



The Daily Star



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BANGLADESH UPDATE **1,034** New cases in 24hrs **15,691** Total cases **239** Deaths **2,902** Recoveries **GLOBAL UPDATE** **284,834** Deaths **4,221,404** Total cases

Test rate still very low

Experts say citing tests per 1,000 in other affected countries; record daily surge takes total cases past 15,000

MOUJUD AHMED SUJAN and WASIM BIN HABIB

The country reported a record single-day surge of detected coronavirus cases -- 1,034 -- as the tally crossed the 15,000 mark, while 11 new deaths took the death toll to 239.

With testing facilities being gradually ramped up, 7,208 individuals' samples were tested in 35 laboratories in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday. Beginning on January 28, 1,29,865 samples have been tested as of yesterday, shows data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Experts however said the number of tests was still inadequate compared to the country's population and other coronavirus-hit countries.

They reiterated that testing was extremely crucial as it helps mitigation efforts, equipping investigators with the knowledge to examine the characteristics, prevalence and spread of any disease.

In a country of about 168 million people, the testing rate is only 0.71 per 1,000 people as of Saturday, according to ourworldindata.org.

The rate is higher in India and Pakistan. In India, it is 1.17 tests per 1,000 and 1.28 in Pakistan.

This rate is 34 per thousand in Spain, 41 in Italy, 12.7 in France, 15.8 in Turkey and 18.71 in the United Kingdom, according to ourworldindata.org.

In the United States, slightly more than 26 tests are being done per 1,000 people while it is 28.3 in Canada.

Among the European countries, Iceland tops the list with around 156 tests per 1,000 people. Other countries are far behind this Nordic country of 364,134 people, shows the data.

Experts in Bangladesh said with the existing number of daily tests, it was difficult to predict how fast the disease was spreading.

"We've no way other than increasing the test numbers to know the real situation. Otherwise, we will not be able to take the right decision for the days ahead," Prof Ridwanur Rahman, a medicine and infectious disease specialist, told The Daily Star yesterday.

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A 120-bed quarantine centre being readied by AL Muslim Group at its factory in Ulail area of Savar on the outskirts of the capital. The apparel manufacturer will keep any of its workers, suspected to have contracted the novel coronavirus, at this facility. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

CORONAVIRUS INFECTION

Crowded barracks put cops at risk

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Despite protective measures taken by authorities, the number of infection in the police force has been on a rapid rise with around one hundred officials across the country testing positive for Covid-19 daily over the last one week.

According to Police Headquarter (PHQ) officials, overcrowded accommodation in police barracks and mismanagement of unit chiefs are to blame for the sorry state of the force.

As of yesterday, the total number of infected case reached 1,756, which was 1,549 the previous day, according to PHQ data.

Of the infected cops, 810 are from Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP). Only 1,153 police officials were infected across the country just a week ago on May 5.

Around 1,933 police personnel were sent into quarantine over the last 24 hours. Around 2,870 officials were in quarantine till yesterday, which now stands 4,803. So far, 165 police personnel have recovered while seven have died from the infection, shows the PHQ database.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, a PHQ high official said that they took preparations in January to create awareness and had a standard operational procedure (SOP) about how to fight the spread of the virus sent to all police units.

"But some unit chiefs, especially in DMP, have failed to follow the SOP. PHQ has already started taking action against the officials," said the official.

Shafiqul Islam, commissioner of DMP, however, blamed overcrowded barracks for the sorry state.

Around 28,000 police personnel are living in barracks in Dhaka with around 30 officials in every single room, Shafiqul told The Daily Star yesterday.

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ARMED FORCES, FAMILIES 345 admitted to CMH so far ISPR release also says 6 including 4 retired army personnel died STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four retired and two serving members of the army died of Covid-19 as of yesterday, said a press release of the Inter Services Public Relations Directorate.

Of the deceased, four retired members were aged above 70. They had been suffering from different incurable illness, the release said.

The ISPR also said 345 serving and retired members of the Armed Forces and their family members have been admitted to the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka as of yesterday after getting infected with Covid-19.

Of them, 88 have returned home so far after recovering from Covid-19. All other patients are in

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Infections creep up in RMG belts

Since factory reopening, at least 58 workers infected at 35 units in Ashulia, Gazipur, N'ganj, Ctg

REFAVET ULLAH MIRDHIA

With more and more garment factories reopening every day, the deadly coronavirus appears to be spreading among workers in the industrial belts in Ashulia, Gazipur, Narayanganj and Chattogram.

As of yesterday, at least 58 workers from 35 garment factories got infected with the virus, said the industrial police.

The number of infected workers was 43 on Sunday. Of them, 35 were male and nine female, according to Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

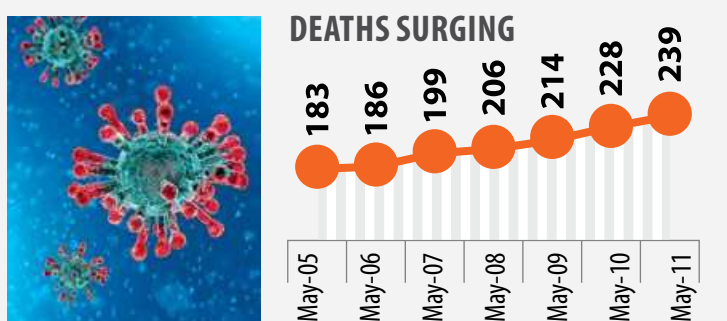
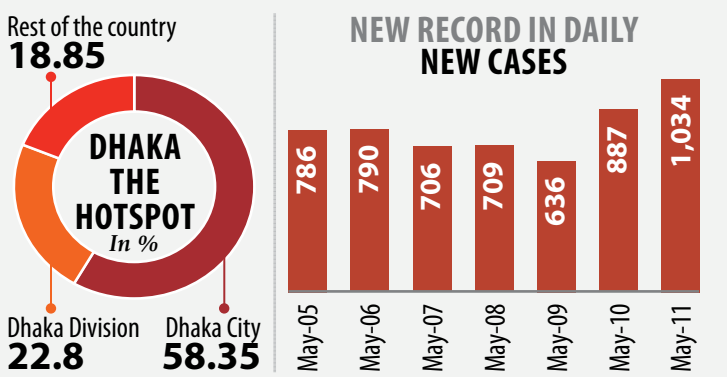
Earlier on April 28, two RMG workers tested positive for the virus just a couple of days after the factories started reopening.

