permission on Thursday. However, a Japanese health official informed Reuters that it has not been determined as yet when Japan will begin the manufacture of this drug.

It has been learnt that Gilead Sciences is negotiating with large companies in India and Pakistan regarding the manufacture of remdesivir.

Simeen Hossain told The Daily Star that the drug administration gave its approval in March to use this drug.

"Immediately after that, our



Wearing masks and maintaining social distancing, devotees offer Juma prayers at Jamiatul Falah Jame Masjid in Chattogram city yesterday, a day after the government withdrew a month-long partial restriction on offering prayers at mosques. The ban was imposed to slow the spread of coronavirus.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**709** New cases in 24hrs



**13,134** Total cases



**206** Deaths



**2,101** Recoveries

**GLOBAL UPDATE**



**266,995** Deaths

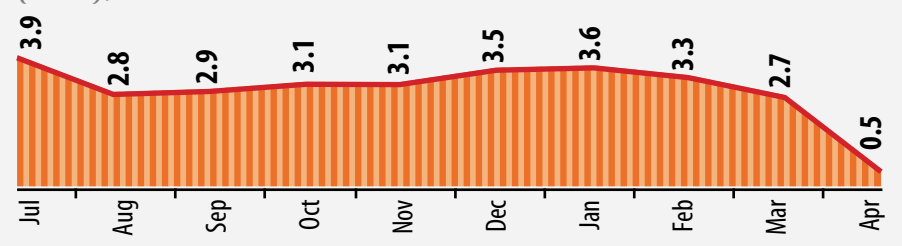


**3,859,483** Total cases

## Exports crash to a 40-year-low

EXPORT RECEIPTS SO FAR THIS FISCAL YEAR

(in \$b); SOURCE: EPB



REFAJET ULLAH MIRDHA

Incredible, is what one would sigh when chancing upon April's export receipts, which hit rock-bottom at \$520.01 million.

The earnings nosedived five times from the previous month and 82.9 percent from a year earlier, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau -- in what is the clearest harbinger of Bangladesh's export prospects in the near future as the rogue virus continues to ram the global economy towards its worst recession since the Great Depression.

Garment, which brings home as much as 84 percent of the export earnings, fetched just \$378.40 million, down from \$2.26

billion in March.

As the dust settles, April's export performance might not seem so shocking seeing that the country has been on a general shutdown since March 26, with factories shut and port activities pared down to the bare minimum.

And most importantly, the countries where the shipments are headed mostly -- the US and the EU -- have been on lockdown since February to flatten the curve on coronavirus, which has so far infected upwards of 3.9 million people around the globe and claimed more than 271,000 lives.

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## Infections see sharp rise in second month

98pc of 13,134 Covid-19 cases recorded in last 30 days; death toll crosses 200-mark

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh recorded over 100 deaths from Covid-19 in the last 18 days of the second month since the detection of the first positive cases in the country.

It was this second month when the country reported the highest number of infections, around 98 percent, a picture quite similar to that of countries hit hard by the lethal virus.

On March 7, the health authorities registered the first cases of infection, and the first fatality was reported on March 18. It took a little over a month, on April 20, when the fatalities crossed the 100 mark.

But in the last month, the number of deaths and infections kept surging. In the past 18 days, the country reported 100 more deaths from coronavirus infection, passing the 200 mark.

Yesterday too, the health authorities confirmed seven more deaths and 709 new cases of infection after testing 5,941 samples at 35 labs. With this, the death toll from the deadly virus rose to 206, and the number of infected people stood at 13,134.

According to the World Health Organisation, the

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ONLINE CLASSES AMID SHUTDOWN

## A distant reality, still for many

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

One and a half months into the closure of in-person classes due to the coronavirus outbreak, the majority of schools, colleges and universities across the country have yet to introduce online education.

Some schools and colleges in the capital and other big cities have started to take online classes to minimise the academic loss due to the shutdown.

But the majority of schools located outside these cities are yet to have initiated virtual learning, according to officials of Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE).

The University Grants Commission (UGC) officials say 63 out of 151 public and private universities have been taking online classes.

A lack of infrastructure and uneven access to internet and devices such as a desktop computer, laptop, or smartphone for the students are the vital obstacles to introducing virtual learning.

"Online education could be a good alternative to in-person classes during a crisis," Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said.

"The corona crisis exposed the fact that nobody has taken education seriously. The majority of schools, colleges and universities are not equipped to take online classes. Most students do not have the devices and internet access," he added.

Professor M Kaykobad of computer science and engineering department at Buet said there are some challenges but still it is possible to introduce online classes, especially when many use smartphones nowadays.

Mahbub Hossain, secondary and higher education secretary, said infrastructures and financial condition of educational institutions and students' access to device and internet are some major issues for online education.

"Some educational institutions have come forward to introduce online learning. We are also looking for options besides providing education through television to keep students engaged."

He added, "We cannot solve the problem overnight."

Some four crore students are now out of in-person classes as all the educational institutions have been closed since March 17.

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HEALTH SAFETY

## DGHS gives guidelines on reopening

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has recently issued a set of guidelines on health safety measures that have to be strictly followed after the reopening of industries, businesses, educational institutions and services amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) prepared the guidelines on May 2 for the institutions, establishments and various professionals to prevent further spread of the deadly virus that has claimed more than 200 lives in Bangladesh.

Signed by DGHS Director General Abul Kalam Azad, the guidelines have identified 43 types of establishments and arranged them in different categories.

The guidelines asked the government, non-government organisations and individuals to cooperate until the pandemic ends.

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BIWTC steamers sit idle in the Buriganga at Shoari Ghat terminal in the capital yesterday as operation of passenger vessels remain suspended for an indefinite period since March 24 due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

CASE AGAINST 11 UNDER DSA

## Charges appear to be puzzling

ZYMA ISLAM and MUNTAKIM SAAD

The charges under Digital Security Act brought against 11 people, including two journalists, on May 6 are broadly described as "knowingly posting rumours against the Father of the Nation, the Liberation War and the coronavirus pandemic to negatively affect the nation's image and to create confusion among the public through social media and to cause the law and order situation to deteriorate."

But what does this even mean? They were charged under four sections of the law -- Section 21, Section 25(1) (b), Section 31 and Section 35.

Section 21 of the law prosecutes anyone who runs propaganda or campaign, "against the Liberation War of Bangladesh, the cognition of the Liberation War, Father of the Nation, National Anthem or National Flag".

The offence described in Section 25(1) (b) is "tampering the image of the nation or spread confusions" while Section 31 refers to contents that "create hostility, hatred or adversity among people or destroy any communal harmony or create unrest or disorder or deteriorates or threatens to deteriorate law and order."

Finally, Section 35 prosecutes anyone "aiding" in the above-mentioned offences.

An analysis of the social media links included as evidence by Rab in the First Information Report (FIR) may leave one puzzled as to the vague nature of the charges.

Six of the accused -- Ahmed Kishore, Mushtaq Ahmed, Saer Zulkarnain, Ashik Imran, Shapan Wahed and Philip Schuhmacher -- were named in the FIR for being the administrators of a Facebook page called "I am Bangladeshi".

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## ADRIFT IN THE BAY

## 280 Rohingyas rescued, taken to Bhashan Char

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

About 280 Rohingyas, who had been adrift in the Bay of Bengal for weeks, were rescued by Bangladesh Navy on Thursday and taken to Bhashan Char -- an island in Noakhali -- yesterday.

Mahbul Alam Talukder, Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner of Bangladesh, confirmed it to The Daily Star yesterday.

Earlier, several international organisations, including the UN and EU, and rights bodies pointed out that two boats carrying about 500 Rohingyas were refused by Malaysia and Thailand in mid-April and had been floating in the sea since then.

The organisations called on Bangladesh and other countries in the region to shelter the stranded Rohingyas.

Bangladesh, in response, said she couldn't accommodate any more Rohingyas as she was already facing huge pressures to manage the 1.1 million Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh, which have sheltered some 750,000 Rohingyas since Myanmar began a military crackdown on them in August 2017, has finally rescued a portion of the stranded Rohingyas.

The rest are believed to have been still floating adrift.

"It is a very tiny boat compared to its 280 passengers. They are starving. The navy has given them food, water and first aid," a Bangladesh Navy official told AFP after the rescue.

The boat was found around 40km south of the Saint Martin's Island, he said.

Authorities say they are likely to have come from Myanmar's Rakhine state rather than camps in southeastern Bangladesh, as they did not have identity cards issued by the UN refugee agency UNHCR, AFP reports.

On May 3, Bangladesh Navy sheltered at least 29 Rohingyas in Bhashan Char.

These Rohingyas swam to the shore in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf and were handed over to Bangladesh Navy by the locals.

Earlier on April 16, some 400 Rohingyas were rescued by Bangladesh authorities. They were, however, quarantined in the Rohingya camp healthcare facilities.

On May 4, Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said no more Rohingya would be sheltered in Cox's Bazar camps as they don't want to "pollute" the camps, for there are risks of Coronavirus infection.

"If any new Rohingya is to be sheltered, we will take them to Bhashan Char," he told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh Navy has built a housing facility of 120 cluster villages on the 40sqkm island in Bhashan Char under a Tk 2,312 crore project for accommodating one lakh of the nearly 1 million Rohingyas living in the cramped camps in Cox's Bazar.

However, the authorities had been 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.



Workers unloading packed clothes from a rickshaw van in the capital's Banga Bazar yesterday. Traders at the popular clothing market have started stocking products as they prepare to open their shops tomorrow, about one and a half months after those were shut to slow the spread of Covid-19. The government recently decided to allow the traders to operate their business on a limited scale ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Charges appear to be puzzling

FROM PAGE 1

The FIR provides the links of 10 social media posts in total, as evidence.

It mentioned a post from the Facebook page stating that it was spreading rumours. The post, uploaded on April 27, read: "So, when and where will the Ifar Mahfil of Mujib Borsho be held?"

This correspondent asked an administrator of the page what the post meant. "It is just mocking the fact that they can't organise iftar parties due to the coronavirus and that it must be painful for some of the party activists," said the admin, requesting anonymity for fear of reprisal.

The post drew 50 laugh reacts from its audience and two comments, both of which made it look like a joke as it was intended to be. The post was not shared by any social media user.

The FIR mentioned three posts uploaded from Kishore's Facebook profile "Ami Kishore", as evidence of "drawing anti-government cartoons of different ruling party leaders to spread rumours and create confusion".

The first post contains two cartoons drawn by Ahmed Kishore. The cartoons are from a series "Life in the time of Corona", where Kishore satirised the government's tackling of the coronavirus situation.

The first cartoon is about the coronavirus testing kit developed by Gonoshasthya Kendra. It shows the organisation's founder Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury as a freedom fighter and parliamentarian Salman F Rahman riding a coronavirus-shaped satellite. The caption reads, "Gono-Zafar, we have already overcome even the coronavirus of the sky, and you are still sitting around with the one on the ground."

The second photo shows writer Zafar Iqbal attempting to remember who missing photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol is. The cartoon appears to be a satirical comment on the media and society's short-term focus on specific issues of human rights violations.

Kajol would be found later, only to be sent to jail.

The post got 527 "reactions", 26 comments and was shared 457 times, at the time this report was filed. Most of this interaction, however, happened after Kishore was arrested, when his cartoons went viral on social media.

The third link included in the FIR shows Kishore shared a post of another person, claiming that VIPs were getting a separate Covid-19 hospital, but Kishore did not add any comment himself. The post received a paltry 21 "reactions".

This information had already been published by many reputed news organisations, following which the government addressed the public and said this was not true. However, to date, none of the publications carrying the report was charged under the DSA, but Kishore, who shared the news, was.

The fourth link included in the FIR

as evidence was not even from this profile. It was posted by a blogger who was not named in the case and Kishore seemingly had no interaction with him.

The evidence presented against writer Mushtaq Ahmed also includes links of two posts. In the first post, he shared a news article uploaded by a prominent Bangla daily on an interview of the health minister where he said that if a garment worker got affected by coronavirus, the factory would be kept closed for a few days.

Mushtaq shared it with a comment saying "only saints would not feel angry reading such a news report."

The second link shows he uploaded a post saying coronavirus is not a venereal disease and therefore should not cause any deterioration in social respect. He said a lawmaker has been tested positive, but since the name is not being disclosed, how will general public have the courage to speak up if they get affected? He also added a news link from a newspaper as reference.

In addition to the links provided in the FIR, it also generically stated that Mushtaq Ahmed posted "anti-government" posts from his Facebook profile.

But most of what he posted from his profile was re-shares of different news links and posts of others, as it appeared from a preliminary glance at the profile.

The administrator of the "I am Bangladeshi" page defended their peers saying, "We grew up believing our great leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was always vocal against oppression. We exercised the same. We stand for what is right and deny all wrongdoings. We expressed our concern through cartoons and added some humour to some of our posts. But it seems this has become hard for the regime to accept."

Three posts by Swedish-Bangladeshi journalist Tasneem Khalil are mentioned in the FIR as "spreading rumours and falsehoods about law enforcement agencies" in addition to the charges mentioned above. The Rab found he communicated with the others through WhatsApp and Messenger applications.

The first post, posted on the historic Mujibnagar Day on April 17, points out the executive roles of Tajuddin Ahmed and Syed Nazrul Islam in the Liberation War, and that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was forced to give leadership from inside a prison, having been deprived of being on the ground. It got a thousand likes, and three comments and was shared 18 times.

In the second post, he too shared a news link carrying the news that VIPs would get special coronavirus hospitals if infected. The link was shared with a caption stating "Will your parents get space in these hospitals? I know mine won't. And yet you are responsible for this ugly system." He did not specify who he was addressing to. The caption also included a profanity

targeting the unspecified "You". The post received around 366 "reactions", three comments, and the news link was re-shared 42 times.

The third link included in the FIR shows he shared without any comment a link of a news item on leaked UN papers claiming many Bangladeshis may die contracting coronavirus.

Neither of the organisations was prosecuted but Khalil was for sharing the links on Facebook.

Speaking on the issue, Supreme Court lawyer Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua said, "Criticism of government is not sedition. A citizen has every right to say or write anything critical about the government and it's logical too. But in our country, we have messed up between the government and the state."

"When a government is formed with the mandate of the people, citizens have the right to criticise and make the government accountable," Jyotirmoy said.

He also said the Digital Security Act is itself draconian as it contradicts with people's fundamental right to freedom of expression.

While blogger Asif Mohiuddin, journalist Shahed Alam, activist of civic political organisation Rashtrochinta Didarul Bhuiyan and Dhaka Stock Exchange Director Minhaj Mannan Emon were also charged for "anti-government" communication with the ones mentioned above, the FIR does not specify the content of the communication.

"It is a legal error to put all the accused in the same case. If there is any specific allegation against someone, the case should be filed separately. Now for one, other 10 may suffer," said Jyotirmoy.

"They live in different places, different countries, have different opinions and Facebook posts. In terms of common intention, it is not like that they all came up with the same post on the same topic," he added.

Talking to The Daily Star from Germany, Asif Mohiuddin, said, "Democracy has no meaning without freedom of speech. The future generations of this country will have to suffer the consequences of this."

He demanded that those arrested for expressing their thoughts be released.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch decried the case in a statement released yesterday.

"It is vital for the Bangladesh government to recognise that freedom of speech is key in the battle against Covid-19. The government should stop harassing journalists, activists, doctors, and nurses for voicing concern and instead address the urgent need for aid, transparency, and resources that have them raising the alarm in the first place," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

The case was filed by Rab-3 with Ramna Police Station on May 6. Four of the accused -- Kishore, Mushtaq, Minhaj and Didar -- are in jail.

## Infections

FROM PAGE 1

number of Covid-19 positive cases in the first two months in the US, the worst hit country, was 15,219 with about 99.9 percent people being infected in the second month.

In Italy, the number of infected people was 92,472 in the first two months and 98.78 percent cases were recorded in the second month.

The cases in Spain and the UK were similar. Of the total infected in the first two months in Spain, about 99.95 percent Covid-19 positive cases were recorded in the second month.

In the UK, the number of people infected with novel coronavirus in the first two months was 25,154. Over 99 percent of them were infected in the second month.

However, the situation in the US and the UK deteriorated in the third month.

During an online press briefing on the country's Covid-19 situation, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the Directorate General of Health Services, said 191 patients recovered across the country in the last 24 hours.

Now, the recovery number stands at 2,101, she said.

Among the seven deceased, five were male and two female. They were aged between 51 and 90, she said.

Despite the rising number of infections and deaths, the government earlier this month declared reopening of the economy, including opening of shopping malls and stores across the country, tomorrow, with the condition of maintaining safety guidelines.

Local stores continue to open, including tea stalls, since the day the directive was issued on May 4.

A number of people flocked to mosques yesterday to offer their Juma prayers after four weeks as restrictions on going to mosques were lifted with some conditions.

Talking to this correspondent, Shahabuddin Ahmed, an official of a non-banking financial institution, said, "We don't know when the [coronavirus] spread will stop? But one thing is clear, it's not going to be over soon."

## Eskayef

FROM PAGE 1

formulation scientists started working on the development of remdesivir from mid-March. As this is an injection to be administered intravenously, the production process is extremely sensitive. The tireless and relentless efforts of the Eskayef personnel over the past two months have made it possible to produce the drug within such a short time span. From Eskayef we are fully committed to make sure that our remdesivir is available for the patients in Bangladesh first. We are ensuring availability of sufficient raw materials by having agreement with API supplier," she said.