The industrial police said 1,750 factories in different industrial belts across the country ran operation yesterday. The number was 1,382 on April 28.

Of the infected workers, 36 are from 19 factories in Ashulia, 12 from nine factories in Gazipur, five from three factories in Narayanganj, three from three factories in Chattogram, and two from a factory in Mymensingh.

Asked about the reopening of factories and the rise in Covid-19 infections among RMG workers, Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute, said, "We have messed it up."

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Tests conducted in 24 hrs **7,208**
New cases found **1,034**
Positive cases **14.34%**

COVID-19 POSITIVE CASES IN BANGLADESH

Tests conducted so far **1,29,865**
Total infections **15,691**
Positive cases **12.08%**

'TREATMENT DENIED' Father passes away after son dies showing symptoms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Tragedy struck a family early yesterday in Narayanganj when a man's death from fever, cough and respiratory problems -- allegedly after hospitals in Dhaka denied him admission -- was followed swiftly by his grieving father's demise from cardiac arrest.

The father and son have been identified as Yar Hossain, 60, and Rimon Saud, 24, of Chattogram's Shiddhirganj.

Family members said that the father succumbed to cardiac arrest within an hour of learning of his son's untimely death after he was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with Covid-19-like symptoms.

Rimon's cousin Masum Saud told journalists his condition deteriorated around 3:00am.

He was then rushed to different hospitals in

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Suspected Covid-19 patients, including some clad in PPE, wait outside the gate of the capital's Mugda General Hospital to be tested yesterday. Many of them alleged they did not get tokens for the test even though they showed up there on the previous two or three days. Asked, the hospital authorities said they were overwhelmed.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Tk 10 a kg rice programme extended

Will go on for another month

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government has extended Food-Friendly Programme for one more month, while the OMS programme for around 13 lakh listed people in urban and semi-urban areas will continue to help the low-income people hit hard by the shutdown.

Under the Food-Friendly Programme, the food ministry, through its dealers, sells rice for Tk 10 a kg among another 50 lakh listed beneficiaries for five months a year. Usually, the programme continues until April, but this year, the ministry has stretched the time until May.

"We have decided to extend it for one more month due to the current situation. We may have to extend further if the situation demands," Food Secretary Nazmanara Khanum told The Daily Star yesterday.

Upon receiving an additional budgetary allocation from the finance ministry, the food ministry yesterday wrote to the director general of Directorate General of Food to take necessary steps for updating the list of beneficiaries and distributing the rice before Eid-ul-Fitr.

Signed by Shameem Hasan, a deputy secretary of the ministry, the letter was also sent to all divisional commissioners, deputy commissioners, and district food controllers.

"We have issued the directive so that the needy get the rice before Eid. The authorities concerned have to update the list before that," Shameem told this newspaper.

Under the Food-Friendly Programme introduced in 2016, 50 lakh families can buy 30kg rice a month for Tk 10 a kg.

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DEAL FOR ROHINGIYA REPATRIATION

UN signs up for 3rd year extension

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN yesterday signed for the third year extension of a tripartite deal with Myanmar on creating conditions conducive to Rohingya's return to Rakhine.

The signing of the deal comes at a time when the ongoing armed conflict in Rakhine and Chin states has deepened the operational challenges faced by aid agencies.

Representatives of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and Myanmar's ministry of labour, immigration and population signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) extension documents in Naypyidaw for a year.

"The MoU aims at helping create a conducive environment for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh as well as supporting recovery and resilience-based development for the benefit of all communities living in the three northern townships of Rakhine State," said a statement of UNHCR in Myanmar.

The deal was initially signed on June 6, 2018, more than a year after some 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military crackdown in Rakhine state, while thousands were killed and their houses and properties burnt.

Initially, Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an MoU on repatriation of the Rohingyas, but repeated attempts of Rohingya repatriation failed as both the UN and Rohingyas say the situation in Rakhine is not conducive to their return. Rohingyas say there is no guarantee of freedom of movement, citizenship and safety in Rakhine.

Following a case filed by the Gambia, the International Court of Justice on January 23 this year ordered the Myanmar government to take provisional measures to prevent crimes of genocide against Rohingyas

in Rakhine and submit reports relating to those within four months.

However, there is no progress. Independent human rights expert of UN, Yanghee Lee, in late April said war crimes and crimes against humanity were still going on in Rakhine and Chin states as Myanmar military has ramped up attacks in recent weeks against civilians, displacing more than 157,000 people.

The UNDP and UNHCR in a joint statement said the environment in Rakhine is not yet conducive to the voluntary repatriation of refugees, but the MoU has allowed UNHCR and UNDP teams to assess the immediate needs in over 120 villages in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships.

Since the initial MoU was signed in 2018, a total of 75 quick impact projects have been approved, including for community infrastructure such as water improvement, school and road rehabilitation, skills training and income-generating projects, as well as projects targeting persons with specific needs.

A seventh round of assessments is now proceeding, but constrained due to the Covid-19 situation.

The statement said consistent access for UNDP, UNHCR, and their partners is essential to ensure expanded implementation of the MoU.

The two UN agencies said they remain committed to supporting Myanmar's work to improve the conditions in Rakhine for voluntary return of Rohingyas.

They called on Myanmar to address the root causes of the crisis by fully implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, including those on freedom of movement, a clear and voluntary pathway to citizenship and increased access to public services and livelihoods.

WHO suspends staff activity in Yemen's Houthi-held areas

REUTERS, Dubai

The World Health Organization (WHO) has suspended staff activity at its hubs in Houthi-held areas of Yemen, a directive seen by Reuters showed, in a move sources said aimed to pressure the group to be more transparent about suspected coronavirus cases.

War-ravaged Yemen, one of the countries most vulnerable to disease, is divided between the internationally recognised government temporarily based in the south and the Houthi group that ousted it from power in the capital, Sanaa, in late 2014.

The Saudi-backed government has so far reported 34 cases of the novel coronavirus with seven deaths in territory it controls, while the Houthis, who hold most large urban centres, have recorded just two cases with one death.

The WHO directive issued late on Saturday notified staff in Sanaa, the Red Sea port of Hodeidah, the northern province of Saada and central province of Ibb that "all movements, meetings or any other activity" for staff in those areas were paused until further notice.

The WHO has temporarily paused its movements in northern areas due to "credible threats and perceived risks which could have an impact on staff security", it said in response to a Reuters' query, adding that operations have not been suspended.

The United Nations is operating

under the assumption that there is now full-blown transmission in Yemen, it said.

"We are competing for resources and supplies in the global market - and a country's 'priority status' in terms of who receives what for Covid-19 is directly linked to how many cases are in country and the need - it is the numbers," it said.

The UN has "systematically for weeks now" advised on case declaration and reporting, but the decision to do so rests with local authorities, the WHO added.

Three sources told Reuters the WHO had taken the measure to press Houthi authorities to report results of tests for Covid-19, the respiratory disease caused by coronavirus.

The Saudi-backed government has accused Houthi authorities of covering up an outbreak in Sanaa, a charge the group denies.

The WHO says it fears Covid-19 could rip through Yemen as the population has some of the lowest levels of immunity to disease compared with other countries. Minimal testing capacity has added to concerns.

The five-year war between a Saudi-led coalition and the Iran-aligned Houthi movement has shattered Yemen's health system and left its population weakened by hunger and disease.

Around 80% of the population, or 24 million people, rely on humanitarian aid and 10 million are at risk of starvation.

Infections creep up

FROM PAGE 1

Seeking anonymity, a senior executive of the BGMEA said they have been instructing the factories to run operations following the health protocols such as measuring body temperature of workers and keeping information on the health status of the staffers.

Designated health workers at Ashulia Health Complex are collecting samples from garment workers with Covid-19 symptoms, added the executive.

The BGMEA website showed that a total of 461 factories were audited till May 10, and the health-safety measures and working conditions in 447 of those were found satisfactory.

The remaining 14 factories, which required improvement, were asked to come up with immediate corrective action plans to continue operation. Otherwise, those would be reported to the authorities concerned, it mentioned.

The Georgia state attorney general has asked the US Department of Justice to investigate the killing of an unarmed black jogger whose death sparked outrage across the country.

Ahmaud Arbery, 25, was killed on February 23 as he ran on a sunny day in a residential neighborhood in the town of Brunswick. Two white men were arrested and charged for his shooting just last week.

"I have formally requested US DOJ (@SDGANews) to conduct an investigation into the handling of the case," Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr tweeted Sunday, linking to an official statement.

Carr said his office is "committed to a complete and transparent review of how the Ahmaud Arbery case was handled from the outset."



A shopper, left, buying a pair of gloves from a hawkker, while security guards in PPE wait to spray disinfectants on her hands at the entrance to a shopping centre in Bangabazar area of the capital around 11:00am yesterday. The authorities reopened such shopping malls on a limited scale on Sunday amid growing number of coronavirus cases in the country.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Crowded barracks put cops at risk

FROM PAGE 1

"We have tried to provide all protection equipment to officials, brief them daily to follow health directives properly. We have tried to ease their crowd by shifting them in different schools and residential hotels," said the commissioner.

"But one or two may not follow directives and spread the virus to their colleagues while living in the barracks. It is totally impossible for us to check every ones activities individually," he explained.

The DMP boss further expressed hope that necessary steps have been taken and created a roster system for their force, in which only half of its members will be out on the field at a time for a week.

"We hope the infection rate will start to reduce now," he added.

On the other hand, police has already booked Impulse Hospital to treat its infected members in Dhaka as the Central Police Hospital is struggling to deal with the increased number of Covid-19 positive police personnel.

Instruction have already given to unit chiefs and specially range

deputy inspector general (DIGs) to book a hospital in every division of the country for treatment of police personnel, said PHQ officials.

Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general of PHQ, told The Daily Star yesterday that their officials have to attend a huge number of public order situations daily, which include taking the sick to hospitals and the burial of Covid-19 victims.

"Police often did not get the chance to arrange a PPE in an emergency and get into close contact with people, which is a big reason behind this high infection rate," he said, adding that they have to live messes and barracks with a number of their colleagues, for which the virus spread among force officials so rapidly.

"But we have now taken steps, including better treatment facilities, which is police officials are recovering fast than before" the AIG said.

COVID-19 IN PRISONS
Meanwhile, the Covid-19 infection rate was also found to be increasing in the overcrowded prisons. On May 9, only 98 jail staffers and inmates were in quarantine. The number rose to 317

yesterday.

Meanwhile, 23 prison guards and two inmates have tested Covid-19 positive till yesterday, Monzur Hossain, assistant inspector general (admin) at the Department of Prisons, told The Daily Star.

The two infected inmates are from Panchagarh district jail, he said, adding that another inmate of Dhaka Central Jail, who tested positive earlier, was released from jail yesterday after the end of his term.

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

Sources at the prison department said there are around 85,000 prisoners against the capacity of 41,244 in the country's 68 jails.

The home ministry, after taking opinions from the law ministry, recently ordered the prisons authorities to release 2,884 inmates, who were jailed for one year or less for minor offences, to ease the accommodation crisis.

Test rate still very low

FROM PAGE 1

"As the virus has spread to all parts of the country, the more tests are done, the more [coronavirus] cases are likely to come to light," he said.

Echoing a similar view, Prof Nazrul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19, said, "It's not possible to any take decision based on the data currently available. We will need at least 10,000 tests per day immediately."

"On Sunday, some 15.4 percent of samples tested turned out to be coronavirus positive. Today, the rate is 14.3. It suggests that the transmission rate did not change," he said.

If test numbers are increased, case detection will also increase, he added.