Remdesivir so far has been proven to be the most effective in the treatment of Covid-19. Experiments carried out by Gilead have indicated improvement in the conditions of the patients who have been treated with this drug.

The dosage depends on the condition of the patient. Severely affected patients may need to be treated with the drug for five to 10 days.

Gilead has the patent for the drug but in accordance to international trade laws, countries like Bangladesh, recognised by the UN as lesser developed countries, are not restricted by the patent. As a result, these countries can produce the drug at a reasonable cost. The drug, however, will not be released in the open market for the time being. It will be provided to government-approved hospitals.

In a discussion at the White House, Anthony Fauci, the top US immunologist and director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAD), said that it was evident that remdesivir had a positive influence on the speedy recovery from coronavirus. He said as there was clear evidence that this drug was effective, there was a moral obligation to inform the public about this.

Eskayef Pharmaceuticals Ltd, a part of Transcom Ltd headed by Bangladesh's renowned businessman Latifur Rahman, has been manufacturing quality drugs for the past 30 years. Eskayef exports its medicines to 30 countries in four continents -- Europe, Australia, Asia and Africa.

## Floods kill 65 in Rwanda as heavy rains pound E Africa

AFP, Kigali

Floods have left 65 dead in Rwanda and heavy rains swept away scores of houses, several bridges and farms, the government said Thursday, as similar scenes played out across East Africa.

In Kenya, floods and landslides have killed nearly 200 people in the past month, while Uganda's Lake Victoria has overflowed, submerging houses, a hospital and bridges and displacing thousands.

"Heavy rains that poured Wednesday night caused a number of disasters," Rwanda's ministry of emergency management said in a statement on Thursday.

## Exports crash

FROM PAGE 1

Much of the Western world is still grappling with the lethal pathogen three months on and debating when to bring their economies out of the induced coma.

In the meantime, millions are losing jobs. For instance, US unemployment hit a post-war high of 14.7 percent in April as 20.5 million lost jobs during the course of the month.

And in the EU, where the unemployment rate is not so bad, its economies are heading towards their worst recession ever.

Europe's economy will shrink 7.4 percent this year, according to the European Commission's projections. To put this figure in perspective, the 27-nation bloc's economy had been predicted to grow 1.2 percent this year. In 2009, at the back of the global financial crisis, it shrank 4.5 percent.

In its latest outlook for the world economy, the International Monetary Fund said it expects global GDP will contract 3 percent in 2020, a far worse recession than the one that followed the global financial crisis of 2008, and there is a chance of the recession extending into 2021.

It's a grim outlook, which means Bangladesh's export prospects in the near future could not be bleaker.

April's export data reveals only a part of the picture. Rubana Huq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), told The Daily Star.

"The magnitude of the devastation is way higher. The situation is horrific."

At the time of filing this report, about 1,150 export-oriented garment factories lost orders worth about \$3.18 billion, she said.

One such company that has been hit with a flurry of cancellations or request for delayed shipment is Ha-Meem Group, which counts JC Penney, Gap, Kohl's, PVH, Kontoor, Next, Abercrombie & Fitch, Garage and American Eagle as its buyers.

And almost all of them cancelled orders or asked for the existing

orders to be shipped in November or December, said AK Azad, managing director of Ha-Meem Group.

More than 10 percent confirmed work orders and more than 50 percent upcoming work orders have been scrapped entirely, he said.

What's worse is some buyers are seeking unreasonable amounts of discounts. "They are offering us very low prices," Azad added.

One buyer of Dosh Garments, often considered to be the architect of Bangladesh's export-oriented garment industry, asked for a 47 percent discount.

"This is impossible for any supplier," said Vidiya Amrit Khan, deputy managing director of Dosh Garments, which saw order cancellations from accessible luxury brands like Kenneth Cole, Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein and high-street brands like Nautica.

A good quantity of work orders was cancelled mainly by the American buyers, although the European buyers have reconfirmed their orders, she added.

"Now, the buyers are trying to work out their future business situation and giving us the assurance that they will reinstate the held and cancelled orders once they can reopen their stores," said Bakhtiar U Ahmed, chief operation officer of Fakir Apparels.

The company saw order cancellations from household high-street names like C&A, Esprit, Primark, Hummel, Marc o'Pololo and s.Oliver.

In terms of value, more than \$25 million orders have been cancelled or held by buyers, Ahmed said.

Zaber and Zubair Fabrics, one of the largest garment exporters, did not see any cancellations of ongoing work orders, but a lot of upcoming work orders have been forfeited, said Anol Rayhan, its brand manager.

The cancellations are from brands such as from Zara Home, Ikea and Williams-Sonoma.

"We are worried about our upcoming orders," he added.

## DGHS gives

FROM PAGE 1

There are some common directives for all the stakeholders, including setting up of thermal scanners to check the temperature and keeping disinfectants at the entrances of every establishment.

Wearing a mask is compulsory for everyone working in a factory, the guidelines suggest, adding that objects that are frequently touched and placed that are frequently visited should be disinfected multiple times a day.

Every establishment must have separate waste disposal areas and they must monitor the employees' health regularly.

For restaurants, thermal scanners should be installed at the entrances and record of employees' health status should be maintained.

Dining tables should be disinfected every time after use.

For saloons, aprons, scissors and other equipment should be disinfected after serving each customer. Chairs at salons will have to be set up 1.5 meters apart.

Rail stations must have disinfectants and proper waste disposal systems.

Passenger with a higher-than-normal body temperature would be placed at the isolation centres set up in stations, each train will have a separate carriage so that passengers with novel coronavirus symptoms can temporarily be placed there.

Buses will have to be disinfected after each trip. Buses will keep some empty seats during the trips. Launches will also have similar arrangements.

Aeroplanes will have mini-quarantine facilities onboard. Planes will keep some seats empty too like buses.

The terminal building will have a quarantine facility. Each passenger will have to go through a temperature checkup before flying, and upon landing.

Workers with flu, fever, sore throat, cough or runny nose symptoms will not be allowed into factories. They will be sent back to home, with medicine, and remain under observation for at least three days, the guidelines said.

For government offices, office hour should be reduced and work from home should be encouraged.

## DEADLY GAS LEAK

## Indian police file complaint against LG Chem

REUTERS, Chennai

Indian police have filed a complaint against an LG Chem subsidiary over a toxic gas leak at its chemical plant in the south of the country that killed 11 people and sickened almost a thousand more.

Authorities doubled the evacuation area around the factory in Andhra Pradesh to a 5 kilometre (3 mile) radius yesterday, a day after the gas first began leaking. Around 800 people were hospitalised.

A copy of the police complaint filed against the management of LG Chem's subsidiary LG Polymers, viewed by Reuters, cited several counts of negligence and culpable homicide.

The report, which precedes a full

police investigation and potential charges, refers to negligent handling of poisonous substances and causing hurt and endangering public life due to negligence. Culpable homicide is classified as not amounting to murder.

An LG Chem spokesman in Seoul declined to comment on the police report.

There was confusion about whether yesterday's expanded evacuation orders were sparked by a renewed leak, as reported by at least one local fire official, or by the fear that rising temperatures at the plant could lead to another leak.

LG Chem said yesterday there was no second leak at the plant, which makes polystyrene products used in manufacturing electric fan blades, cups

and cutlery and containers for cosmetic products.

"LG Chem has asked the police to evacuate residents as a precautionary measure as there are concerns that tank temperatures would rise," South Korea's biggest petrochemical maker said in a statement. "We are taking necessary measures, including putting water into the tank."

N. Surendra Anand, a fire officer in Visakhapatnam district, had earlier told Reuters that more people were being evacuated because of renewed emissions from the plant: "the situation is tense." Residents said police began moving them out of their homes and into waiting buses from around midnight.



## TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Green-billed Malkoha at Satchori National Park.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

## Green-billed Malkoha

In 2016, while working on a book of photographs of birds of Bangladesh, I visited Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary several times looking for birds that I had not found elsewhere. It was during one of these trips that I saw my first Green-billed Malkoha. Trying to photograph it was a frustrating experience. It was often hidden behind branches with only parts of its body showing as it moved from branch to branch. Eventually it moved to a tree which had shed its leaves and I caught it whole on camera, including its long, dark-grey tail with large white spots in it.

Its name notwithstanding, the polka-dot tail and the bright red patch around its eyes are the striking features of the Green-billed Malkoha. And the bill? It is a weak green, not particularly remarkable. At 20-25 inches long and weighing around four ounces, the bird is larger than a crow. From above, it is dark grey with a greenish sheen, oily green wings and a long tail. Its habitat is primary and secondary forests, cultivated areas, scrub and village groves. It lives on insects it glean from the trees, such as large caterpillars, crickets and grasshoppers. It will also eat small lizards and eggs of other birds. While looking for food, it perches and often contorts its body into awkward directions as it searches behind leaves. It makes its way through the foliage, checking all

possibilities, creeping like a squirrel, before making a hop – or gliding – into the next tree.

Known as *Phaenicophaeus tristis*, the bird belongs to the Cuckoo family. Its range is South and Southeast Asia. There are nine species of Malkoha in the world: all of them are restricted to tropical Asia, and only the green-billed one is seen in Bangladesh. The name "Malkoha" is derived from Sinhala meaning "flower cuckoo."

Since that day in Rema-Kalenga, I have observed Green-billed Malkohas many times. Once I got past the difficulty of photographing them, I found them fun to watch because of their distinctive behaviour. For example, one afternoon in a village grove in Purbachol, I observed one for several minutes. It was crawling along the branches, performing its usual search. At one point it turned upside down, head hidden behind the leaves, its tall tail straight up. It remained in this ridiculous position for a while before it decided to right itself.

But the best view I had was from the tower in Satchori National Park where it flew in and landed on top of a tree crown. It stayed there for a minute or two, surveying the immediate vicinity. Along with others at the tower, I was able to observe it in all its glory before it decided to fly off.

facebook.com/ikabirphotographs or follow ihtishamkabir on Instagram.

## 3 killed in N'ganj septic tank blast

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

A pregnant woman and two children were killed and six others injured in a septic tank explosion in Narayanganj's Bandar upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased are Laboni Aktar (28), and Jisan (12) and Masnun (8), sons of Khorshed Alam, said Abdullah Al Arefin, assistant director of Narayanganj Fire Service and Civil Defence.

The tank, under a five-storey building, exploded around 6am due to a lack of maintenance, the fire service official said.

The two children were sleeping in a room on the ground floor above the septic tank. The room's walls collapsed on the duo following the explosion and they died on the spot, Abdullah added. In the meantime, the tin-shed house next to the building, where Laboni lived, also collapsed and injured her severely.

Laboni was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the doctors declared her dead, said Rafikul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bandar Police Station.

The injured were admitted to the Bandar Upazila Health Complex for treatment, the OC added. Police and fire service officials were conducting further inquiries into the explosion, he said.

## 10,000 kindergarten teachers in Barishal unpaid for months

Educators struggling amid Covid-19 shutdown

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Teachers of kindergarten schools in Barishal have appealed to the government for financial support so that they are able to tackle the hardship they are facing due to Covid-19 pandemic.

In this regard, they submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner on May 3 through email, said Abdus Sobhan Bachchu, secretary general of Barishal Kindergarten Forum. The organisation includes teachers and founders of 350 such pre-schools in the division.

Due to the ongoing countrywide shutdown they had to close their educational institutions, he said, adding that as a result the teachers are struggling to survive.

Although the schools are not registered with the government, those play a significant role in the education sector, Bachchu said.

"Teachers are not getting salaries for around two months while the authorities are struggling to pay rent for school accommodations. The situation will worsen if the shutdown continues till September," he added.

Shelfali Baroi (55), principal and founder of Merryan Child School on the city's Circular Road in College Row area, said, "Amid the coronavirus

outbreak and the subsequent shutdown, guardians are also not able to pay tuition fees, which is the only source of money to run such a school."

"Every month, I have to spend over Tk 2 lakh for rent of a three-storey school building, its utility bills, and salaries of 18 teachers and other staff," she said. "It's not possible for me to bear that without any source of income."

Das Gupta Asis Kumar, adviser of Bangladesh Shikkhak Samity, Barishal unit, urged the government for financial support.

Mosharrif Hossain, principal of Popular Academy in Charfashion area, said even though he wanted to, he cannot pay the teachers.

A teacher, who used to get Tk 5,500 from Nuria Kindergarten in Barishal city's Alekanda, said she is struggling to cope with the situation as her salary is pending.

Around 10,000 teachers are serving more than 1,000 kindergartens in the division where nearly one lakh students are receiving education, said Anwarul Haque, president of Barishal Kindergarten Forum.

Contacted, Barishal Deputy Commissioner SM Ajjar Rahman told The Daily Star on Thursday that he received the memorandum. "We will send it to the ministry concerned soon," he said.

## A hospital on wheels

Mobile health centre serving non-Covid-19 patients in Cox's Bazar

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Ctg

To render medicine to non-Covid-19 patients living in remote areas, Cox's Bazar district administration has initiated a mobile hospital service.

The campaign kicked off on April 26. Under the initiative, a vehicle equipped with medical facilities tours one specific area of the district, serving people from 10am to 1pm, said authorities.

The mobile hospital has brought huge relief for patients without Covid-19 symptoms, as they are finding it harder and harder to access medicare during the pandemic. The programme separates people who are suspected of being Covid-19 and sends them to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital for treatment.

Abdur Rahman, a resident of Kolatoli village of Cox's Bazar told The Daily Star that he had been suffering from abdomen pain but could not consult any physician as most of them are avoiding



A girl getting medicine from a physician at the mobile hospital while others await their turn.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

chambers during the pandemic.

"The mobile hospital has been a blessing for me. After days of agonising pain, I received medicine from the mobile hospital," he said.

Md Kamal Hossen, deputy

commissioner of Cox's Bazar, said, "The mobile hospital has two doctors and a few volunteers. The hospital prescribes people and provides free primary drugs to those who need it. When any

suspected case of Covid-19 appears, they are sent to Sadar hospital for specialised treatment," he added.

He said there is a standby ambulance accompanying the mobile hospital to carry coronavirus-suspected patients to Sadar hospital.

The initiative aims to ensure primary treatment for women, children, and the elderly who are facing problems as coronavirus is taking up most focus from the healthcare sector these days.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) has promised to lend a hand to this initiative.

Dr Mahbubur Rahman, general secretary of BMA, Cox's Bazar district chapter, told The Daily Star, "It is a great initiative for non-Covid-19 patients, who were denied treatment due to the contagious nature of the virus."

"We have promised to support the initiative with human resources. We have asked the district administration for a need assessment," he said.

## NUSRAT JAHAN RAFI MURDER

## Case hearing delayed for coronavirus

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Though a High Court bench was ready to hold hearing on the sensational Feni madrasa student Nusrat Jahan Rafi murder case, it cannot start the proceedings as the court functions are closed due to ongoing coronavirus outbreak.

The HC bench led by Justice Soumendhra Sarker could have begun hearing of the death reference and appeals in the case in last week of March as Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain earlier assigned it for hearing and disposing of the matters, Deputy Attorney General Bashir Ahmed told The Daily Star on Monday.

He said the bench may start the case hearing immediately after it will reopen following the ongoing closure.

"At least, six months' time will be needed for the High Court for

finishing hearing and disposing of the matters after it will start the hearing," DAG Bashir Ahmed said.

The trial court had finished the trial proceedings of the case within a recorded short period of time as the government had given priority and necessary measures including completion of investigation and producing witnesses before the court for quick delivery of justice for the case.

After the case's death reference reached the HC, the chief justice ordered the office concerned to prepare the case's paper book as soon as possible, SC sources said.

After the paper book was prepared in February this year, the chief justice assigned the HC bench led by Justice Soumendhra Sarker for hearing and disposing of the death reference and appeals.

Attorney General Mahbubey

Alam told this correspondent earlier that his office will conduct the case on behalf of the state before the HC bench after it includes the matter in its cause list and fixes a date for hearing.

Nusrat, a 19-year-old madrasa student in Feni, lost her battle for life on April 10 last year, four days after she was set afire.

She was sexually harassed by the then madrasa principal Siraj Ud Doula, on March 27 last year.

Her mother filed a case against Siraj, who was later sacked, arrested and sent to jail.

A Feni court on October 24 last year handed down death sentence to all 16 accused, including Siraj Ud Doula and two expelled local Awami League leaders, over the murder, an incident that shocked the nation.

The accused burnt Nusrat

by pouring kerosene on her in a planned way, and they deserve exemplary and harshest punishment, the trial court said while delivering the judgement in a packed courtroom.

The documents of the murder case reached the HC on October 29 last year, as a death reference to examine the trial court verdict.

If a lower court sentences any person to death in a case, its judgement is examined by the HC through hearing arguments for confirmation of the death sentence.

The case documents and judgement reach as death reference to the HC from the lower court in seven days after the latter delivers the verdict.

Later on, convicts including Siraj Ud Doula filed separate appeals with the HC, seeking acquittal of the charges.

## Struggling to stay afloat

Delay in human resource export, inadequate financial support leave returnee female migrant workers in the lurch

JAMIL MAHMUD

Lipi Akter started processing her migration to Saudi Arabia in early March, expecting financial solvency there will help her raise her children back home.

She had earlier spent two years in the Gulf country as a domestic worker and returned home in August last year.

But her second attempt saw hardly any progress in about two months, thanks to a pause in human resource export over the novel coronavirus outbreak in the country. The delay has put her into further economic hardship, as she already was in debt.

"I did not see this coming," said Lipi (37), a mother of three.