Both experts pointed out that the number of detected cases had started to go up after the authorities began

expanding the testing facilities in the first half of last month.

They stated that there were many hidden cases and unreported deaths caused by the deadly virus.

They also claimed although the ongoing countrywide shutdown helped bring down the transmission rate, proper benefits could not be reaped due to the failure to ensure contact tracing of infected patients.

They warned that the country would have to pay a heavy price if the situation worsened further.

RECORD SURGE
During a daily briefing on the coronavirus situation, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) at the DGHS, said the total number of confirmed Covid-19 patients stood at 15,691 yesterday.

She said 252 patients recovered in

24 hours till 2:30pm, taking the total number of recovery cases to 2,902.

"The recovery rate now stands at 18.52 percent and mortality rate at 1.53 percent," said Prof Nasima.

Of the 11 deceased, six were female and five male. Eight of them died in Dhaka Division, two in Chattogram and one in Rangpur Division, which saw the first such death.

One of the deceased was aged between 21 and 30, two between 31 and 40, two between 41 and 50, four between 51 and 60, one between 60 and 70 while the other between 71 and 80.

So far, the highest number of detected cases -- around 60 percent -- are in Dhaka city, shows DGHS data.

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

345 admitted to CMH so far

FROM PAGE 1

good condition, it added.

"There are three RT-PCR machines at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology [AFIP] and 10 RT-PCR machines at CMHs in other cantonments for testing coronavirus of authorised members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and their

family members," the press release said.

Till date, 3,194 samples have been tested at AFIP under its own management. All CMHs also have adequate stock of medical equipment, including PPE, masks, gloves and necessary medicines. Besides, the presence of full-time trained

physicians in CMHs is being ensured in a planned way, the release said.

It also stated that the army has taken adequate measures to provide medical care to Covid-19-infected members of the Armed Forces. In this context, necessary steps have been taken in the CMHs in all cantonments, including that in Dhaka.

Georgia asks US justice dept to probe killing of black jogger

AFP, Washington

The Georgia state attorney general has asked the US Department of Justice to investigate the killing of an unarmed black jogger whose death sparked outrage across the country.

Ahmaud Arbery, 25, was killed on February 23 as he ran on a sunny day in a residential neighborhood in the town of Brunswick. Two white men were arrested and charged for his shooting just last week.

"I have formally requested US DOJ (@SDGANews) to conduct an investigation into the handling of the case," Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr tweeted Sunday, linking to an official statement.

Carr said his office is "committed to a complete and transparent review of how the Ahmaud Arbery case was handled from the outset."

"The family, the community and the state of Georgia deserve answers," he added.

Arbery's death gained national notoriety last week with the release of a 28-second cell phone video that

captured the shooting.

In the footage, Arbery is seen running down a residential street and approaching a white pickup truck stopped in the right lane with a man standing in the back.

As Arbery tries to get around the vehicle, he is confronted by a second man holding a shotgun. An altercation between the two ensues and the firing of three shots can be heard.

The two white men were identified by police as Travis McMichael, 34, and his father Gregory McMichael, 64, who both live in Brunswick. They were arrested on Thursday and charged with murder and aggravated assault.

According to the February police report, Gregory McMichael told officers he thought Arbery was a suspect in a series of area burglaries and that he had seen the young black man "hauling ass" down the street.

McMichael said he went inside his home and got his .357 Magnum while his son grabbed a shotgun. When they finally caught up with Arbery and Travis McMichael got out of the truck with the shotgun, Arbery began to "violently

attack" him, the father said, according to the police report.

The father said he saw his son shoot Arbery and the jogger fall to the ground.

The footage of the killing sent shockwaves across the United States and prompted a number of celebrities to call for action, including basketball star LeBron James and actress Zoe Kravitz.

Some people drew parallels with the shooting death of another unarmed young black man, Trayvon Martin, by a neighborhood guard in Florida in 2012.

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms described Arbery's killing as a "lynching."

"It's heartbreaking that it's 2020 and this was a lynching of an African American man," Bottoms told CNN's Jake Tapper on "State of the Union" Sunday.

In an advertisement in Sunday's Atlanta Journal-Constitution newspaper, rapper Jay-Z and singer Alicia Keys appealed to Georgia's governor and attorney general to "ensure a fair trial is conducted, as that can only lead to the appropriate felony convictions of both McMichaels."

2 die after showing Covid-19 symptoms

STAR REPORT

At least two people died after showing Covid-19 symptoms in Chandpur and Manikganj on Sunday night.

The victim of Chandpur was a 60-year-old woman. She breathed her last at her house at Randhonimur of Haziganj municipality.

She had been suffering from fever, diarrhoea, and breathing problems for last couple of days. She was admitted to the icddr, in Matlab around noon on Sunday as she had diarrhoea.

Doctors referred her to Chandpur Sadar Hospital as she had coronavirus symptoms. But her family members took her to house instead of admitting her to the hospital.

The woman died at night, said the family members and locals.

On information, a medical team rushed to the house and collected her samples, said HM Soyeab Ahmed Chisti, Haziganj upazila health officer.

In Manikganj, a 35-year-old man died at his village home in Manikganj Sadar upazila.

The victim used to work at a brick kiln in Narsingdi. He was suffering from cold and fever for the last few days. The man who returned home around noon on Sunday perished around 11:00pm, said Lutfar Rahman, Sadar upazila health and family planning officer.

His samples were collected for tests. Samples of other family members will also be tested, he added.

Houses of the victim and two of his neighbours have been isolated following the death, said Iqbal Hossain, Sadar upazila nirbahari officer.

Our Chandpur and Manikganj correspondents contributed to this report.

Nine die in care home fire outside Moscow

AFP, Moscow

A fire broke out in a retirement home in the Moscow region, killing at least nine people, local authorities said yesterday.

The blaze in the privately-owned care home in the town of Krasnogorsk started at around midnight Sunday and was extinguished within an hour, emergency services said.

"Nine people died on site and nine more were rushed to hospital in serious condition and are being treated in intensive care," the Krasnogorsk municipal government said in a statement.