As Bangladesh went on shutdown from March 26 to contain coronavirus infections, many returnee female migrant workers found themselves without income opportunities.

This came as an added challenge to their lives, as many female migrant workers rely on their own income. According to the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, of around 97,430 female workers went abroad last year, 30 percent were either divorced or widows.

Lipi, who hails from Manikganj's Harirampur, said her husband Ismail, an electrician, seldom cared for her and their three children. He married another woman and now lives with the second wife in the capital.

As a result, she has to meet educational expenses of one of her two daughters, alongside meeting daily expenses and house rent.

She said she borrowed about Tk 60,000 from two local NGOs in Harirampur after returning home, in order to support the family.

"I thought I would run the family for a few months and then depart to Saudi Arabia," she added.

Lipi married off her elder daughter in 2017 while she also has a school dropout son aged 14.

Sheikh Rumana, general secretary of Bangladeshhi Oviabashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA), said they are in contact with several returnee female migrant workers in Manikganj, Dhaka, Sylhet and Habiganj districts who are facing hardship.

Rumana said her organisation recently prepared two separate lists comprising about 600 returnee female migrant workers of different districts who are in need of financial support.

Female migrant workers have contributed to the country's economy

through sending remittance. Now, no one is there to look after them, Rumana said.

One such returnee is Dahlia Akhter of Jatrabari. She returned from Saudi Arabia in August, 2019 after allegedly being tortured by her Saudi employer.

Coming back to home, Dahlia was not accepted well by her husband.

She along with five other Saudi returnee females had been running a catering service in Dhaka's Dakkhinkhan area to be self-dependent.

Dahlia said they had to close the catering service on March 23 because the offices and marketplaces where they were supplying food items have shut down after the outbreak.

She said the situation has put her and other women in economic hardship, as they do not have alternative income opportunities.

Many female migrant workers who returned home in the past two to three years had been involved in small scale economic activities, said Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme.

Now, they are facing an economic downturn due to the shutdown, said Shariful.

The Brac official said at least 10,000 female migrant workers have returned home from different countries, mostly from Saudi Arabia, in the past four to five years.

Shariful also said female migrant workers including those returned home recently have contacted them over phone and narrated their sufferings.

"Many of them are running out of money," he added.

According to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, some 5.5 lakh female migrant workers went overseas between 2015 and 2019. Majority of them went to eight Middle East countries including Saudi Arabia.

Shoab Ahmad Khan, director of Wage Earners' Welfare Board, said they usually support female migrant workers when they return home "unexpectedly".

Asked about government steps to bailout female migrant workers amid current economic downturn, he said the welfare board is preparing lists of those migrant workers who have returned home recently.

"You will know if there is any support initiative taken for them," he told this newspaper by phone.

The WEWB official said the expatriates' welfare ministry has allocated about Tk 7.75 crore for Bangladeshis who are facing food crisis aboard.



THE NEW NORMAL? Three women were spotted on a rickshaw in the capital's Rajarbag yesterday, dressed in protective gear from head to toe, literally. As businesses open and public movement restrictions ease, it appears that concern for health safety is set to become a matter of personal choice. Some would choose to continue staying home, while others will go wherever they wish. Perhaps wearing full PPE gowns on a rickshaw ride is a decent middle ground after all!

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Mango harvest begins May 15

Rajshahi DC issues notice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Harvesting of mango is set to begin this year on May 15, through plucking of Gutti varieties of the fruit.

Rajshahi's deputy commissioner Hamidul Haque signed a notice in this regard on Thursday, fixing the dates for harvesting different varieties of mangoes.

Harvest of Gopalbhog mangoes will commence on May 20, while Laxmanbhog, Laukna and Ranipasand varieties will start on May 25.

The sweetest varieties of mango – like Khirsapat and Himsagar – will start coming to markets on May 28, while Langra will begin on June 6.

Harvest of Fazli and Amrapali will start on June 15.

The Ashwina and BARI Mango-4 varieties can be harvested from July 10, according to the notice.



## Troops deployed in Gujarat as coronavirus cases surge

AFP, Ahmedabad

Hundreds of paramilitary forces have been deployed in coronavirus-hotspot Gujarat state as India yesterday faced a surge in the number of deaths and infections from the outbreak.

Official data show the deadly disease is taking a growing toll in the country of 1.3 billion people even as it begins to emerge from the world's largest lockdown.

India had 56,000 cases including 1,886 fatalities as of Friday, official figures showed. But experts fear limited testing and incomplete record keeping are masking the true scale of the health crisis.

The number of deaths has doubled to about 100 a day in the past two weeks, while the rate of infections is doubling about every 10 days, official data show. A week ago it was every 12 days.

But Health Minister Harsh Vardhan told AFP there was no uncontrolled "community transmission".

"India has surprised the world by handling the COVID-19 crisis in a more mature way than some of the most developed countries," Vardhan said.

"Given all the constraints, India has worked with speed, scale, determination and decisiveness."

While the known number of deaths is low compared with the United States and the worst-hit European nations, health specialists say India's pandemic curve may only peak in June or July.

The western state of Gujarat has become one of the most severe hotspots with about 6,500 cases.

## Govt mulls

FROM PAGE 12  
package for vulnerable groups, garment industries, government officials and frontline health workers in the wake of the crisis.

India's capital city imposed a 70 percent tax on retail liquor purchases from Tuesday, to deter large gatherings at the stores after a six-week lockdown.

## 'Drug dealer'

FROM PAGE 12  
Later, Rab personnel found the bullet hit body of Maruf lying on the ground while his associates managed to flee the scene, Rawshan said, adding that Maruf was taken to Avoyagar Upazila Health Complex where on duty doctors declared him dead.

The two Rab personnel who received injuries were taken to Khulna Navy Hospital for treatment, Rawshan added.

Rab also claimed to have recovered a foreign-made handgun and 100 bottles of phensidyl from the spot. A case was underway in this connection.

## 80-year-old

FROM PAGE 12  
samples tested positive for the virus.

Ajimon Bibi and her family members were released as test reports appeared negative twice, Proshanta said, adding that the upazila administration gave them necessary medicines and food for the next 14 days.

The health and family planning officer said although they have recovered from the disease, they would have to stay in a fresh 14-day home quarantine.

According to family sources, Ajimon Bibi and four of her family members returned home from Narayanganj on April 20.



With the Eid-ul-Fitr only about two weeks away, hawkers are making a comeback on the city streets to do a brisk business. In this photo taken in the capital's Gulistan area yesterday, hawkers are seen putting shoes and sandals on sale. However, there was hardly any customer around amid the coronavirus outbreak.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## 'An independent country's police

FROM PAGE 12  
independence, he adds. Bangabandhu further says, "The role you played in the war has changed people's perception about the police. Today, they see you like their brothers. I hope you will live up to that spirit. You are sons of this soil. Serve people with love, magnanimity and idealism. Don't try to be rulers. An independent country's police can never behave like rulers."

**BANGABANDHU'S RAJSHAHI SPEECH**  
On the second day of the four-day tour in North Bengal, Bangabandhu today arrives in Rajshahi. He addresses a mammoth gathering at the Madrassah

Maidan. The prime minister urges people to devote themselves to the reconstruction of the war-torn country. Without sacrifice and hard work the country will not be able to recover from the damages caused by the Pakistan army, he adds.

Reiterating his goal to achieve Shonar Bangla, Bangabandhu says that if people work hard the dream can be realised within three years. There will be no hunger and exploitation in the Shonar Bangla, he declares.

Bangabandhu further says that he will never accept aid from anybody if it is offered with strings

attached. We cannot pass on huge loan burden to our future generations by accepting conditional aid, he adds.

The prime minister says that there is conspiracy afoot, within and outside, against the new-born state of Bangladesh and urges the people to unite against the conspirators and resist them. He adds that the imperialist forces did not want Bangladesh to be independent and, therefore, they have employed local agents to create disturbances in the new-born country and tarnish its image.

SOURCE: May 10, 1972 issue of Dainik Bangla.

## Uphold freedom of expression

FROM PAGE 12  
Cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore, writer Mushtaq Ahmed, Didarul Islam, a member of politico-civic organisation called Rashtrachinta, and Minhaj Mannan Emon, managing director of BLE securities, were sent to jail.

The filing of cases and the arrests came hot on the heels of the imprisonment of photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol and several others arrested under the Digital Security Act since the shutdown began on March 26.

Kajol is facing three cases under the Digital Security Act for sharing a news link on his Facebook page about ruling party lawmaker Saifuzzaman Shikhor's alleged links to an infamous female Jubo League leader.

Placing emphasis on access to reliable information provided by independent journalists, UK High Commissioner Robert Chatterton Dickson said, "Amid the C-19 crisis, it is even more important that freedom of expression is upheld and the media can do its job."

Japanese Ambassador Naoki Ito, Norwegian Ambassador Sidsel Bleken, and Canadian High

Commissioner Benoit Préfontaine also made similar tweets stressing the need of freedom of speech and making sure that voices of journalists are not limited.

Ambassador and Head of EU Delegation to Bangladesh Rensje Teerink said in times of crisis, press freedom is more important than ever.

"People need to have access to reliable and fact-based information. While fake news can become a serious issue, journalists should be allowed to carry out their work unmuzzled in a free and independent way."

German Ambassador Peter Fahrenholtz said media are really important, especially in difficult times. They inform the public, through criticism they contribute to improving the performance of the administration, etc., he tweeted.

Swedish Ambassador Charlotta Schlyter tweeted: "More than ever we need facts, more than ever we need #pressfreedom. Amid the #Covid19 crisis, it is essential that freedom of expression is safeguarded and that the voices of journalists are not restrained."

Dutch Ambassador Harry Verweij said the

Netherlands and the European Union support free and independent journalism. Access to facts and information provided by free media are vital everywhere especially in times of crisis. "Facts are life savers!"

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday termed statements posted on social media by some diplomats on media freedom issue "unfortunate, disappointing, and unacceptable".

"They could have told us following diplomatic norms if they have anything to say," he told UNB.

Momen said he spent a long time in the US and he had never seen such an approach from diplomats there.

"We are running our country in our own way. I am very upset. This is very disappointing. This is very regrettable. This is not good at all," he said.

The foreign minister said freedom could not be honoured unless there is responsibility.

He said Bangladesh would have been happy if the diplomats had said something on cancellations of RMG export orders or safety and support for Bangladeshi expatriates living abroad and ensuring their jobs for at least six months.

## Rivers existed on Mars 3.7b yrs ago

FROM PAGE 12

to the cliff," said Francesco Salese, study author, geologist and senior scientist at Italy's International Research School of Planetary Sciences.

"Unfortunately we don't have the ability to climb, to look at the finer-scale details, but the striking similarities to sedimentary rocks on Earth leaves very little to the imagination."

Researchers have long studied the crater because it's one of the largest in the solar system, stretching 5.6 miles, according to CNN.

In the images of the rim, ancient evidence of a large lake, rivers, deltas and channels can be seen in the rock.

By examining the images, researchers determined that ancient rivers stretched up to several meters deep, the report said.

Narrowing their search to the rim's cliff faces, researchers discovered that the rivers were in some ways similar to those on Earth.

These were "rivers that continuously shifted their gullies, creating sandbanks, similar to the Rhine or the rivers that you can find in Northern Italy,"

the researchers said in their study, according to the outlet.

The scientists are said to believe that the planet's water was driven by precipitation, much like rain on earth.

However, the rocks captured in the images only contain a small amount of time that water and sediment were being moved in the region, CNN reported.

They were said to have stipulated that other rocks that could present as measures of time could yet to be undiscovered or buried.

## A distant reality, still for many

FROM PAGE 1

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

Contacted, the authorities of renowned schools like Viqarunnisa Noon School and College, Ideal School and College, Mothijheel, Willes Little Flower Schools, Kakoli High School and others said they have started online classes using Facebook live, messenger, Zoom and other tools. Classes are also uploaded on YouTube.

GM Nizam Uddin, general secretary of Bangladesh School Medium School Association, said most of the English medium schools in the capital are taking online classes.

DSHE Secondary Director Belal Hossain could not say how many schools of the country are start online classes. "Most of the schools of Dhaka and other big cities have introduced online classes but schools in rural areas are yet to introduce this virtual learning," he said.

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, 77 percent of the total 20,465 secondary schools are in rural areas.

Kishoreganj District Education Officer Zulfiqar Hossain said less than 20 out of 262 secondary schools in his district now take online classes.

"There is lack of skilled teachers in the district to start online classes. Besides, many students have problems relating to electricity, internet and devices," he added.

COLLEGES

The majority of colleges that are providing higher secondary, graduation and post-graduation education are yet to have online education system.

Professor Shahedul Khabir Chowdhury, DSHE director (college and administration), said teachers of about 507 colleges are taking online classes, mostly for higher secondary students. Of the colleges, around 250 are government ones.

They cannot introduce online classes for graduation and post-graduation levels for several reasons. "There are some obstacles. Like many colleges do not have infrastructure and set up to take online education," Shahedul said.

Another problem is the colleges are not getting sufficient manpower amid this shutdown, he added.

There are 4,495 colleges in the country and 673 of them are public colleges.

Most of the colleges under National University already plagued with session jams, and in the absence of classes, they might get caught in prolonged suffering, said academics.

Dhaka College Principal Prof Nehal Ahmed said whatever facilities and infrastructures they have are being used for online classes at HSC level.

"We have honours courses for 20 subjects and there are six batches of students. And teachers are now staying at different places. So unavailability of teachers is another crisis," he said.

UNIVERSITIES

The education ministry and the University Grants Commission on April 30 asked all private and public universities to complete academic activities for the current semester through online classes.

The instruction came after a meeting among top officials of education ministry and UGC and vice chancellors of several public and private universities.

"At the meeting, we decided that all public and private universities must ensure online classes," UGC Acting Secretary Ferdous Zaman said.

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

"Many of them are holding name-only online classes," said Ferdous.

Late April, the authorities of several public universities talking to this newspaper gave various reasons for not introducing online education -- including a lack of facilities at the institutions and uneven internet access for all students, many of whom are now in their village homes.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 found only 37.6 percent of households in the country has access to the internet by any device from home. It also found only 5.6 percent of households have a computer or tablet.

Telecom insiders said 30 percent of total cell phones in Bangladesh are smartphones. There are 10 crore SIM cards here -- of these, around four crore are unique users.

## Four more die

FROM PAGE 12

Poly was taken to Hatia Upazila Health Complex after she suffered from fever, cold and cough for eight days. She died yesterday morning.

Nizam Uddin Mizan, corona focal person of Hatia Upazila Health Complex, said the authorities have sent four staffers of Hatia Upazila Health Complex and six staffers of the diagnostic centre where Poly worked to home quarantine.

Rezaul Karim, Upzila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Hatia, said they locked down the diagnostic centre and the house where Poly used to live.

In Joypurhat, a 60-year-old man died with coronavirus symptoms in Panchbibi upazila on Thursday night.

The dead was a garment worker and had returned home on Tuesday from Narayanganj.

Healthcare workers collected samples from his body and sent it to Rajshahi to test yesterday.

Hobibar Rahman, chairman of Mohammadpur Union Parishad in the upazila, said the deceased had symptoms like dry cough and fever and he returned to Raigram with his wife on Tuesday from Narayanganj. But, the villagers denied his stay at the village.

Later, he left to Boropukra village in the upazila to stay at his father-in-law's house. But, the villagers there also denied him.

Later, he took shelter in a room of a school in at Raigram, said the chairman.

After his death, the body was buried at a local graveyard on Thursday night after collecting the sample from his body, said Dr Salim Mia Civil Surgeon of Joypurhat.

In Jhenidaha, an elderly man died at Kabirpur village in Shailakupa upazila on Thursday night.

The victim is Shahidul Islam, 60, of Kabirpur village in the upazila.

Shailakupa Upazila Health Complex's emergency doctor Suriyea Jahan said Shahidul Islam took admission to the hospital with breathing problem, pain in chest and cough around 9:00am on Thursday. He died at 8:00pm on Thursday night.

She also said that Shahidul's body was buried maintaining all the protocols after collecting samples.

Rashed-Al-Mamun, upazila health and family planning officer in Shailakupa, said the sample of the patient was collected and sent to Jashore Science and Technology University for tests.

## Tsunami

FROM PAGE 12

to beat the coronavirus, as western economies prepared to brave still mounting death tolls with a return to normal business.

As the global epidemic cast a pall over sombre memorial events, Germany's President Frank-Walter Steinmeier drew a parallel between the war and the new scourge that has already killed over 270,000 people around the world.

"For us Germans, 'never again' means 'never again alone'," Steinmeier said at a Berlin ceremony. "If we don't hold Europe together, including during and after this pandemic, then we are not living up to May 8."

"We want more, not less cooperation in the world -- also in the fight against the pandemic."

Far from bringing the world together, the epidemic that has infected 3.8 million and put much of the planet's social and economic life in lockdown has triggered a war of words between China, where the epidemic began, and the United States, where it is at its worst.

US President Donald Trump has dubbed the outbreak the "worst attack we've ever had" and blamed China for failing to stop its spread, suggesting that it may have escaped from a Chinese laboratory.

China rejects the charge, and America's allies are not convinced. According to German news weekly Der Spiegel, citing a leaked internal memo, Germany's defence ministry and spy agency see Trump's claim as a "calculated attempt to distract" from Washington's own failings.

Nevertheless, China yesterday said it would support a review led by the World Health Organization into the global response to the outbreak, albeit only "after the pandemic is over".

**ECONOMIC COLLAPSE**  
In the meantime, while parts of Europe appeared to be over the hump of new infections and deaths, the toll in the United States showed no signs of slowing, and Brazil warned of chaos with the pandemic running out of control.

"Within about 30 days, there may start to be shortages on shelves and production may become disorganised, leading to a system of economic collapse, of social disorder," Brazil's economy minister Paulo Guedes said.

Brazil is Latin America's worst-affected nation, with more than 135,000 infections and 9,100 confirmed deaths, although experts say the true figures are much higher.

But far-right President Jair Bolsonaro opposes stay-at-home measures to slow the spread, saying they are unnecessarily damaging the economy.

Trump is also pushing for lockdowns to be lifted, as he tries to steady the economy ahead of November polls.

brac	
Invitation for Tender (IFT) for X-ray Machine with CR System and Online UPS	
Project name	TB Control Programme
Source of Funds	Global Fund
Tender package no.	BRAC/BPD-TB/01-2020 (X-ray Machine) BRAC/BPD-TB/02-2020 (Online UPS)
Reference no. and date	IFT/BRAC/ BPD-TB/20-02 (X-ray Machine) IFT/BRAC/ BPD-TB/20-03 (Online UPS) Date: 07 May, 2020
Tender name	Procurement of 54 no's x-ray machine With CR System and 145 pcs Online UPS
Time of delivery	As per Tender Documents.
Price of the tender documents	BDT 3,000.00 (bKash-01711730741) for X-ray Machine and BDT 1,000.00 (bKash-01740284030) for Online UPS (Non-refundable) (Must share Company name in Bkash reference)
Tender security	As per tender documents.
Availability of Tender documents	Online Scanned Signed Document (After receiving tender document fee, we will share scanned signed tender by mail)
Date & time of Selling Documents	11 May to 03 June 2020 Between 10.00a.m to 4.00p.m
Tender dropping place, date & time	Tender Box-3, BRAC Procurement Department (Ground floor), BRAC Centre, 75 Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212. 04 June, 2020 Between 10.00am to 2.00 pm
Tender opening place, date & time	BRAC Staff Canteen (4 <sup>th</sup> Floor), BRAC Centre 04 June 2020 at 3.30pm
<b>BRAC Procurement Department, BRAC Centre, 75, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212 Mobile: 017 11 730 741 for Xray Machine and 017 08 498 677 for Online UPS</b>	



# Up to 190,000 could die in Africa

AFP, Kinshasa

Up to 190,000 people in Africa could die of coronavirus in the first year of the pandemic if containment measures fail, the World Health Organisation warned on Thursday.

The UN health agency cited a new study by its regional office in Brazzaville which found that between 83,000 and 190,000 could die and 29 to 44 million be infected during the period.

The research is based on prediction modelling and covers 47 countries with a total population of one billion, the WHO said in a statement.

Experts have consistently warned that Africa is particularly vulnerable to an outbreak, due to weak health infrastructure, high rates of poverty, numerous roiling conflicts and a proven susceptibility to previous epidemics.

But the virus has been slow to spread across the continent, which has yet not recorded the soaring number of infections or deaths seen in Europe, the United States and elsewhere.

"The model predicts the observed slower rate of transmission, lower age of people with severe disease and lower mortality rates compared to what is seen in the most affected countries in the rest of the world," the statement said.

"The lower rate of transmission, however, suggests a more prolonged outbreak over a few years."

Africa has so far recorded 53,334 cases and 2,065 fatalities -- out of a global death toll of nearly 267,000 -- according to an AFP tally.

Several countries have put confinement measures or lockdowns in place, but others have not and some are considering lifting restrictions.

Nigeria lifted the lockdown in Africa's most populous city Lagos earlier this week, while South Africa started to ease its measures last week.



Pro-democracy lawmaker Eddie Chu Hoi-dick (top) shouts at security trying to restrain him during a key meeting at the Legislative Council in Hong Kong, yesterday. Rival Hong Kong lawmakers clashed yesterday inside the city's legislature which has been paralysed for seven months as pro-democracy politicians attempt to scupper a controversial law that bans insulting China's national anthem. PHOTO: REUTERS

## CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC LATEST UPDATES

### CASES NEARS 3,900,000

The novel coronavirus has killed at least 269,514 people since the outbreak first emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT on Friday. More than 3,856,400 cases were registered in 195 countries and territories. Of these, at least 1,256,900 are now considered recovered. Since Thursday at 1100 GMT, there have been 5,722 new deaths and 90,220 new infections recorded worldwide.

### CHINA BACKS WHO-LED REVIEW

China said it supports a World Health Organization-led review into the global response to the coronavirus outbreak, but "after the pandemic is over". Meanwhile, WHO yesterday said a wholesale market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan played a role in the outbreak last year, but called for more research. The comment came as US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said there is "a significant amount of evidence" the virus came from the Wuhan virus laboratory, although he has also said there wasn't certainty.

### MALARIA DRUG FAILS ANOTHER TEST

The malaria treatment repeatedly championed by US President Donald Trump as a "game changer" in the fight against the novel coronavirus has again failed to show a benefit in patients hospitalized with COVID-19, according to a study released on Thursday. While the study being published in the New England Journal of Medicine had certain limitations, doctors reported that the use of hydroxychloroquine neither lessened the need for patients requiring breathing assistance nor the risk of death.

### INDIANS EVACUATED

India's navy began evacuating from the Maldives around 750 of the hundreds of thousands of Indian nationals stranded worldwide because of coronavirus travel restrictions. The operation by two warships in Male forms part of an initial operation to repatriate almost 15,000 Indians from 12 countries.

### HOME DELIVERY OF LIQUOR!

Indian states have been advised to consider "indirect sale, home delivery" of liquor to ensure minimal crowds and enforcement of social distancing protocols at alcohol shops across the country, the Supreme Court said yesterday. Alcohol stores, closed nationwide on March 25, were allowed to re-open this week, generating queues of hundreds outside outlets in some cities and leading to baton charges by police to enforce social distancing protocols.

### VVIRUS FOUND IN MEN'S SEMEN

The new coronavirus can persist in men's semen even after they have begun to recover, a finding that raises the possibility the virus could be sexually transmitted, Chinese researchers said Thursday. About 16% of patients had evidence of the coronavirus in their semen, the team from Shanggju Municipal Hospital reported in the journal JAMA Network Open.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

# 'They're exhausted, fell asleep' Hotter, humid weather may not halt virus: study

India train crushes 14 home-bound migrant workers sleeping on tracks on their long journey to home amid lockdown

THE STATESMAN/ANN

A train in western India has run over migrant workers sleeping on the tracks, killing at least 14 among a group of people returning to their villages, according to officials.

Tens of thousands of labourers have been walking home from India's key cities after losing their jobs in recent weeks because of a lockdown imposed to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

The railways ministry yesterday said the driver of the freight train in Maharashtra state tried to stop in time but failed. Fourteen people were killed and five were injured, according to spokesman, CH Rakesh.

The ministry said it had ordered an inquiry into the incident.

Police said the labourers worked for a steel company and were walking to their village in the neighbouring state of Madhya Pradesh.



They had been walking all night, they were exhausted and fell asleep on the tracks," a police officer said.

Amid the nationwide lockdown, thousands of daily wagers and other migrants from big cities undertook epic journeys to reach home — walking, cycling and hitching rides when they could — in the absence of public transport.

Some made it, some are still on their way while some others just gave up on the way. There have been several

reports of workers desperate to be with their families in the uncertain days of a pandemic but dying before they reached their destination.

Although states announced special trains to return migrant labourers, many continue to walk long distances to reach their villages.

Local media reported some provinces were charging for the rail tickets, which most can't afford.

The nationwide lockdown, which began on March 25, was first extended till April 14, then till May 3 and finally till May 17 with a few relaxations built in. The unprecedented move to stem the spread of COVID-19 triggered possibly the biggest movement of people since Partition.

According to a report by SaveLIFE Foundation, at least 42 migrants died in road accidents while attempting to return home during the Coronavirus lockdown.

According to a global study on novel Coronavirus, temperature and latitude are not associated with the spread of COVID-19 disease that found public health measures, including school closures, social distancing and restrictions of large gatherings etc are having a positive effect on containing the virus.

The study, published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, looked at 144 geopolitical areas, states and provinces in Australia, the US, and Canada as well as various countries around the world.

"Our study provides important new evidence, using global data from the COVID-19 epidemic, that these public health interventions have reduced epidemic growth," said Peter Juni from the University of Toronto, and St. Michael's Hospital in Canada.

To estimate epidemic growth, the researchers compared the number of cases on March 27 with those on March 20. They determined the influence of latitude, temperature, humidity, school closures and social distancing measured during the exposure period of March 7 to 13.

The study found little or no association between latitude or temperature with epidemic growth of COVID-19, and a weak association between humidity and reduced transmission.

Professor Dionne Gesink, a coauthor and epidemiologist at Dalla Lana School of Public Health in Canada said, "Summer is not going to make this go away. It's important people know that. On the other hand, the more public health interventions an area had in place, the bigger the impact on slowing the epidemic growth. These public health interventions are really important because they're the only thing working right now to slow the epidemic."

THE STATESMAN/ANN

# Could pandemic lead to positive change?

AFP, London

Major social advances have often emerged from the depths of disaster: the Black Death brought an end to serfdom, and Britain's welfare state emerged from the ruins of World War II.

As the coronavirus outbreak took hold, many governments brought in policies previously dismissed as "utopian", such as backing wages or housing the homeless.

But as emergency measures are eased, and the world tries to get back a semblance of normality, there is debate about which, if any, could -- or should -- be kept.

In Britain, as elsewhere, the crisis has shone a light on the plight of underpaid delivery drivers, teachers, nurses and other key workers who have been vital to the response.

The government has stepped in to guarantee salaries of the five million self-employed. Finance minister Rishi Sunak has already begun talking about scaling back the measures, which back 80 percent of someone's average monthly salary up to £2,500 (\$3,100, 2,850 euros).

But David Napier, professor of medical anthropology at University College London, said withdrawal could prove problematic given the imbalances the virus has highlighted.

"The strong have been depending on the weak for their survival," he told AFP.

In the United States, 30 million people have already lost their jobs because of the pandemic's economic impact.

To keep the economy afloat, President Donald Trump's Republican administration has included direct cash payments of up to \$3,000 per family in its stimulus package.

Oxford University historian Timothy Garton Ash noted that a concept like basic universal income was considered "radical, if not utopian" not so long ago.

But a recent study from his university indicated that 71 percent of Europeans now supported the idea.

Doctors and nurses on the frontline of tackling the global pandemic have campaigned for years to get pay rises and more resources. In France, President Emmanuel Macron initially said there was no "magic money" for the sector but later

promised more investment.

In Britain, the state-run National Health Service has been hit by a decade of cuts in funding and staffing following the 2008 financial crisis.

But Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose Conservative party has been accused of wanting to privatise the free service, has become one of its staunchest defenders. He was treated at an NHS hospital for COVID-19 and credits its doctors with saving his life.

But Mark Harrison, a professor of economic history at Warwick University,

said even that has policy implications.

"The simple story of the PM who got saved by the NHS is very powerful, it will be hard for the Conservatives to try to go back on that type of commitment."

Elsewhere, the British government moved to house homeless people in empty hotels and hostels, because of the risk of them contracting the virus.

Jasmine Basran, from the charity group Crisis, called the government's response "incredible". "It shows what is possible if there's political will," she said.

As the full impact of the crisis becomes known, there are calls for the government to guide industrial policy, similar to the Marshall Plan for reconstruction after World War II.

The director of the International Energy Agency, Fatih Birol, has urged world leaders to prioritise green energy as they try to kick-start their economies.

Germany has made state aid conditional on firms pledging climate targets and France has said a seven-billion-euro bailout of Air France is dependent on a cut in short-haul flights and emissions.

But business leaders are resisting attempts to introduce initiatives to cut waste and the use of plastic.

For Warwick professor Harrison, the crisis "has the potential to change people's perceptions" for the better over the long term.

But Sankalp Chaturvedi, a professor of organisational behaviour and leadership at Imperial College Business School in London, said goodwill would only go so far.

"This generosity will come with higher taxes," he said, predicting that short-term help would lead to anxiety and frustration.



# US Justice Dept drops Flynn case

AFP, Washington

The US Justice Department withdrew its case against former White House national security advisor Michael Flynn Thursday, handing President Donald Trump a major political victory.

In a nearly unheard-of reversal, the department said in a filing that Flynn's December 2017 guilty plea for lying to the FBI in an interview over his Russia contacts was moot because the lies were insignificant.

It also said the FBI's original probe of him -- part of the sweeping counterintelligence investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election -- had no "legitimate investigative basis."

The decision by close Trump ally Attorney General Bill Barr effectively reversed 18 months of work by the department and FBI under Barr's predecessors.

It also added fuel to Trump's allegation over the past three-plus years that the Russia probe was a political "witch hunt."

He took aim at the FBI and Justice Department officials behind the original investigation. "I hope a lot of people are going to pay a big price, because they're dishonest crooked people. They're scum and I say it a lot. They're scum, they're human scum," he said.

Current and former officials associated with the investigation voiced outrage and accused Barr of doing Trump's bidding.



# Accuser says Biden should quit White House race

The woman who accused Joe Biden of sexually assaulting her in 1993 called on him to drop out of the US presidential race, saying Thursday she'd take a polygraph about the alleged encounter if he would. Tara Reade said in March that Biden, the Democratic Party's presumptive presidential nominee, sexually assaulted her in a Capitol Hill corridor 27 years ago when she was a 29-year-old aide in the then-senator's office. The accusation is the biggest imbroglio of Biden's presidential campaign. The candidate has denied wrongdoing. It was Reade's first on-camera interview since Biden, 77, released a statement Friday saying the incident "never happened."

# N Korea lashes South as Kim praises China's Xi

North Korea condemned the South yesterday for holding military drills, saying the situation was returning to before the diplomatic rapprochement of 2018, as leader Kim Jong Un -- whose health was the subject of intense speculation in recent weeks -- reached out to traditional ally Beijing. Kim sent Chinese leader Xi Jinping a diplomatic communication congratulating him for China's "success" in controlling the novel coronavirus epidemic, the state news agency KCNA reported. The North has closed its borders to try to protect itself from the disease that first emerged in its giant neighbour, and insists it has not had any cases. Kim told Xi he was as pleased with China's successes as his own, KCNA reported, adding he "sent militant greetings to every member of the Communist Party of China".

# China's new spacecraft returns to Earth: official

China's new prototype spacecraft "successfully landed" yesterday, marking an important step in its ambitions to run a permanent space station and send astronauts to the moon. The spacecraft -- which was launched Tuesday -- arrived safely at a predetermined site, the China Manned Space Agency said. It said the cabin structure of the spacecraft had been confirmed on site as being intact. The test vessel was launched with a cargo capsule aboard a new type of carrier rocket from the Wenchang launch site on the southern island of Hainan. The return has verified the spacecraft's capabilities such as its heat resistance -- vehicles re-entering Earth's atmosphere face high temperatures. It is hoped the spaceship will one day transport astronauts to a space station that China plans to complete by 2022 -- and eventually to the Moon

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



(From foreground to background) German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the President of the Bundestag (lower house of parliament) Wolfgang Schaeuble, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the current president of the Bundesrat (upper house of parliament) and Brandenburg's state premier Dietmar Woidke and Andreas Vosskuhle, President of Germany's Constitutional Court, attend a wreath laying ceremony to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of World War Two, at the Neue Wache Memorial in Berlin, Germany, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

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# Musings with Syed Hasan Imam

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Freedom fighter and cultural personality Syed Hasan Imam began his acting career in 1961. Over the years, he has won several prestigious awards, including the Ekushey Padak (1999), Independence Award (2016) and Bangladesh National Film Award for Lifetime Achievement (2014), among others.

He never confined himself to one thing. At one point, he was a regular football and cricket player. He studied Mechanical Engineering, and got his first job was at Darshana Sugar Mill. He also worked at a bank.

Syed Hasan Imam began his acting career with television, before making his way into films. When he first started out, he worked on three different films around the same time. His first theatrical release was the film, *Dharapat*. He acted in several theatre plays as well. He has also shown his mettle as a film director, reciter and singer.

He took up Rabindra Sangeet in 1952, for a brief period. "I was the champion of the All India Youth Festival's Rabindra Sangeet category, and Chinmoy Chattopadhyay secured the second position," he says. "I was appreciated for my talent. However, I fell dangerously ill around that time and I had to give up my dreams of a singing career."

The actor also authored the book, *Akash Amar Bhorlo Aloy*, published by Panjeri Publications, in which he shared many personal stories. According to him, it is a lot like an autobiography.

Moreover, he was involved in the major political



PHOTO: STAR

struggles of the country. "I have had a blessed life so far, with a range of experiences. I have been at the frontline during times of crisis. But now, even if I want to, my age restricts me to be so," says the freedom fighter. "I was involved in the movement that demanded trials for war criminals. Today, as the nation copes with the coronavirus crisis, despite my restrictions, I am trying my best to help people who are close to me and are struggling at this time."

Syed Hasan Imam was just eight in 1943, throughout the famine in the Bengal province of British India during the Second World War. "My family was actively providing necessary aid to the destitute families at the time, and I helped out as much as I could," he explains. "I remember the horrific days of the famine vividly. That was the first time I saw the realities of poverty and helplessness so closely. Those days taught me that we are all in this world to help each other out. I believe that our life is not for us, but rather, for the people around us. It is my greatest life lesson."