Tk 10 a kg rice

FROM PAGE 1

Amid the allegation of misappropriation of the government subsidised food, the ministry formed committees to scrutinise the lists to check whether the needy are getting the food, said Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder.

"We formed committees at union level to check the lists of beneficiaries under the Food-Friendly Programme. The committees comprised of a government officer, an elected representative, an Imam of a local mosque, a college teacher, and a schoolteacher have completed their work," said the minister while talking to this correspondent yesterday.

Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Food launched a Special OMS programme on April 5 so that the poor can get rice at Tk 10 a kg amid the countrywide shutdown enforced to contain the spread of Covid-19.

But over allegations of rice embezzlement, the government resumed selling rice under the programme from last month and sold rice among 12.81 lakh listed people so far, the food secretary said.

The number of beneficiaries under the programme may increase once they get an additional allocation from the finance ministry, the secretary added.

Father passes away

FROM PAGE 1

Dhaka but they refused to admit him because of his coronavirus-like symptoms, Masum alleged.

Later, Rimon was taken to DMCH, where he breathed his last around 6:00am, he said.

Sheikh Mostafa Ali, chief medical officer at Narayanganj City Corporation, told The Daily Star Rimon had been suffering from fever, cold and respiratory problems for the past few days.

Rimon's samples were collected to be tested for coronavirus in Dhaka and he was waiting at home for the report, said Mostafa, also a member of the district coronavirus prevention committee in Narayanganj.

Mostafa said as Rimon's condition deteriorated, he was taken to DMCH in the early hours yesterday. Later, emergency doctors at DMCH declared him dead.

Hearing the news, Yar rushed to DMCH where he suffered a cardiac arrest and subsequently died, Mostafa added.

He said Rimon's family did not communicate with health officials or hospitals in Narayanganj for his treatment.

Mostafa added that the process was underway to bury the dead body with help from Narayanganj City Corporation.

VIRTUAL COURT

Three petitions filed on first day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After a break of 46 days, lawyers yesterday started filing cases with the High Court for virtual hearing and disposal, amid the ongoing closure stemmed out of coronavirus outbreak.

A total of three petitions were submitted through email to the HC bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim, mentioning the reasons for their urgent hearing.

The officer concerned of the HC bench will now inform the lawyers through email and cellphone when the judge will hold hearing of the petitions, SC sources said.

No case was filed with other two HC benches yesterday.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain on Sunday constituted three single-judge benches of the High Court for holding virtual hearing and disposing of urgent cases through digital services during the ongoing closure.

The three HC judges are Justice Obaidul Hassan, Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim and Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar.

He also formed a bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court with Justice Md Nuruzzaman for virtual hearing.

The chief also issued some directives for the courts about dealing with urgent cases through using technology. He issued the "practice directives" in line with the ordinance issued by President Abdul Hamid on Saturday.

The Appellate Division bench will start dealing with cases from May 14.

Meanwhile yesterday, the Dhaka Metropolitan Session Judge's Court started its virtual court proceedings through videoconferencing.

An official of the court told The Daily Star they have issued a notice in this regard and passed it to the Dhaka Bar Association along with the directives the Supreme Court mentioned for virtual courts.

The court asked for applications from lawyers so that the virtual hearings can be prioritised case by case, with the hearing of bail petitions of those accused -- who are now in jail -- taking top priority.

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Members of Pragatisheel Chhatra Jote, a progressive students' alliance, formed a human chain yesterday in front of Jatiya Press Club demanding that Digital Security Act be repealed. A number of cases have been filed in recent weeks under the controversial law, drawing criticism from various quarters.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Doctors hopeful about condition of nat'l professor Anisuzzaman

Says his family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Doctors are cautiously optimistic that the health condition of National Professor Anisuzzaman, being treated at Combined Military Hospital (CMH), will be stabilised, said his family yesterday.

On April 27, the Dhaka University professor emeritus was admitted to Universal Medical College Hospital after he fell ill seriously.

Prof Anisuzzaman was shifted to the capital's CMH on Saturday, as his condition was not improving. Apart from heart problems, the 83-year-old has been suffering from kidney and lung complications and respiratory problems, according to his son Ananda Zaman.

"They [doctors] are still hopeful about further development but looking forward to a sustainable one, as the situation is still at a concerning level. They want us to wait till tomorrow [Tuesday] evening to give us a complete update," he said yesterday afternoon.

Prof Anisuzzaman, one of the most prolific essayists and scholars of the country, was previously

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COVID-19 TESTING IN CTG

Contrasting results a cause for concern

ARUN BIKASH DEY, CTG

A quizzical rate of positive results of Covid-19 test results at Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU) has caused some alarm, after 53 out of 97 samples showed positive on Sunday, and 40 out of 61 samples showed positive on Thursday.

In stark contrast, at another testing facility in the port city -- Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID), 22 samples were tested positive out of 217 on Sunday, while 18 positive cases were detected out of 198 samples on Thursday.

The civil surgeon's office officially announced the results.

Health experts at BITID said there may be some weaknesses in the testing process at CVASU, since most of their lab technicians are not experts and there has been a previous case of mistake there as well.

CVASU, on the other hand, claimed that the percentage of positive cases were much higher as many samples were taken from Covid-19 positive patients for the second time and they who were undergoing treatment at hospitals.

Testing at BITID started on March 25, while CVASU started testing nearly a month later, on April 23. However, CVASU does not collect samples; BITID collects and sends those for test.

Chittagong Medical College also started Covid-19 testing from Saturday. Till Sunday, results of all nine samples tested there were negative.

WHAT AUTHORITIES SAY

Dr Hasan Shahriar Kabir, Chattogram divisional director of Directorate General of Health Services, said Thursday's results were declared on Friday after collecting details of patients. "There is no scope for controversy or confusion over the result," he told The Daily Star.

Asked about the high percentage of positive cases, he said most Covid-19 positive patients were undergoing treatment in hospitals with symptoms of fever and coughing. "The more you collect samples from symptomatic patients, the more the result will likely be positive," he said.

Contacted, Chattogram Civil Surgeon Dr Sheikh Fazle Rabbi said they too were surprised to see the results. "We declared the results after verifying it," he added.

'A MATTER OF WORRY'

Prof Dr Shakeel Ahmed, in-charge of the BITID laboratory, said, "When I came to know about the Thursday's results [at CVASU], I was surprised and worried."

This is not the first time that samples from CVASU raised questions, he said.

Prof Shakeel said around a week ago, they found some anomalies in results while re-testing those. He did not elaborate any further.

He also informed that the lab technicians at CVASU were trained by them. "Usually, students perform the tests there, and they are working amid pressure. So there is some weakness there, which may affect quality," he told this newspaper.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

114 Bangladeshis return from UK

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 114 Bangladeshi nationals stranded in the UK returned home yesterday by a charter flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines amid flight suspension due to Covid-19 pandemic.

The flight landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport from London at 9:40am, Biman Deputy General Manager (Public Relation) Tahera Khondokar told the media through WhatsApp.

Meanwhile, a press release issued by Bangladesh High Commission in London said the Bangladesh government's special flight, BG 4041, departed London at 7:45pm London local time on Sunday for Dhaka carrying the Bangladeshis. Most of the returnees are students, it added.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to the UK Saida Muna Tasneem saw them off at the Heathrow Airport.

As per the Bangladesh government decision, all returnees would have to be sent to a 14-day institutional quarantine if they fail to show medical certificate.

Apart from the UK, Bangladesh has so far brought back stranded Bangladeshis from India, Australia, Thailand, Singapore, Myanmar and Malaysia while charter flights have also been planned to bring nationals back from USA and Malaysia.

On May 5, Bangladesh extended the ongoing ban on scheduled passenger flight operation for the fifth consecutive time till May 16 with all countries except for China.

Different countries, including the USA, the UK, Canada, Turkey, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Bhutan, Myanmar, Germany and different European countries so far operated several special charter flights amid the flight suspension to take their citizens back from Bangladesh.

Beyond the line of duty

DMP launches mobile shop to deliver essentials to Dhaka residents for free

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

To reduce exposure to Covid-19 infection, police have introduced an app and mobile shop to reach daily commodities to the doorsteps of Dhaka residents.

Alongside the initiative, the law enforcement agency has also opened a page in social media to support the needy and middle class families, according to Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

The Tejgaon division of DMP has launched the app -- wevbd.com -- last week to deliver essential products to the doorsteps of people so that they do not need to come out of home.

"We have started a test-run, through which people living in Tejgaon division will be able to place orders for essentials. Police with the assistance of young volunteers will deliver the products free of charge," Biplob Bijoy Talukder, deputy commissioner of Tejgaon division, told The Daily Star recently.

He said many areas have been locked down now due to coronavirus, that's why they launched the app to help people in need.

A huge number of people started calling the official phone numbers of six police stations -- Tejgaon, Mohammadpur, Adabao, Sher-e-Banglanagar, Hatirjheel and Tejgaon Industrial -- under the division for support and police provided them with daily essentials, said the official.

With an aim to make the process easier, police sought support from area-based young volunteers and then designed the app, said the deputy commissioner.

HOW THE APP WORKS

Officials said people will be able to order rice, lentil, sugar, salt, flour, potato, onion, oil, garlic, ginger, different types of spices, baby food and medicine through the app.

To place an order, one has to visit -- wevbd.com

-- then select respective police station and complete registration by providing details such as delivery address.

Once the grocery items are selected and finalised, the order will be delivered to a person's doorsteps, they said.

The application has three sections -- users, admin and volunteers, said Hafiz Al Faruk, additional deputy commissioner of Tejgaon Division.

"We have selected some grocery and medicine shops so volunteers can collect products from there at actual price. Once an order is placed, a nearby volunteer will collect the order and deliver those to the address with a bill and collect the money," he said.

Faruk said they have planned to continue the support even after the situation becomes normal. "We will then provide the service to the elderly and people with disabilities," he said.

OTHER INITIATIVES

The Gulshan division of DMP has already launched a new service in apartment buildings with the help of a volunteer group "Hello Shop". Customers can collect essential items (with price tags) from a shelf set up downstairs and leave the money in a cash box next to it, Sudip Chakraborty, deputy commissioner of the division, told The Daily Star.

"We are planning to set up such shops at all large apartments in the division but it will take some time as we need to take care of the logistics first," he said.

The Gulshan division also has home delivery options and a volunteer group -- "Swapno Chaka" -- is helping them in this regard, added DC Sudip.

Meanwhile, the Mirpur division of DMP has launched a platform called "Khoj Niyechen" to stand beside the needy by providing them with food support.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Petition seeks protection of Halda dolphins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Supreme Court lawyer yesterday filed a writ petition seeking its directive on the authorities concerned of the government to immediately take necessary steps to prevent killing dolphins in Halda river in Chattogram and to protect them.

Barrister Abdul Qaium Litan submitted the petition as a public interest litigation through email for a virtual hearing.

In the petition, the lawyer prayed to the High Court to issue a rule asking the authorities concerned to explain why their failure to prevent killing dolphins in Halda river should not be declared illegal.

Abdul Qaium said in the writ petition that total 24 dolphins in Halda river were killed since 2017 till date, endangering the environment and ecology, according to a report published on The Daily Star online on May 8.

Barrister Qaium told The Daily Star that the High Court is yet to set a date for hearing on the writ petition.



Residents of the capital are not the only ones in a frenzy to shop for Eid. After markets reopened on Sunday, Rangpur city saw huge traffic congestions throughout the day, creating long tailbacks amid the pandemic. This photo was taken yesterday from the city's Jahaz Company intersection.

PHOTO: STAR

'Use reserve funds to pay our salaries'

Univ teachers issue statement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 829 public and private university teachers yesterday in a joint statement said private university authorities can pay salaries to their teachers and staff using their reserve funds.

According to Private University Act 2010, it is mandatory for each private university to have a reserve fund. They can use that fund to bear expenses in times of crisis, said the statement signed by Kamrul Hassan Khan, chief coordinator of Bangladesh Biswabidyalaya Shikkhak Forum, an association of public and private university teachers.