An avid bookworm, the actor is spending most of his time at home reading different books nowadays. "I am also keeping in touch with my friends and loved ones. It appears that we are at a standstill now, but life is going by," he explains.



Rafa



Bappa Mazumder



Kona

## Pulling through as a musician

*It was, perhaps inevitable for the music industry to see huge losses in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. Since social gatherings can put one's well-being at risk right now, live shows have been cancelled, hindering the biggest source of income for musicians and putting their future in jeopardy.*

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

"We are not doing well at all," says a concerned Bappa Mazumder. "You see, as much as we try to stay positive, I cannot help but think what will happen if three or four months go by like this." The artiste is trying to divert himself from reality as much as possible, spending more time in his home studio to make new music. "I am trying to learn visual editing, something that I've wanted to do for a while now. One thing that I am grateful for is being able to spend more time with my wife and daughter." Bappa asserted that even though innovations like online concerts on social media are helping, more needs to be done to keep musicians afloat.

Another star in the industry, Kona, says that anxiety is her bane during these times. "I can't explain the emotional roller-coaster I am on right now, as I keep scrolling through my news feed and am terrified of whatever is going on around the world," she says. The talented singer spends her time doing daily household tasks, barely able to concentrate on music. "I entered self-isolation with a sore throat. Moreover, it is very difficult for me to get myself to practice in this state of mind," says Kona, who believes that everything will be alright soon. "In spite of all the negativity, I believe that we will come through as a nation. Every now and then, when I see something positive on the internet, I pray that it is true," she says.

Positivity is the strongest weapon one can yield in the middle of a pandemic, according to Mahadi. The artiste, who is also the Head of Business in the retail chain Swapno, has taken



Minar

a huge step in helping out struggling musicians gain employment. "We were having constant meetings about the HR crisis and shortage of workers we were experiencing; so, I convinced the team to hire out-of-work session musicians. I am glad to say, they are doing very well." The commendable initiative, Mahadi's brainchild, is now providing food on the table for the families of some of the most neglected professionals in the country. "After the coronavirus hit, everyone was concerned about the day-to-day earners, and what will happen to them. However, no one thought of musicians who perform and earn on a daily basis, as music itself is unfortunately not considered a "real" profession in this country. I am happy that my organisation could do something for them."

Minar, who is now recording at his home studio, is skeptical of how

sustainable it would be to work from home as a musician. "During the Eid season, a lot of investment in music come in from the record labels. However, this time, there is little to no initiative," says the concerned artiste. "I had planned out 2020 meticulously, but the pandemic has poured cold water on all my plans. Musicians have gone into survival mode by now." However, the singer is utilising his time at home, concentrating on his artworks. "I am painting almost every day, and want to hold an exhibition of these paintings after this ordeal ends. No matter how cornered we are, I believe that we will find a way to get through this together."

Rafael Hasan Rafa has found his time in quarantine extremely productive. "I know that the lack of shows has been a nuisance, but I have used this time indoors to rediscover myself as an

artiste," says the AvoidRafa frontman, who feels like he had hit a musician's block for a while, before. The multi-instrumentalist noted that once a performer finds success, his work starts becoming formulaic. "For the last three or four years, I feel like I had been making the same kind of music with similar chords, which people have grown to associate with me. However, now, I have been experimenting with different types of sounds." Rafa explained that it is inevitable that online fests and shows will become the norms, if the situation stays the same. "Modern problems require modern solutions. We are already seeing initiatives like online-ticketed festivals for musicians. I am sure that we will find a way," he adds.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



Mahadi



Alif

## Independent shorts by emerging filmmakers

PRACHETA AHANA ALAM

Today, film is arguably presented as a marketing tool rather than a form of art. An odd conundrum we see nowadays is films made in Bangladesh premiering internationally, but yet to see a theatrical release locally. Sameer Ahmed of Gao Productions once commented that filmmakers are often stuck in a circle of "agenda, corporate



W(dot): Be a Digital Superhero



The Shell

interests, TV channel guidelines", and it is only within these bounds that they are free to experiment.

That being said, a new generation of



Just a glance

independent filmmakers are emerging, and some of their content is free to consume online. The ubiquity of social media has made it so that there is an ocean of content online, but often it is easy for good content to become lost in the noise. Here is a list of five must-watch short films and music videos, in no particular order, that are a simple click away, and are worthy of attention.

### INDALO'S 'HOBEDI'?

A music video with a hefty, suspenseful storyline and stunning visual effects, this short aligns perfectly with Indalo's eerie guitar riffs. The producer, Tawshif Akkas, supposedly worked with the director, Ejaz Mehedi, entirely from a different country and despite that, the attention to detail in its world-building is praiseworthy. It is available for viewing on the YouTube channel, Indalomusic.

### THE SHELL

A spare, minimalistic horror short by Monzur Anik, with commendable attention to sound design and a simple but effective storyline. This short is available for viewing on the



Indalo's Hobedi?

YouTube channel, Filmesque.

### W(DOT): BE A DIGITAL SUPERHERO

Winner of the Special Prize at Star-BracI's Short Film Competition in 2019, this short film was made with no budget, and follows the theme of 'Digital Bangladesh'. It's quirky, hilarious, and action-packed with very effective dialogue. It is available for viewing on Wasi Noor Azam's Vimeo channel.

### JUST A GLANCE

A wonderfully introspective monologue by Ragheeb Faatih Moazzem, who goes by the alias 'Robindronath' online. This short manages to speak volumes without literally voicing a single word. It is available for viewing on Robindronath's IGTV.

### ALIF

Jubo Zubayer Hossain's strong depicts a Kafkaesque tale with short social commentary. This surreal short has circled on numerous festivals, winning awards along the way. It is available for viewing on YouTube via the deafripENT channel.

## 'Tomar Prithibi Chinte Paro Na' instills hope for a better future

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

The coronavirus pandemic has essentially brought the world to a standstill, teaching us how we tend to take even the little things in life for granted.

A video featuring the poem, *Tomar Prithibi Chinte Paro Na*, written by Kamal Chowdhury and recited by Asaduzzaman Noor, was published by Voice of America recently via social media platforms.

Jointly backed by BCC, Ministry of Information and Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the video sends a message, urging people to stay at home for the time being to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

The poem portrays the harsh brutalities of the coronavirus pandemic, and how our world is struggling to fight the virus. Complementing the stellar composition by Naquib Khan and Bappa Mazumder, Noor's powerful voice inspires us to fight, while hoping for a better future. The poem was written to inspire millions of people, residing in their homes, to be hopeful and confident. Despite our helplessness and



Kamal Chowdhury

struggles against the virus, we will get through this.

With the lines, *Harbena Tumi Bijoyi Manush, Dekhbe Shudin Ashbe, Baire Abar Shobuj Patati, Jholmole Dine Hashbe*, the poem inspires us to fight back and make the world a better place by showing compassion.



Asaduzzaman Noor

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED





## Virus eradicated, humans too

NISHAT TAHSIN

Chapasthan has apparently stopped the spread of the deadly morosnavirus, and they have supposedly done so a fair while ago. There has been radio silence from the country for the last six months as the world descended further into the war against the Morbid-19 disease and there was little time to look at news that was not about a given nation's own troubles.

But news trickled through that something utterly strange was afoot in Chapasthan when a migrant worker from that country returned to it via sea from his adopted country of Iwalked last month.

After reaching Chapasthan, he communicated with our agency over the satellite phone he had carried, which was a stroke of luck as all telecommunication in the country was down. The government had years back started to roll out a passenger-pigeon communication service fearing the spread of rumours on digital media.

This correspondent then too travelled went to Chapasthan to see if the migrant worker's horrific account of an empty ghost town, recounted over his satellite phone was anywhere close to true.

It was.

After three days searching most restaurants, hundreds of tea-stalls and all other popular hangout spots, no survivors were spotted. The virus had been defeated, but that was because there seemed to be no hosts left.

However, upon scouring newspapers that were piled up in big columns in front of a building, it was apparent that the massive human cost was not because a particularly deadly strain of morosnavirus had attacked Chapasthan. Reports dating back a year showed that Chapasthan was taking the same measures that most of the world had adopted back then -- social distancing, nationwide shutdown and testing as many as possible for Morbid-19.

About a month and a half later, people became restless just as the outbreak was approaching its peak. As an underdeveloped nation, Chapasthan could ill afford to keep their economy closed for long periods and particularly, forego export orders of their number one export -- buttons -- worth billions. So, the government had decided to open up factories, restaurants and other small businesses on a "limited scale". Only people who lived in Chapasthan's capital would be allowed to join work while others would remain "safe" in their village homes. Curiously enough,

the newspaper did not define the "limitations". They said social distancing guidelines must be followed, but the newspaper pages were filled with people cramming together to buy fish, climb foot overbridges, provide donations, go for Dryday excursions donned in new clothes and all.

A month after the opening up on a limited scale, both the infection rate and death rate spiked. The government was roundly criticised for delaying approval of testing kits made by local companies. They could have followed the example of European nation Kartaka's example and started contact tracing and testing for antibodies to identify who might be immune, therefore could go back to work and keep the economy chugging along, said an op-ed writer, whose obituary appeared on the next day's paper.

Chapasthan had self-identified as an autodemocracy -- a system of government where democracy happened automatically -- and so, the government, under increasing pressure, promised to show the world that they were far ahead of their more developed counterparts and would stop the disease dead in its tracks.

According to a news published three months ago, the Chapasthan government declared martial law and

ordered institutional quarantine of all 170 million people.

Newspapers came out for about a month after that, and carried news of how a half-baked research led to a ridiculous figure of the minimum income to be doled out to disadvantaged families and had left them starving, how domestic violence and murder had increased when abusive families were cooped up and of course, people dying at home without treatment with morosnavirus-like symptoms.

There was also news of how some rich people made it out by giving the law enforcers guarding their mansions, their mansions. But not much was heard about them afterwards.

The last official bit of info came from the information minister, who was in charge of sitting at home and enforcing the Insecurity Act, so had no contact with the outside world for six months. He was also the supposed last survivor.

"Everything is fine, no one is spreading rumours, my screen is blank. Sometimes I watch news of the good old days of bumper cucumber harvest on VTV and it makes me feel even more hopeful for the future. As part of my job, I am glad to announce we have beaten Morbid-19 well before any of the richer nations have," he had said.

## Domestic workers extend 'general holiday'; cite risks and how dirty people are

The bourgeoisie scramble for solutions, but obviously can't find one on their own

LUBNAN KHALEESI

In an unprecedented move, the Utopian Union of Househelp (UUH) issued an official statement pushing back their return to places of employment until September 2020.

Putting an emphasis on the current crisis and asserting that the move has nothing to do with bored housewives and hot irons, the association said it was simply a matter of safety.

The decision has created ripples across the country.

"There are growing piles of clothes in my house and no one to clean them. What will I do until September?" said a horrified aunty from the block, who was recently released from quarantine.

It is not merely aunts who are feeling the brunt of



this decision by the UUH. Young people, enraptured by the Marie Kondo method which was all the rage last year, are faced with a new conundrum.

Tasnu, a university student said, "What is the point of having so many pairs of jeans and t-shirts? But throwing these clothes away also means I am not being Zero Waste. If the maids were here, I could donate my clothes to them. Now I am just piling up all these clothes that don't spark joy."

When asked what they will do in the interim, a UUH spokesperson said, "We are creating a framework for our activities. A big part of that will be designing a campaign for alternatives to being cleaners in holy lands."

Lubnan Khaleesi has cracked the code for the right street-type jhalmoory, but is still on the hunt for the best halim in town. And don't even get started on her cheesecakes.

## The Writer's Block



## Government sets one-hour 'mingling window' for citizens amid lockdown

OSAMA RAHMAN

Frustrated with the absolute stupidity of people, the government of Bhangadesh today announced a one-hour window for citizens to go out and mingle with each other.

This came after their earlier plan to open shopping malls did nothing for the economy as few people had money to splurge on Eid dresses, especially at a time when even profit-making hospitals had decided to cancel the festival bonuses of doctors and nurses.

The mingling hour has been set from 11:00am to 12:00pm, a period when it has been historically proven that no bad things happen.

"Good boys and girls should not go out after the sun sets any way. This will also inculcate good habits among these westernised people," the country's health and apparently also the morality minister said.

"Look, these people are constantly gathering till 5:00pm anyway. I have seen them idling around vegetable sellers, passing vegetables to each other and asking



that those be smelled. We don't know why they are behaving this way, but there's not much we can do now," Petal Jamal, a minister hired because of his connections, said.

"None of us have any expertise on this or any other matter. Our health minister never even opened a biology book in his life. Our commerce minister is a loan-defaulter," another top official said on condition of anonymity.

With an entire state mechanism mired in incompetence, the ruler of the country also lashed out at their supporting cast yesterday. "If I gave them toilet paper to distribute among the people, they would use those to make tant sari for themselves, which would be gorgeous but simple. Of course, until it started to rain -- the health minister would have a problem with that," they said.

Having failed to keep citizens

indoors, the government had to come up with the one-hour window, experts (maybe) said.

During the hour, all parks, restaurants and businesses will be kept open.

"This will save us all in the long run, please keep writing about that," said a glassy-eyed very, very high official of the finance ministry. "The world is about more than people, man," he added, before explaining whatever little he understood about "herd immunity".

"Why don't cows get coronavirus? Because herds, man," he said.

Meanwhile, citizens have been asked to use the window well and not make it a reason to spread the deadly infection currently plaguing the city, which is expected to worsen, because why shouldn't it?

"I am going to Cox's Bazar," a citizen told this correspondent when asked how he planned to use the time. When reminded that he could never make that journey in an hour, he said it was okay because the country's people had very strong immunity and something about the sun.



# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SATURDAY MAY 9, 2020, BAISHAKH 26, 1427 BS

## Infections are still rising

Information and testing are crucial

It is worrying that as the country is preparing to ease the lockdown before Eid to mitigate the economic fallout of the crisis, the ground realities regarding the number of COVID-19 positive cases and deaths related to the virus suggest that the disease is spreading. On Thursday there were 13 confirmed deaths due to the virus, the second highest in one day. Between May 4 and 5, 23 patients died from what appeared to be coronavirus at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital which is being used to treat COVID-19 patients. The bodies were handed over without being tested—authorities said they did not have the capacity to test them. Meanwhile as garment factories are reopening, according to Bangladesh Garment Shramik Sanghati (BGS), 96 garment workers and a staffer of a factory were found COVID-19 positive between April 9 and May 7 in the country.

What all this points to is that there is every possibility that the virus will spread as already there are likely to be many infected. As markets and shops open the rush for Eid shopping will be inevitable and hence the spread of the disease unless stringent safety measures are maintained. In factories it is the same situation with maintaining and ensuring social distancing being major challenges.

The most dangerous factor in this formidable scenario is the fact that testing, although has been increased, remains grossly inadequate. As of Thursday 105,513 people have been tested—a drop in the ocean in terms of the real picture of infections according to experts. As more and more people—many of them could be asymptomatic carriers—will come out of their homes with easing of lockdown restrictions, the likelihood of the disease spreading will be high. Testing is crucial and has to be expanded exponentially, all over the country and if there are laboratories willing to take on this task and other entities coming up with fast, reliable testing kits, the government should take full advantage of them to increase testing. So far our knowledge of the spread of the virus, the specifics regarding the COVID-19 related deaths have been frustratingly limited which puts us at a disadvantage in our fight against the virus. Add to this our health sector which is already struggling with the crisis because of lack of resources and capacity.

Knowledge is therefore crucial in controlling the spread of the virus, isolating and treating the infected and saving lives. The government must therefore, take all steps necessary so that we can get as close as possible to the real picture through testing and disclosure of information. Without this knowledge we will be rushing out of the lockdown into a blind and dangerous alley.

## Violence against women has increased during lockdown

Innovative interventions can stop this

There is little doubt that as with most crisis situations, the lockdown to stop the current COVID-19 pandemic has affected women and children more severely than other groups. According to a telesurvey report of Manusher Jonno Foundation some 4,249 women faced different forms of domestic violence in April this year during the shutdown. This included sexual and physical violence, mental torture and depriving women of food and financial support. During this time 33 incidents of child marriage took place, 424 children were tortured at home and there were 42 incidents of sexual violence including rape against children. Although the survey was limited to areas where MJF and its affiliated organisations work it can safely be said that this scenario is representative of the rest of the country.

This is appalling and frightening. While the survey cannot conclusively say that the rate of domestic violence and child abuse has increased during the lockdown, the fact that 1,672 women admitted that they experienced violent incidents for the first time in their lives does make such a premise compelling. More so because of the recorded 20 percent rise in domestic violence all over the world during the lockdown period.

As MJF has pointed out, addressing domestic violence and violence against children must be incorporated in the government's rescue response of food and financial assistance. Ensuring their safety must be a priority for the state especially at a time when they cannot escape from home and are shut out from all possible avenues of help.

The recommendations given by the MJF are practical and can be executed on an urgent basis. The home ministry, law ministry, women and children affairs ministry, and inspector general of police, can direct their field-level officials to enhance their activities with the priority to curb domestic violence. National helpline services like "109" and "999" can increase their support during the shutdown. Shelter homes can take effective steps to help women in distress to take refuge. Virtual court hearings can be introduced to bring culprits to book even during a lockdown.