They urged the education ministry and University Grants Commission (UGC) to resolve the issue by sitting with university trustee boards as soon as possible, the statement said.

According to the law, each private university in Dhaka and Chattogram has a reserve fund of Tk 5 crore, each university in other metropolitan cities has Tk 3 crore, and each university in other places has Tk 1.5 crore.

UGC Private University Division Director Fakhru Islam said universities cannot use the fund without UGC approval.

Asked, UGC Chairperson Prof Kazi Shahidullah appealed to all private universities to pay salaries. "If they send us proposals for using the funds and repaying the amount later, we will study their proposal to come up with a solution," he told this newspaper.

Kamrul said many private universities are failing to pay salaries, both fully and partially. "This is inhumane and unprecedented."

"Our private universities are more like industries, and this is not at all a sign of a healthy nation," Kamrul told The Daily Star.

To contain coronavirus spread, all educational institutions have been closed since March 17. The number of infections is still rising, showing no sign of slowing down. As a result, the government extended the closure till May 16.

Contrasting results

FROM PAGE 3
 “They never had to deal with patients before... but when an issue arose over test results around a week ago, we pointed those out and instructed them on how to get accurate results,” he added.
 Prof Shakeel also mentioned that testing of Covid-19 started at CVASU to take some pressure off BITID. “If we have to recheck their samples, then it will create more hassle for us,” he said.

WHAT CVASU SAYS
 Dr Zunaed Siddiki, a professor of pathology and in-charge of laboratory at CVASU, said they believed there was no weakness in their testing process.

“We have learnt from the experts at BITID; if they say that there is weakness in our testing process, that’s unfortunate,” he said.

Asked about the high percentage of positive cases, Dr Siddiki said, “At first we were surprised. But we were told that many samples were from already detected Covid-19 patients.”

Dr Siddiki, however, said there is no microbiologist in their laboratory. “Our students of pathology and students of microbiology and genetic engineering departments of Chittagong University, who received training from BITID, volunteer in the lab,” he added.

About CVASU’s claim that many samples were from Covid-19 positive patients, Prof Shakeel of BITID said the number of positive samples sent for re-testing is hardly 15-20 percent.

ANOMALIES IN BITID REPORT TOO
 Meanwhile, allegations over lack of coordination in the BITID laboratory ran rife not too long ago, after a result sheet signed by Prof Shakeel Ahmed on May 6 wrongly mentioned the date of collection and testing of samples.

The result showed 12 positive cases while all the samples were shown to be collected on April 30; they mentioned that the result sheet was prepared on May 4 and the tests were performed on May 5 and May 6.

However, many family members of victims claimed that the samples were collected much later.

For example, family of Abdul Halim (56), who died on May 5, alleged that samples of the patient were collected after his death.

Asked, Prof Shakeel said it was a “typing mistake” on the top-sheet but the date of collection and testing was rightly mentioned in the pages inside.

“We are performing tests and writing reports as well. We have never done any clerical work before, hence there was an error,” he said.

Asked, Civil Surgeon Dr Rabbi said the BITID authorities apologised for their mistake. “The mistake was only on the first page; the rest was accurate,” he assured.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bashundhara Group Managing Director Sayem Sobhan Anvir hands over 25,000 masks and 1,000 personal protective equipment to Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Director General Maj Gen Md Shafeenul Islam at BGB Headquarters in the capital’s Palkhona on Sunday.

Animal cruelty video sparks criticism on social media

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

“A dog is fighting a fox, watch here quickly” -- said a Facebook post by one Md Monayem Khondokar on May 7.

The video clip showed torture of a fox tangled up in a net, being attacked by dogs.

In the comments, one Md Masum said the fox was caught in a net in front of his house, adding, “The dog killed it slowly”. According to his Facebook, he is an assistant teacher at a high school in Kishoreganj.

The post was deleted amid heavy criticism. The incident took place at Charigram village in Kishoreganj’s Mithamoin.

Animal rights activist Rakibul Haq Emil said, “This is very unfortunate. The video shows cruelty on a vulnerable animal and people are entertained by it. This was a clear violation of the law.”

Besides, as they posted violent content on Facebook, it is also a violation of Digital

Security Act-2018. The above incident violates section-6 under Animal Welfare Act-2019, which can result in up to six months of non-rigorous imprisonment or a fine of Tk 10,000, Email told this newspaper.

Contacted, Wildlife Crime Control Unit Director ASM Jahir Uddin Akan said, “If the fox was killed, this will violate the Wildlife Conservation and Security Act-2012.”

Asked if they would take any step, he said, “During this pandemic, it’s impossible to move instantly. We’re looking into it.”

Contacted, Md Masum said, “Foxes attack poultry so villagers are weary of them. Some youth set up a trap beside my house and caught the fox and set a dog on it.”

“Locals had asked people to let the fox go when the dog attacked it, but someone recorded and posted the video,” he added.

This correspondent attempted to contact Monayem -- on whose profile the video was posted -- but his phone was switched off.

Three petitions

FROM PAGE 3
 The court will hear the petitions that remained pending at the court from March 29.

The official closure of the courts in the nationwide shutdown is scheduled to stay till May 16.

Over 900 bail petitions are pending at the court at present.

Contacted, Dhaka Bar Association President Iqbal Hossain said he has received the notice and will convey the message to lawyers in the association.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate AM Zulfiker Hayat has formed four courts for holding hearings on bail petitions in the cases filed with 49 police stations under DMP.

The four courts are of Metropolitan Magistrates Sarafuzzaman Ansary, Sabbir Yasir Ahsan Chowdhury, Debdash Chandra Adhikary and Rajesh Chowdhury.

Earlier, Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain had issued necessary directives for the lower courts for holding hearings on bail petitions of urgent cases through using information and communication technology during the ongoing shutdown.

Beyond the line

FROM PAGE 3
 They receive daily orders from 11am to 5pm through three hotlines -- 01537551110, 01883422631, 01883422632.