The lockdown, which is to save lives from the virus, cannot become a reason for those lives to be threatened by violence at home.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Protecting women and girls

As the global COVID-19 pandemic spreads, women and girls face heightened risks of domestic violence due to the lockdown. Shattered economies mean little-to-no income for vulnerable families, particularly households led by women. Medical services for women—including sexual, maternal, and reproductive healthcare—are under severe strain.

COVID-19 exacerbates the challenges women and girls—including refugees in Bangladesh, asylum seekers in Greece, internally displaced people in Syria and South Sudan, Venezuelans across Latin America and forcibly displaced women and girls in other areas of the world—already face in displacement. Therefore, governments, humanitarian actors, donors, and community leaders should take part in the global pandemic response programmes to protect displaced women and girls in whatever ways that are possible.

Sarah Sheffer, by email

# Crossing the public-private divide



BLOWN' IN THE WIND

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

I was a young lecturer when private universities appeared for the first time in the higher education scene of Bangladesh. I remember when one of my colleagues left us to join a pioneer private university as a full time faculty, we at the department felt that he had sold his soul to money, deciding to work under a corporate system. The same thing happened when one of my teachers left for a financially lucrative BCS job.

Somehow in the public system, we "were" very conscious of the opportunity cost. We knew we had decidedly settled for low wages to enjoy the social prestige and intellectual freedom as members of the civil society. We knew it was our responsibility to educate the best minds for the future of the nation. We were inspired by one secret feeling (something that we ironically, albeit ideally, share with those in civil or military bureaucracy): the taxpayers had paid for making us who we are, and therefore as citizens we need to pay them back. We owe it to our country. Students paying for their education from their own or parents' sources may not feel the same.

My professor who joined the private system reportedly quadrupled the figure of his last public paycheck, which was 10 times more than what I was making as a lecturer. To be honest, my salary-scale was half of what I was making as an MA student with part-time jobs. Still I had no complaints, none of us had! We were happy to be among the intellectually stimulating cohorts who would force you to remain academically updated and socially committed. We looked up to some iconic professors and challenged ourselves to set the bar high.

As a young faculty member, I was full of idealism and enthusiasm. I was giving 12 to 16 lectures a week, volunteering for every assignment, events and activities. And as a result, I have many students who have become my lifelong friends. When you are in your mid-20s you can afford to be an idealist. Back then we were very suspicious of the privatisation of higher education thinking of it as a sorority and fraternity house for rich kids. That for me changed one day during an inter-university competition organised by a club to which I was a faculty adviser. The captain of a participating private university team (he is now a media celebrity) said something really witty: "the private universities are the real representatives of higher education. Look how high our buildings are." Everyone laughed, and I thought, this guy was alright; the team was alright. It takes only a nudge in the right direction to change one's attitude.

I left for the US on a Fulbright scholarship soon afterwards. After finishing my MA, I even had a chance to go into a full-funded PhD programme. By then the result of my wife's BCS exam came out. She got selected for the foreign service, and returned from the US to join her training. With my daughter just a year

old, I decided to resume my teaching post at Jahangirnagar University deferring my doctoral pursuits. I started receiving calls from my senior colleagues who by then were holding various top positions in private universities.

I started teaching courses in the afternoon or the weekend with proper permission from my parent university. The supplementary income was becoming essential in a country that had just adopted an open market economy.

The demography of the private universities was changing too. It was no longer a space for those who did not make it to the public system. Many students started opting for the private system because of its rigid academic calendar. Many middle-class and lower-middle-class parents saw it as a good alternative as graduates of the private universities were entering the job market almost two years ahead of their public counterparts.

I left for the UK for my PhD, and by the time I returned the private system was thriving. In contrast, the public system seemed jaded. It did not have the intellectual climate that it used to have up to the 90s. The cosmetic conversion of colleges into universities, politically motivated appointments,

the publications that we have produced, the resources and faculty portfolios that we have built are enviable in a Bangladeshi context. I am very proud of the English department which I have been a part of. In the public system, my hands were tied to bureaucracy, partisanship, power politics, and groupings. I felt sorry for my students who came to the University of Dhaka with stellar results and potential, but were not given the scope to grow. Large classrooms, teacher-centred learning, and lack of commitments were the main evils. My decision to take a break from the university to see what change I could bring to the system had paid off.

The reason I am sharing my personal experience of the public and private system is to help you understand a fault-line; a tremor is in the making. The public and the private students are being pitted against one another. At the advent of the worldwide pandemic, most private universities switched to online teaching to ensure the continuity of education of their students. The reservation against it was made clear by some of the top officials of the University Grants Commission (UGC). Once all educational institutions were shut down, UGC allowed the private

know for a fact how hard my colleagues worked during the last two months to make sure that the migration from face-to-face teaching to online one remained seamless. They are adopting new tools, gadgets and applications to overcome the hiccups they had due to the sudden transition in the Spring Semester.

Online teaching is a culture that needs to be cultured. In order to create a learning environment, it requires empowerment of both students and

*One hopes that UGC would think big and help us build the teaching capacities of all institutions. It needs to bring in all stakeholders of the digital system to ensure that the country acquires a contingency plan for any future crisis.*



adherence to old curricula, exodus and retirements of experienced teachers, lack of accountability and hunger for political power had changed the public education landscape. The quality declined, the quantity increased, while the ego, however, remained intact. Meanwhile, the private system benefitted from the recruitment of experienced retired teachers. The relatively better pay structures of the top private universities attracted teachers with overseas exposures. These universities adopted a flexible policy to update its curricula, while focusing on networking and entrepreneurial attitudes.

I took leave from Dhaka University and joined as pro-vice chancellor of a university that models after the North American liberal arts system. Even though my decision to join a "lesser university" was frowned upon, I must say that I found freedom and resources to do things that I could not do at the public universities I taught. The international conferences and events that we have

universities to continue with online teaching. Then they backtracked by saying that exams should not be held online. It's like the famous fallacy of having a pound of flesh without a drop of blood. And some immediately sensed fish in the murky water.

One official told the media, if DU, BUET, JU could afford not to have online classes, then why the private universities should be so keen. The guardian thus revealed who his favourite child was! The profit motif of the university board of trustees was hinted. Maybe it's true for some rotten apples, and there are plenty of them. For instance, the ones who started slashing the salary of faculty and staff at the first sight of the virus. Financial regularities of the private universities again should have been strictly monitored by UGC to protect the institutions from emergency situations like the one we are experiencing. It does not make sense for a university to stop paying in the middle of a semester for which the students have already paid. At my university, I

faculty members. The mixed signal given by the UGC simply damaged the confidence of the students in us. The financial insecurities of the students during this pandemic have already made everyone very edgy, and the irresponsible comments and behaviours of some of the BoTs as well as UGC rocked the boat.

As the guardian of both public and private universities, one hopes that UGC would think big and help us build the teaching capacities of all institutions. It needs to bring in all stakeholders of the digital system to ensure that the country acquires a contingency plan for any future crisis. Instead of giving pep-talk on the fourth industrial revolution, UGC should equip its affiliated institutions to prepare for the 21st century. This "us-and-them" divide is rather unfortunate, especially for those who want to see the improvement of the national education scene.

The UGC must act as a catalyst to create bonds between the public and private institutions. My university has been using a learning management software (LMS) for the last five years. Instead of dismissing or doubting our online initiatives, UGC can invite us to share our knowledge with those who do not have the capacity. If students do not have devices or network accessibility, UGC can bring in MNCs, donors, banks, and philanthropic organisations to offer financial schemes, soft loans or to arrange special internet data packages for students.

Thankfully, with the intervention of the education ministry, UGC had finally come up with a clear guidance on examination and admission for private universities. The private universities are taking baby steps to attain online teaching capability. Their experiences can be used to upscale and update the learning environment of all universities. It will be suicidal to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

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

## DS BOOKS AUTHOR SERIES Booked Solid



FARAH GHUZNAVI

I was amused to see a recent Facebook status update from my friend, the Indian writer Madhulika Liddle. She wrote, "I want to change places—if only for a week—with all those people... who have the time to be bored,

the time to need things to do. If only!" A prolific writer of darkly brilliant short stories and the creator of Muzaffar Jang, a protagonist featuring in a series of novels about the life of a detective in the Mughal era, Madhu shares on social media her many and varied interests, including creative cookery, drawing, botany and film history, all of which she fits in alongside raising a young child and managing to pull off an impressive juggling act with respect to her work-life balance. So it's no surprise that "spare" time is in short supply!

Although Madhu and I have only met once—at the Bangalore Literature Festival a few years ago—I am consistently amazed by how similar we sometimes are. So much so that at the festival, I was accosted by one of the organising team who insisted, "Madhulika Madam, you must hurry up and get on stage. You are missing your session!" It took me some time to convince him that I had finished attending my sessions, and that I was not in fact Madhulika—though I have since reached the conclusion that she is indeed my "sister from another mister", given the attitudes we share. And while I am hardly a Renaissance woman like her, I will admit that I do share her longing for the luxury of boredom.

Being responsible for an eight member household under the current circumstances doesn't leave much time to ponder one's entertainment choices. And despite having set up a family Netflix account two years ago, I have only ever

watched two episodes of some TV show that a houseguest of mine insisted that I would like (not that I liked it enough to watch a single episode after she had left!)

During a recent conversation, a helpful friend suggested some Netflix shows I might like, and I confessed that I hardly ever watch TV other than my daily dose of world news. Instead, I will often utilise even a 10 minute window of opportunity to read a book instead. "Oh my God, Farah, what is it with you? Do you realise

rejections and a field where criticism comes with the territory?"

Anyway, all this to say that reading has always been my go-to for both entertainment and therapy. And writers have been my rock-stars, proving that admiration frequently leads to emulation!

The therapeutic value of reading fiction is now widely accepted, something that seems almost incredible to a generation of Bangladeshis who grew up hearing that



PHOTO: STEFANO MONTAGNER/FLICKR

you're going against a global trend? Nobody reads any more. Supposedly we're rotting our brains with screen-time instead! Why are you such a weirdo?"

Well, the answer to that final question probably lies in the fact that I'm a writer—and surely, by that very definition, a weirdo! I mean, who else would willingly spend their lives in constant stew of self-doubt, publishers'

"beshi golper boi pora bhala na" ("It's not good to read too many storybooks"). Among my friends, I was in a minority of one, and very grateful, to have parents who have always encouraged me to read widely and well.

Intuitively, of course, it makes perfect sense. For one thing, the stories that we love best make us feel less lonely—not because they prove there are others

like us out there, but also because that writer whose work you love so much has created something which shows that she understands what it's like to be you.

And although I sometimes worry about my book-buying addiction, I know it's fuelled by "abibliophobia", the fear of running out of books to read. When I was growing up in Dhaka, the continuous shortage of English storybooks meant that this was a very real problem. I remember well the sense of panic I felt when I finished working my way through the children's section at the British Council (which, once upon a time, was a magical library full of books...). Hence, while attempting to stave off financial ruin as I continue to feed my habit, I console myself that given the times we live in, it could be far worse. I may well run out of living space soon, but at least it's not drugs!

Also, as any writer will tell you, while the lifestyle can be brutal, it is a major bonus when your "homework" actually consists of reading as many books as possible. Having always been a conscientious student, these days I read voraciously. And I find myself seeking out new writers and hitherto unexplored literary territory. Recent favourites have included *Wolf Hollow* by Lauren Wolk (a book that has distant echoes of one of my all-time favourite novels, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*), *Listen Slowly* by Thanhha Lai, *Everybody's Son* by Thrity Umrigar, *When We Believed in Mermaids* by Barbara O'Neal, and *Honour* by Elif Shafak.

One additional thing I have learned from this reading frenzy is that I will read almost any kind of story if it is well-written. The exception—you will perhaps not be surprised to hear—is any form of dystopian literature, including disaster and horror stories! Because let's face it, these days, reality would be hard to beat in that respect...

Farah Ghuznavi is a writer, translator and development worker.



# Overcoming rising inequality exposed by COVID-19



SHAHEEN ANAM

COVID-19 has wreaked havoc in the lives of millions with devastating economic and social impacts. Although no country or people have been spared

from its rampage, it is being experienced differently in terms of gender, class and socioeconomic situations.

In an already unequal world, COVID-19 is exacerbating inequality globally. For centuries the rich-poor divide has been an accepted norm in all societies. Some countries have succeeded in bridging that gap through the "welfare state" systems with strong social protection, high taxation of the wealthy and improved health services. Nonetheless, over the years, global inequality has grown to epic proportions. In 2018, Oxfam revealed in a report that 82 percent of the wealth generated last year went to the richest 1 percent of the global population, while the 3.7 billion people who make up the poorest half of the world saw no increase in their wealth. Again in 2019, Oxfam reported that the world's 2,153 billionaires have more wealth than the 4.6 billion people who make up 60 percent of the planet's population, going on to say that a CEO of one of the four famous global brands makes in four days what a garment worker in Bangladesh makes in her lifetime.

Let that sink in for a moment. Currently, the prolonged lockdown is resulting in near destruction of the livelihoods of the most vulnerable people. We are witnessing the loss of the progress we had made through years of poverty alleviation. While the crisis is affecting the wealthy too—big

businesses, manufacturers, retail shops, etc., are counting huge financial losses all over the world—it is the poor who are at risk of starvation, ill health and continued deprivation, further widening the rich-poor divide.

With sustained GDP growth of 7 percent over the last 6 years and prediction of 8.2 percent in the current year, Bangladesh was poised to achieve middle income status in 2030. However, the situation of inequality has remained a major challenge which even the government acknowledges. The latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey released by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) found that the income share of the poorest 5 percent of our population was 0.23 percent of overall income, a sharp fall from 2010 when it was 0.78 percent. In contrast, the richest 5 percent's share of income grew to 27.89 percent, up from 24.61 percent in 2010. This basically means that the bottom 5 percent's share of national income has decreased, whereas the richest 5 percent's has increased.

Bangladesh is performing poorly in reducing the gap between the rich and the poor as it is ranked 148 among 157 countries in this year's "Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index". Citing similar data from the 2016 survey, the government has acknowledged in its SDG progress report that income inequality increased in the past six years with a Gini coefficient value of 0.483 in 2016. While the statistics bureau survey mainly sheds light on growing income inequality, wealth inequality is even worse. According to estimates by the Centre for Policy Dialogue, wealth inequality in terms of Gini coefficient stands at a staggering 0.74. In another report Bangladesh topped the list of countries in 2018 that saw the quickest growth in the number of ultra-wealthy people that rose by 17.3 percent between 2012 and 2017.



PHOTO: SUDIPTA ARKA DAS/FICKR

Decreasing inequality is a tall order for any society, more so in ours where class divide is deeply entrenched and scope for upward mobility is limited.

Decreasing inequality is a tall order for any society, more so in ours where class divide is deeply entrenched and scope for upward mobility is limited. However, there is ample evidence that inequality is not so much a condition of lack of resources but rather the way it is distributed and who benefits from it. The Oxfam report in fact shocked the world of the vulgarity of the skewed distribution of wealth. In talking recently to development workers across the country the same story emerges, due to lockdown there is widespread hunger and deprivation of marginalised people, persons with disabilities, women headed households, street children, ethnic minorities and the so called untouchable communities. To add to this are reports of increase in gender violence and child marriage as an offshoot of increased poverty. The woman who till recently earned enough to support herself and two children with her *pitha* making

enterprise is left destitute with no source of income, the van puller who earned at least Tk 300 per day has no passengers and boat men see their boats lying idle without goods to ferry. The informal workers who account for 80 percent of the workforce have no option but to depend on government and other relief efforts.

Once the economy begins to move again, given the dynamics of wealth creation, the wealthy have a much better chance of overcoming their losses and return to their previous positions. But it will be extremely hard for the already economically weak to regain lost economic and social capital. There is every chance that they will end up losing not only their income, but human capital as well such as education and health, severely pushing back the gains made over the years of political, social and economic empowerment. So what can be done to at least

minimise risks that rising inequality poses. I say risk because according to social scientists, when Gini coefficient of income inequality is above 0.5, (presently 0.483 BBS) a country remains in the high risk of social unrest. It is to everybody's interest that the economically weak be assisted to stand back on their feet again. Suggestions by experts for cash transfers of Tk 10,000 each to two crore people which is only .80 percent of the GDP (Rizwanul Islam, *The Daily Star*, May 1) should be considered seriously. Same case has been made by CPD arguing that such cash incentives will generate six times the return on investment.

Finally, what about our own brand of the wealthy 1 percent? Can we count on them to use their power and wealth to do what it takes to revive the economy and assist those in need in this hour of crisis? There are many who are already coming forward with massive donations and relief. However, the need of the hour is much more than relief, it is about assisting in ways that will enable entire communities to rise out of the poverty cycle in a sustainable way. Not only the very wealthy, we all have to make a commitment towards social giving as we have never done before. It has taken many years of effort by government, non-government organisations and the private sector to reduce extreme poverty from 23 percent to the present 15 percent. We cannot let all our collective efforts go to waste.

Together, we have to make a stronger commitment to building a more humane, just and equitable society. For that to happen we need strong political will, bold policy decisions, accountable transparent systems of service delivery and collaboration of all sections of society.

Shaheen Anam is Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation.

# Bidyanoondo and the battle for our soul

Bigots must not be allowed to define us

Are You Hindu or Muslim?

Who asks?

Helmsman, Tell Them:

A Human Being,

My Mother's Child, is Drowning!

— Kazi Nazrul Islam



ASHFAQUE SWAPAN

THE voluntary

organisation Bidyanoondo is a stirring example of what amazing things goodwill can achieve. It's youthful founder, Peru-

based Kishore Kumar Das, has a richly deserved, devoted following of millions.

This is what makes the recent vile, sectarian attacks on Das so extraordinary. The attack has exposed the ugly underbelly of majoritarian bigotry in Bangladesh. It's also a call to action.

In moments like this we are presented with a poignant, existential question of national identity.

Just who are we?

Didn't the 1971 Liberation War settle the issue? An official Bangladesh government poster said it all. With a mosque, church and temple silhouetted in the background, the poster declared unequivocally in Bangla: "Bengal's Muslims, Bengal's Hindus, Bengal's Christians, Bengal's Buddhists, Bengal's Muslims—We are All Bengalis."

Apparently Das's detractors failed to get the memo.

Reality is a lot murkier and messier.

Bengali Muslims appear confused and divided about their identity. The

rise of Muslim separatism resulted in East Pakistan in 1947. Yet in less than a decade, the Muslim League, the midwife of Pakistan, got thrashed in the 1954 elections. The Awami Muslim League became the Awami League in a predominantly Muslim region. In 1971, Bangladesh embraced secularism and accepted Rabindranath Tagore's "Amar Sonar Bangla" as its national anthem.

Case closed?

Not so fast.

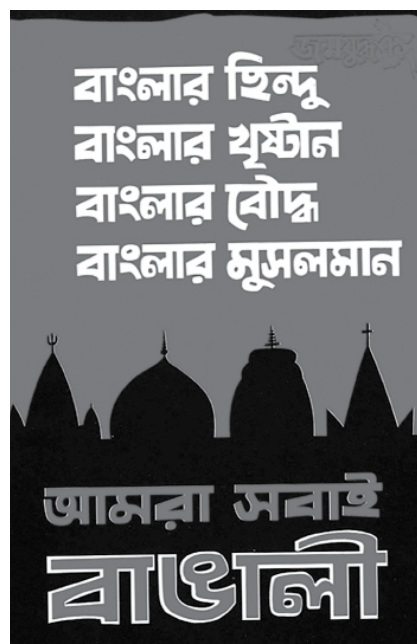
After independence, support for an extreme, intolerant form of Islam has grown. Infusion of petrodollars and a willingness of major political players to mollycoddle sectarian prejudice has contributed to this dreadful tendency.

The attack on Das is the latest example of this virulent prejudice. There have been other attacks.

I was outraged when Liton Das, the swashbuckling Bangladeshi batsman, was hurled with abuse simply because he had offered puja greetings on his Facebook page.

These attacks are an ongoing battle to define what being a Bangladeshi Muslim means. You could be a Muslim like my now-deceased mum and sister who pray five times and love Rabindra Sangeet. Or you could be the sort of Muslim whose faith has curdled into such vicious intolerance that Bengali culture, language can be anathema, and non-Muslims are vilified.

Nor does religious practice necessarily precede prejudice. Mohammed Ali Jinnah ate pork and drank whiskey, yet he believed Hindus and Muslims were separate nations. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib was a practicing Muslim, yet he championed an inclusive nationalism



that embraced Bengalis of all faiths.

Devout believers—of whatever religion—will have you believe that religious texts, whether it's the Quran, Hadith, Bible or Manusmriti—define their values. Don't you believe it. A society drawn from the same religious tradition can vary widely: It can be obscurant, bigoted and viciously intolerant. Or it can be humane, inclusive, and plural.

Take the experience of 12th century Jewish philosopher and physician Maimonides. He was born in Cordoba, Spain, at the height of the rule of the Muslim Moors, where he grew up in a flourishing Jewish community. However, when the Almohads, Berber Muslims,

toppled the Moors, Jews were given a choice: conversion to Islam, exile or death. Maimonides chose exile, and eventually became the court physician to Kurdish Sultan Saladin, the great Muslim Crusades hero.

Can Muslim societies leave religious intolerance behind and embrace a humane, inclusive ethos?

The west has, despite its vicious history of intolerance. Amartya Sen astutely observed in a 2001 article in *The New York Times*: "When Akbar was making his pronouncements on religious tolerance in Agra, in the 1590s, the Inquisitions were still going on; in 1600, Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake, for heresy, in Campo dei Fiori in Rome."

In Bangladesh, the firestorm of protests following reports of bigoted attacks on Das included many outraged Muslims. This already appears to be having a salutary effect.

Mass public disapproval has been effective before. On April 14, 2001, Muslim extremists bombed Chhayanaut's traditional musical celebrations of the Bengali new year. (This is deeply personal for me. My sister and brother-in-law were performing.)

If the idea was to scare off people, it was an abysmal failure.

In years since, huge (overwhelmingly Muslim) crowds have thronged Chhayanaut's celebrations. Every year, clerics threaten participants in the beautiful *mangal shobhajatra*, a Bengali new year rally, with fire-and-brimstone speeches. Each year their speeches are treated with the disdain they deserve.

To provide the *coup de grace* to Muslim extremists, what's needed

is what Herbert Marcuse called an "immanent critique"—effective criticism from within.

I've heard any number of devout Bangladeshi Muslims bitterly complain about how extremist Muslims give Islam a bad name. Well, it won't do to just talk the talk. Are you willing to walk the walk?

If you think bigots should not get to define your faith, then stand up for your beliefs.

It is only when practicing, devout Muslims stand up for their faith and confront the bigotry and intolerance that they so abhor will they achieve a Muslim society that reflects the tolerance and humanity they aspire to.

It took centuries, but it happened in the west. It can happen here too, but it won't happen without a fight.

There is no false choice of being Bengali or Muslim. Many Bengali Muslims proudly and joyfully embrace both. (If your orthodox Muslim views preclude music, that's your privilege, too. Just don't ram it down other people's throats. And respect the fact that national identity is defined by geography, not religion.) This will make for a better, inclusive, world.

"The main hope of harmony lies not in any imagined uniformity, but in the plurality of our identities, which cut across each other and work against sharp divisions into impenetrable civilisational camps," Sen wrote in "A World Not Neatly Divided," the aforementioned article.

Ashfaque Swapan is a contributing editor for *Siliconeer*, a monthly periodical for South Asians in the United States.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**RABINDRANATH TAGORE**  
(1861-1941) Bengali poet, short-story writer, song composer, playwright, and essayist.

*The butterfly counts not months but moments, and has time enough.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

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**YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS**

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

**BEETLE BAILEY** BY MORT WALKER

**BABY BLUES** BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



MUSINGS

# Friends Forever in a Happening Place!

FAKRUL ALAM

There were six of us, bosom buddies who had studied together in the same school and college, friends for years—“good” boys. And there were the same number of them, if not more, from the same Dhaka school and college—“nice” girls. We came from an exclusively boys’ school and they from an exclusively girls’ one. And it seemed for seemingly forever for a couple of months that never the members of the twin groups would meet. But we so wanted to meet, talk and....

In late 1960s Dhaka, however, most boys like us would be content merely to ogle girls and dream up long distances romances. True, there were not a few “smart” ones in our midst who boasted of going out with their “girl” friends. A few even claimed that they had gone

legs are thin!”....

Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?  
In a minute there is time  
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

Like Eliot’s Prufrock, most of us didn’t dare “disturb the universe” by asking for a “date” from a girl, and were content only to fantasizing relationships with angelic women because of inadequacies about ourselves in our own estimation, timidity, what not.

But to go back to the University of Dhaka and those of us friends who had been admitted to its English department in October 1969. Most of us did not dare talk to the girls we kept ogling everywhere in the campus. In classes, corridors, the Mall, the Registrar’s

We no longer felt the shyness, the tension, and the timidity that had kept us from mingling for days, weeks and even two months till that time. We kept talking. Topic after topic came up, our conversation accompanied by giggles and, at times, peals of laughter.

Sunday (our weekly holiday then!) assembled in front of the Arts Building to be bused to the launch station in Narayanganj.

For the first time in months us boys and girls of the 1969 batch felt like true *sothirtos* or class friends. It was as if the picnic ambiance had set in with sunrise that day. The more relaxed and colorful clothes we were wearing, the closer contact between us all as we boarded the bus and sat in parallel rows relaxed the girls, and made them as well as the boys dare to introduce themselves and talk a bit. By the time we got down from the bus in Narayanganj the bit of wintry fog that had created a bit of a veil in the Arts Building had fully lifted and we could be much more intimate and take in each other in broad daylight, having gone beyond introductions in the past hour or so.

For sure, the excitement of being on a picnic in a mixed group was palpable by then. Waiting in the even closer space of the boarding station apparently reserved for us, we began to introduce ourselves further (although it was soon obvious that we had learnt each other’s names well from the roll calls), talk and exchange pleasantries. Indeed, in no time we were smiling freely a lot—at what was being said and even when nothing was being said!

But we became even friendlier and relaxed in each other’s companies once we boarded the paddlewheel steamer. Using it for our picnic was clearly a great idea that our teachers had. Not only the girls, but our teachers too mingled with us as we formed small groups and took in the sunshine, the cool but not cold breeze blowing across the river, and the whole riverscape. Clearly, our teachers led by the redoubtable Dr. Khan Sarwar Murshed had chosen to design a trip that would bond all of us—teachers and students—forever. But the teacher who stands out in my memory from that day was Dr. Jyotirmoy Guha Thakurta, who talked to us freely (I am writing this on Shaheed Buddhijibi Dibash, 2019 and remembering him as well as the other teachers I knew who were murdered, either like him in March or on December 1971, fondly and sadly).

At one point, and as the Welsh singer Tom Jones’s “Green, green grass of home” was being played over the microphone, Dr. Guhathakurta said to our group of boys and girls—why don’t you all dance to the tune and keep dancing to the music?” We were taken

back by his friendliness and question. We were also too shy to dance in public then, but we sure felt like doing so.

By the time we got down from the paddleboat steamer for the next and final part of our journey to Sonargaon, a walking tour of Panam City, the ice had broken between us boys and girls. We no longer felt the shyness, the tension, and the timidity that had kept us from mingling for days, weeks and even two months till that time. We kept talking. Topic after topic came up, our conversation accompanied by giggles and, at times, peals of laughter. There was something about the old city setting, the narrow road to and from Panam City, the walk across the *char*-like place that took us from the steamer to that road and back, and the late lunch we sat down for, that contributed to a bonding that would last for a long, long time.

And afterwards? There were at least a couple of romances that developed between us boys and girls who first broke the ice and talked to each other the day of the picnic. One of them led to a happy marriage. The other one, however, ended abruptly, terminated tragically when my best friend in school and college till then was martyred in trying to cross the border and join the Liberation War in November 1971. There were also a couple of relationships that got so complicated that they ended creating distance instead of lasting bonds. As for the other exchanges, although some of us did not continue in the Honors program and opted to leave the department and the University of Dhaka after 1971 or later, we have remained pretty good friends. Although scattered all over the world (in 4 continents to be more precise!), we have been in touch, one way or the other.

Such breaking of the ice happened, of course, between boys and girls of other departments as well. The late 1960s was a time when Bangladeshi men and women were coming together in an increasingly liberal and relaxed atmosphere. The University of Dhaka was, for sure, a happening place for young men and women for all seasons and all reasons, and friendship/lasting ties between those studying there for a sustained period of time was not only inevitable but also something intently wished for. One remembers such ties as one more reason to celebrate our alma mater’s hundredth anniversary in 2021!

Fakrul Alam is UGC Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka.



past “fielding” (a “Binglish” word then in vogue used to denote staring at girls longingly from a distance!) and would boast that they had managed to enter into relationships. Rarely and occasionally there would be a boy who claimed that he was playing the field—a real “playboy”! For sure, he was the envy of most of us who seemed eternally stuck in the dilemma made forever memorable by T. S. Eliot’s incomparably penned lines in “The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock,” spoken by a man condemned to single life because of timidity and self-doubt—

And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, “Do I dare?” and “Do I dare?”

(They will say: But how his arms and

Building and the British Council, the roads around the Arts Building and TSC itself (the most exciting place in the world for us all outside the departmental corridor), we kept eyeing girls and (in our minds only!) narrowing down the ones we would like to talk to and fantasize about (who knew?) ending up in a relationship with them.

And so, days went by and a couple of months too. We would be meeting the girls seemingly all day (classes were held then from morning to evening). But in classrooms there were strict segregation. Therefore, we didn’t get around to doing anything much even after the first few weeks except exchange perfunctory greetings. Though subsidiary classes—which brought together students of

different departments of the Arts faculty together—were quite large, classrooms where Honors classes were taken were smaller and intimacy inducing. But nothing helped solve the problem of breaking the ice between us groups of boys and the girls of the English department for a while.

True, soon the long distance looks of anonymous faces were interspersed with more familiar glances exchanged between fellow classmates with names learnt from roll calls carried out diligently by teachers. Some of the male students earned more glances from the girls than others because they were more adventurous and/or attractive one way or the other; some of the girls even ventured to smile and exchange pleasantries in passing with us and in the more intimate but safe space that was the English department seminar library, the relatively small British Council book corners, and even the comparatively cavernous TSC dining room. But really, weeks went by and there were no real verbal exchanges that could light up into something else.

For us English department students, all this would change in January (I can’t recall the exact day; none of my class friends I talked to about the day can) when a notice appeared in the departmental Notice Board announcing a departmental picnic. We were informed that we would be going to Sonargaon for a whole day and that the trip would involve going by bus to Narayanganj and then taking a BIWTA paddlewheel steamer to Sonargaon and back. We all paid up the subscription and one winter

MUSINGS

# REFLECTIONS

TOHON

In 1980 while I was pursuing PhD in the U.S.A. I stumbled into the world of philosophy. Beyond my engineering studies, I devoted myself to my new-found passion. Since that time, I have been maintaining a diary. The following episodes are based on selected journal entries.

INVISIBLE FAULT LINE

During a casual conversation, my philosophical viewpoint angered my good, old friend of fifty years. He was so angry that he abandoned our friendship. I was dumbfounded for I could not believe what was happening. When I realised that it was real, I phoned my friend to beg his forgiveness, but to no avail.

I have come to realise that invisible fault lines run somewhere deep in our minds. These fault lines lie where we are immovable from our deeply held beliefs, faiths and instincts. There would naturally be a tremor when two opposing fault lines collide.

The saddest part is that we are unaware of our own fault lines, let alone those of others.

ETERNITY IN HEAVEN

I befriended a crippled, teenage boy. I asked him what he would do if God gave him one – just one – day of normal life. He replied, ‘I would go out for a walk. I would walk, walk and walk all day. The day would be like eternity in heaven.’

‘Oh God!’ I cried. I have already lived a

long life without knowing that I have been living in heaven. Now I feel vulnerable that my heavenly life might end at any moment.

DESTINY

As I enter the narrow alley, I slow myself down to the pace of a man in front of me. The man is too old to walk at a normal speed. As I become impatient, I realise that the aged man represents my future. I accept my destiny and follow him humbly.

LOSS

I am worried about the sale of our property. If it is not sold soon, We will run into financial difficulty.

Last night, the real-estate agent informed me that an offer has been made on our property. The offer is quite low compared to my expectation. It is an interesting situation. Can I have peace of mind, regardless of loss or gain.

In response to my recent letter, the mother of my long-lost friend writes: ‘Only God knows a mother’s grief. Outwardly, I pretend all is well, but inwardly my pain never ceases. Why did He choose to give and then why did He choose to take it back – this remains a mystery to me to this day.’

How would I ever know a mother’s grief? How trivial is my problem compared to the loss of one’s child? Should I not put aside my worries and concentrate on loving our children while they live? They may not be with us tomorrow.



COMPLICITY

I watched *Casualties of War* on TV. The story is set during the Vietnam War. Three American soldiers, despite protests from a fourth companion, rape a Vietnamese girl and eventually kill her.

The story revolves around the agony the fourth soldier suffers. The drama is so real that I not only hated the three soldiers, but it made my blood boil. I wished the fourth

soldier had killed his fellow soldiers before they could rape the innocent girl. Since that did not happen, I wanted the three soldiers to be punished, just as much as the fourth soldier did. But the system wouldn’t allow it. The major with whom the fourth soldier lodges a complaint says that in a war that is the name of the game.

Metaphorically, the story features an offender, a victim, a human conscience and

an onlooker. The offender is one of us – a human being, one of our kind. Bringing him to justice is not true justice. We should all be brought to justice – including the prosecutor, the jury, the judge, the highest authorities and the onlooker.

Guilt will not go away if we are not ashamed of crimes and do not take penitence and put ourselves in pain. Acts like condemnation, announcing a verdict, preaching non-violence, or even raising the fear of hell mean nothing. They simply hide our complicity.

How would one ever know that he is an accomplice to the action he condemns?

PILGRIMAGE

I thoroughly enjoy my cool morning shower. The process of first wetting, then massaging the body with soap and finally rinsing it is so refreshing. How I wish I could give such a refreshing shower to my inner self.

One of the most disgusting chores that I often have to do is pick up the excrement of our dog, Spotty. It has an awful odour and it turns my stomach. The other day, as I was attending to this chore, I realised that millions have to do worse things, like cleaning human excrement. The worst part is that they must do it for a living.

I cleanse my heart every time I attend to such a despised chore.

Tohon is a regular contributor to The Daily Star Literature Page.



## NAMASTE IN, HIGH-FIVES OUT

Namaste and clapping could replace handshakes and high-fives when cricket resumes after the coronavirus pandemic, India's Ajinkya Rahane said. Wicket celebrations might look very different post-virus, the 31-year-old batsman said, predicting many changes on and off the field. "I think we might go back to the good old days when fielders would still stand in their designated positions after the fall of a wicket and clap," Rahane said in an online briefing. "Maybe handshakes will be replaced by a namaste," he added, referring to the Indian greeting where both hands are brought together in front of the chest. -- AFP



After completing medical check-ups and undergoing tests for Covid-19 on Wednesday, Barcelona's footballers led by Lionel Messi arrived at the Tito Vilanova facilities and began individual training sessions.

PHOTO: FC BARCELONA TWITTER

## La Liga knocks down talk of June 20 restart

REUTERS, Madrid

La Liga has refused to confirm Leganes coach Javier Aguirre's announcement that the Spanish soccer season will re-start on June 20 after being halted for more than three months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"There are no confirmed dates to return to competition," a La Liga spokesman told Reuters on Thursday. "We will begin training sessions and wait for a government decision about established dates. Our intention is to return to competition in June."

Speaking to Mexican website Marca Claro earlier on Thursday, Aguirre said he had been given details of when the campaign would start again and had been informed the season would conclude before the end of July.

"We now have a start date for the league, we begin on June 20 and finish officially on July 26. We will play 11 rounds of matches on Saturdays and Sundays and Wednesdays and Thursdays," said Aguirre, whose Leganes side are 19th in the standings. "La Liga has just told me this and I'm very happy that we now have our training programme scheduled."

Clubs in Spain's top two divisions held obligatory testing for players on Wednesday and many teams are due to begin individual training on Friday.

Germany's Bundesliga announced on Thursday that it will resume action on May 16, making it the first of Europe's top five leagues to resume action.

## Son dazzles in boot camp

AGENCIES, Seoul

Tottenham Hotspur's South Korean star Son Heung-min completed a three-week military training programme with the best performance among all trainees Friday, as he excelled in shooting and other areas, officials said.

Son was one of the top five trainees to receive a prize at the camp's graduation ceremony on the southern island of Jeju on Friday. The exact scores of the trainees were not disclosed, but officials said Son was the top among a total of 157 trainees.

In shooting, Son hit 10 out of 10 shots on the target, officials said.

Son entered the camp on April 20 for basic military training required of those entitled to exemption from two years of mandatory military service.

Son earned the exemption after winning the men's football gold medal for South Korea at the 2018 Asian Games.

## India to be quarantined in Australia?

AFP, Sydney

India's cricket team is prepared to undergo quarantine to salvage a money-spinning Test series against Australia, a top official said Friday, but there was less optimism about this year's Twenty20 World Cup taking place Down Under.

Virat Kohli's men are scheduled to contest a four Test series in Australia towards the end of the year but will need to isolate for two weeks under current COVID-19 rules.

Board of Control for Cricket in India treasurer Arun Dhumal said the Test team were willing to make that sacrifice to save the series, which cash-strapped Cricket Australia desperately needs to replenish its coffers.

"There is no choice -- everyone will have to do that. You would want to resume the cricket," Dhumal told Fairfax newspapers. "Two weeks is not that long a lockdown."

Australia this month dethroned India as the world's top-ranked Test team, setting up the series as a blockbuster rivalry.

The series would also generate hundreds of millions of dollars for a host organisation struggling during the coronavirus shutdown.

Revenue from the series is so important to Cricket Australia that it has proposed adding a fifth Test, which would mean ditching a one-off Test against Afghanistan in November.

# BCB to raise its guard for post-pandemic cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

With lockdown restrictions slowly easing off around the world, the cricket bodies have started to think of resuming the game while maintaining safety measures.

Cricket Australia is set to begin its pre-season later this month under a set of new training protocols devised for the safety of players amid the Covid-19.

According to a report, CA is churning out strategies for resumption of training supervised by chief medical officer Dr John Orchard and head of sports science and medicine Alex Kountouris.

Although the coronavirus situation is showing no signs of abating, with hundreds of new cases being detected in Bangladesh, the

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is already looking forward to post-pandemic reality and suggesting all players and employees to undergo tests in order to ensure safety once the shutdown is lifted.

"Covid-19 tests have not been carried out in private sector till now. Government labs are doing it and they have their own protocol. If someone does not have symptoms, he needs not be tested. We are expecting the government to allow tests in private sector, but until that we do not have an option [to have our players or BCB employees do the test]," said Dr. Debashish Chowdhury, the chief physician of BCB. "We will of course want, especially the players, to undergo tests and we can approach the government if the players do not

have symptoms, but for safety we want them to undergo the test. And if by then it is allowed in the private sector, then it can be managed easily," he added.

The BCB suspended all cricketing activities on March 19, with the DPL suspended after the first round of matches as the board decided to run office from home.

"All physiotherapy of the players is halted now due to the situation. There are no new injuries, given there is no cricket happening. We are concentrating on players' fitness. They have been provided protocol online and they are trying to follow it as much as possible. We will not be active on the field until the government directive comes. Once everything opens, we will be able to start our outdoor activities,"

Debashish explained.

CA's Kountouris said the new normal should not have much impact on training in a sport like cricket. Since cricket is not a physical contact sport, with the physical distance between a bowler and the batter being 22 yards in nets, there is not much to worry about as far as cricket training is concerned, according to Kountouris.

However, just before the shutdown with coronavirus threat still looming in Bangladesh, the BCB did initiate the players to maintain social distancing during the first round of the DPL.

But those directives were hardly followed. According to Debashish, the board will come up with a proper guideline for the players to cope with the new normal.



The quarantine has given athletes, who are usually busy jetting around the world, some precious time to spend with their children. Five-time Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo posted a snap of him enjoying his time with his four children while Shakib Al Hasan posted an adorable selfie with his elder daughter.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



Although he had been exempted from mandatory military service after winning the gold medal with South Korea's football team at the 2018 Asian Games, Son Heung-min used the unexpected break from sport to finish a three-week military training programme, where he was deemed the top recruit among 157 trainees.

## 'It's difficult to recreate emotions without fans'

AGENCIES

India captain Virat Kohli acknowledged that there is a possibility of sport resuming without fans at stadiums but said it will be difficult to recreate the magical moments without supporters.

"It's quite a possible situation, it might happen, I honestly don't know how everyone is going to take that because we all are used to playing in front of so many passionate fans," Kohli said.

"I know it will be played at a very good intensity but that feeling of the crowd connecting with the players and the tension

of the game where everyone goes through it in the stadium, those emotions are very difficult to recreate," he added.

Kohli said the many moments which are created because of the passion brought in by fans would be missing.

"Things will still go on, but I doubt that one will feel that magic happening inside because of the atmosphere that was created. We will play sports how it is supposed to be played, but those magical moments will be difficult to come by," he said.

Ben Stokes, Jason Roy and Pat Cummins have backed the idea of playing behind closed doors. However, Allan Border has said it would defy belief to host a World Cup without spectators.

## Jerseys of Munna, Tayeb on auction

SPORTS REPORTER

Auction 4 Action, a charitable organisation, is all set to put two memorable jerseys of former national captain Momen Munna and former FIFA referee Tayeb Hasan up for auction through Facebook tonight to raise money in fight against the coronavirus pandemic. The auction will get underway at 10:30pm.

Auction 4 Action has already uploaded a short clip on the career of Munna, arguably the best defender in the history of Bangladesh. The last time Munna wore the historic jersey was when Bangladesh won its first international trophy in 1989 by beating a South Korean side to clinch President's Gold Cup title at then Dhaka Stadium.

The base of Munna's jersey has been fixed at Tk 2 lakh.

"Part of the fund will be used through Munna Smriti Sangsad. The other part will be distributed among some people, who were close to both Munna and myself, as they are going through trouble right now," Munna's wife Surovi Momen told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, former referee Tayeb will auction the jersey he wore while officiating the 2013 SAFF Championship final between India and Afghanistan. Nasim Faruque Khan, president of Satkhira chamber of commerce, wanted to buy his jersey for Tk 5 lakh.

"The base-price of my jersey is Tk 2 lakh," Tayeb told The Daily Star, adding that he wants to help people of football community and Satkhira locality.

## French Open to refund all tickets

AFP, Paris

All ticket holders for the French Open, postponed from this month until September because of the coronavirus pandemic, will be refunded, the French Tennis Federation announced Thursday.

"The current health situation and the extent of this pandemic are causing uncertainty for all events bringing together the public, all over the world," the federation said in a message sent to all people who had bought tickets.

"Pending having drawn up all the outlines, the FTF has decided to cancel and refund all tickets already purchased."

Roland-Garros was scheduled for May 24-June 7, but has been pushed back to run from September 27.

## Root 'very optimistic' about home Tests against Windies

PTI

England captain Joe Root has said he is "very optimistic" Test cricket will take place in the 2020 home season even if that means the squad have to go into more than two months' of quarantine.

With Britain currently in lockdown because of the coronavirus, a three-Test series against the West Indies scheduled for June has been postponed, with Pakistan due to visit later in a season whose start has now been delayed until July 1 at the earliest.

In a bid to salvage the most lucrative matches following a warning from England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chief executive Tom Harrison that a totally wiped out season could cost the board 380 million, Root said as long as the British government relaxed rules sufficiently to let the matches go ahead, some international matches could yet be salvaged from an otherwise possibly barren campaign.



"I'm very optimistic, hopefully that can be the case and it would be a real shame if it wasn't," he told the Cricket show on Sky Sports on Thursday.

"I think a number of people are desperate to see live sport back on telly and the guys are all very much missing playing and would love to get back out there."

Root praised the recent input of ECB

medics as he stressed: "Safety is paramount and we need to make sure everyone involved is absolutely safe."

"I'm sure the discussions will progress and we'll get more information and get closer and closer to cricket being back on and international cricket being played."

One plan would be to have all internationals played at Hampshire's Ageas Bowl and Lancashire's Old Trafford as these grounds, with on-site hotels, offer better 'bio-security' than other venues. But it could put a strain on players' private and family lives if they were unable, as is normal in a home season, to go home between matches.

Nevertheless Yorkshire batsman Root, whose wife Carrie is expecting their second child, said he and his team-mates could cope.

But Root, acknowledging the need for England to be "flexible" in a situation that could "drastically change" in the coming weeks, added "we've got to find safe ways of getting out of the bubble".





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## TOBACCO, LUXURY ITEMS Govt mulls over 'Covid-19 tax'

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The government may introduce a coronavirus tax on tobacco products and several luxury goods while giving tax cuts to internet services.

The measures are aimed at making the internet cheaper and curbing tobacco use during the Covid-19 outbreak, finance ministry officials said.

"Internet services provided by broadband and mobile data are now crucial for running the administration, keeping the students engaged and socialising," a top official of the finance ministry told The Daily Star.

The announcements might appear in the next budget speech in the parliament by Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal on June 11.

Ministry officials said they asked the National Board of Revenue to find out ways for imposing the coronavirus tax and reducing the burden on internet use.

Cars, air-conditioners, cosmetics, perfumes, bathtubs, jacuzzis, and other, mostly imported, luxury goods will be costlier, they said.

"It is sure that revenue collection in Bangladesh will be dealt a major blow due to fewer economic activities. We need to find ways to increase revenue collection," one official said.

The tax on tobacco is considered because of its harmful effects on health, which is more serious during the pandemic of a respiratory virus.

Officials are also considering whether to raise the income tax for those who earn over Tk 5 crore a year.

The economy is witnessing an unprecedented shock due to the Covid-19 outbreak and the subsequent shutdown enforced on March 26.

The government announced a Tk 95,619 crore stimulus

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Diagnosed with Covid-19, a senior staff nurse of Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital pulls a gurney with her luggage on it through the gate of Mugda Medical College Hospital yesterday. She was referred to Mugda hospital for admission as there was no bed available at her hospital. The ambulance which carried her to the hospital was not allowed in.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Four more die with Covid-19 symptoms

Two RMG workers among them

STAR REPORT

At least four people, including two ready-made garment workers, died with Covid-19 symptoms in four districts in the last two days.

Samples were collected from the dead and their family members for testing coronavirus.

In Lalmonirhat, garment worker Taleb Mia died at his house in Sadar upazila. He returned home from his workplace in Narayanganj a few days ago.

Sources at the local administration and health department said Taleb was suffering from cough and fever but his family members kept the matter hidden. His condition deteriorated yesterday morning and he breathed his last before his family could take him to the upazila health complex.

His body was buried under special arrangement.

Nirmalendu Roy, civil surgeon in Lalmonirhat, said they collected samples from the Taleb's body and his family members for testing Covid-19.

In Noakhali, a 20-year-old lab assistant Poly Akhter died with coronavirus symptoms in Hatia upazila yesterday morning.

Mominur Rahman, civil surgeon of Noakhali, said

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

## Uphold freedom of expression

9 foreign envoys urge govt; FM terms their tweets 'unacceptable'

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Nine foreign diplomats in Bangladesh have taken to social media, calling for upholding the freedom of expression and saying facts are more important than ever during any crisis to save lives.

"Access to reliable and fact-based information provided by free and independent media is vital to protecting public health everywhere," said US Ambassador Earl R Miller in a tweet on Thursday.

"Amid the C-19 crisis, it is essential that freedom of expression is upheld and that the voices of journalists are not restrained," he said.

The call came at a time when cases are being filed against journalists and free thinkers for expressing their critical views.

Eleven people, including a cartoonist, two journalists, and a writer, were charged with "spreading rumours and carrying out anti-government activities" under the Digital Security Act on Wednesday.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

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

### 'An independent country's police can never behave like rulers'



Bangabandhu paying tribute to the martyrs of the Liberation War by placing flower wreaths at the Liberation War Memorial at Sarada Police Academy on May 9, 1972.

May 9, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

BANGABANDHU VISITS SARADA POLICE ACADEMY

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today attends a passing out parade at Sarada Police Academy. Speaking at the programme the prime minister says that the Bangladesh police force has set a great example of patriotism by sacrificing their blood in the Liberation War. He recalls the valiant role played by the members of police deployed at Rajarbag Police Line in resisting the first strike by the Pakistan army on March 25, 1971. They fought for ideals and

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## 'Drug dealer' killed in 'gunfight' with Rab

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A suspected drug peddler was killed in a "gunfight" with members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) at Shorkhola village in Jashore's Avoyanagar upazila early yesterday.

The dead Maruf Mollah, 26, son of Muslim Mollah, hailed from Buikara village of Noapara municipality, said Lt Col Rawshan Kabir, commander of Rab-6.

On information that a group of drug peddlers were supplying phensidyl to dealers, a team of Rab-6 conducted an anti-narcotic drive there last night, said the Rab official.

Sensing the presence of the elite force, the alleged drug peddlers opened fire, forcing the Rab members to retaliate, claimed the Rab official.

Two Rab members were injured in the ensuing "gunfight".

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## Rivers existed on Mars 3.7b yrs ago



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Researchers have used images to examine a portion of rocks on Mars and determine when the planet had water on its surface.

The new, highly detailed images allowed scientists to "read the rocks" of the planet and find the first evidence that rivers existed more than 3.7 billion years ago, according to new research published in Nature Communications and first reported by CNN.

According to the images and data, water existed on the planet for 100,000 years, the broadcaster said.

Scientists used the imagery and topography captured by Nasa's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter's HiRISE camera to study a crater rim of Mars in the southern hemisphere.

"It is not like reading a newspaper, but the extremely high-resolution imagery allowed us to 'read' the rocks as if you are standing very close

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## 80-year-old woman beats Covid-19

UNB, Patuakhali

The recovery of an 80-year-old woman from novel coronavirus in the district's Bauphal upazila has raised hope among others about fighting the deadly disease.

Ajimon Bibi, 80, and her four family members -- Honufa Begum, 40, Farzana, 14, Hawa Begum, 50, and Siddiqur Rahman, 22 -- recovered from Covid-19 after an 18-day battle.

The upazila administration greeted Ajimon and her family members with flowers around 11:00am and allowed them to go to home, said Proshanta Kumar Saha, upazila health and family planning officer.

He said they had collected samples from the five on April 21 and sent those to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

On April 23, the five were placed in institutional quarantine at Kalaia Idris Degree College as their

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Locals fill plastic containers with drinking water from a tap near the gate of Central Police Hospital in the capital's Rajarbagh yesterday. The police authorities installed the tap to ease the sufferings of local residents who don't have access to safe drinking water. Many people from Shantinagar and Fakirapool areas also collect water from this point.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## 'Tsunami of hate' engulfing world

Warns UN chief; nations continue to ease curbs as grim economic data reveals virus devastation

AFP, United Nations

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday called for an "all-out effort" to end the "tsunami of hate and xenophobia" sparked by the novel coronavirus pandemic, as countries continue to ease restrictions.

"The pandemic continues to unleash a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scaremongering," Guterres said in a statement.

"Anti-foreigner sentiment has surged online and in the streets. Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have spread and Covid-19-related anti-Muslim attacks have occurred."

According to Guterres, migrants and refugees have been "vilified as a source of the virus -- and then denied access to medical treatment."

Meanwhile, "contemptible memes have emerged suggesting" that older people, some of the most vulnerable to the virus, "are also the most expendable," he said.

Additionally, "journalists, whistleblowers, health professionals, aid workers and human rights defenders are being targeted simply for doing their jobs," Guterres said.

The UN chief appealed for "an all-out effort to end hate speech globally," and singled out educational institutions to help teach "digital literacy" to young people -- whom he called "captive and potentially despairing audiences."

Guterres also called on "the media, especially social media companies, to do much more to flag and... remove racist, misogynist and other harmful content."

GLOBAL CO-OP TO BEAT VIRUS

Germany marked the anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe yesterday with a call for global cooperation

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