“People from different income groups are calling us, seeking support for food and other essentials,” said Mahmuda Afroz Lucky, additional deputy commissioner (admin) of Mirpur division. They have so far provided food and daily essentials support to around 1,600 families, she said.

Doctors hopeful

FROM PAGE 3
 hospitalised for one week at the beginning of April.

The academic taught at Dhaka and Chittagong universities, was a post-doctoral fellow at University of Chicago, and a Commonwealth Academic Staff Fellow at University of London.

He was awarded Ekushey Padak and Swadhinata Padak, the highest civilian awards in Bangladesh government, and Padma Bhushan from India, for his distinguished service in Bangla literature and education.

Gonoshasthaya wants temp

FROM PAGE 12
 and a public health expert said, adding that it would be great if the government temporarily approved the kits.

“[With an approval] We could test the patients suffering from other diseases linked to kidney and heart and suggest the next course of action.”

Treating kidney failure patients with Covid-19 would require a separate place which the Gonoshasthaya hospital does not have, he said, adding that the hospital provides dialysis to over 250 patients every day.

The hospital would set up two dialysis machines for kidney failure patients with coronavirus infection if there is a place available near Dhanmondi, he said.

Authorities in the UK, USA and India have quickly approved home-grown rapid coronavirus testing kits, Zafrullah said.

“We expect our government to be prompt and to act considering the nature

of emergency.”

When Gonoshasthaya approached the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) for validation of their kit on April 26, DGDA asked it to go through contract research organisations (CROs). Gonoshasthaya, however, refused to do that, arguing that that process would raise the price of the kit.

On April 30, the DGDA permitted Gonoshasthaya Kendra to have their kits independently validated by the BSMMU. On May 2, the BSMMU formed a committee headed by virology professor Shahina Tabassum.

RT-PCR, which is widely considered the best coronavirus testing method, is being used in Bangladesh. But it is expensive and time-consuming. On the other hand, a rapid test is a low-cost alternative that takes about 15 minutes. Many countries are using these tests.

Land for landless peasants

FROM PAGE 12
 bighas of land, he adds.

BANGABANDHU RETURNS TO DHAKA

After successfully completing his four-day tour of North Bengal, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today returns to Dhaka. He was given a warm farewell by the people of Rangpur before he left for Dhaka.

HOSPITAL FOR INJURED FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Bangabandhu declared on May 10 in Pabna that a hospital will be established in Dhaka for injured freedom fighters. The hospital will be named after Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq.

ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMME
 With the support of the ministry of cooperatives, 2,000 adult literacy

centres have been established across the country. Fifty-two teacher training centres have also been established to support these private initiatives. The government is also actively considering a mass literacy programme worth Tk 47 crore with a target of achieving 80 percent literacy rate within five years.

BANGLADESH
 Bangladesh will get two more Fokker airplanes from Netherlands. These aircrafts will reach Dhaka within two months. At present Bangladesh Biman has two Fokker, one DC-6 and one Boeing jet.

SOURCE: May 13, 1972 issue of Dainik Bangla.

DU decides

FROM PAGE 12
 “Online classes can be held after Eid upon ensuring technical support and other facilities for teachers and students, if the ongoing indefinite closure extends further,” it added.

Speaking to The Daily Star, DU VC Prof Akhtaruzzaman said the university has to ensure the necessary technical support for teachers and students to go for online classes.

The meeting also reached a consensus on taking classes on weekends and extra classes to make up for academic losses.

Yesterday’s meeting was organised to evaluate the feasibility of online classes and to find the way and necessary steps to mitigate the academic losses the students may face due to the indefinite shutdown of the university.

A week after the country reported its first Covid-19 case on March 8, the DU authorities suspended all academic activities till March 28. The suspension, which was later extended for an indefinite period, resulted in the cancellation of mid-term examinations of many departments.

Fears of second wave grow

FROM PAGE 12
 some shops were set to reopen, causing a surge in the numbers using the Paris metro.

“If it’s like this at 6:00 am, imagine how it’s going to be in two hours -- this is going to be impossible,” said one rider named Brigitte on a crowded train early yesterday.

Many Spaniards revelled in being able to visit outdoor terraces and cafes again after months under one of the world’s toughest lockdowns, although virus hotspots such as Madrid and Barcelona remain under wraps.

“I really missed this, now you value these little pleasures,” said Jesus Vazquez, a 51-year-old builder, as he enjoyed a breakfast sandwich and beer in the sunshine outside a bar in the city of Tarragona.

Shopping boulevards were once again populated with pedestrians in Greece, while other parts of Europe from the Netherlands to Switzerland and Croatia youngsters headed back to the classroom after weeks at home.

“They were jumping with joy when they saw their friends again, they were very happy,” 43-year-old Manon told AFP as she dropped off her three children at school in The Hague.

Germany too has set in motion the reopening of shops, eateries,

schools and gyms, but the process was thrown in doubt Sunday by official data indicating the virus appears to be picking up speed again.

Chancellor Angela Merkel only days ago declared the country could gradually return to normal, but the figures showed the reproduction rate of the virus had exceeded the critical figure of 1.0, meaning one person infects on average more than one other.

As recently as Wednesday, the number had stood at 0.65.

In Britain, meanwhile, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it was too soon for the country to lift its lockdown but he offered hope by unveiling a “conditional plan” to ease curbs in England during the months ahead.

Johnson said the restrictions had brought “a colossal cost to our way of life” but it would be “madness” to squander the nation’s progress by moving too early.

Almost seven weeks after a nationwide stay-at-home order was put in place, more than 31,800 people have died in Britain -- a figure second only to the United States.

SECOND WAVE FEARS
 With governments across the world trying to avoid a second wave, Asian nations that were among the first engulfed by the virus but have since

brought it to heel are being keenly watched.

Much of China has begun to get back to a form of normality, and yesterday Shanghai Disneyland threw open its gates following a three-month shutdown.

“We are very much looking forward to the first day of reopening and wondering what’s the difference inside today compared to before,” said one eager visitor named Kitty.

But enthusiasm in China was tempered by news on Sunday that one person had tested positive for the virus in Wuhan. There were five more cases yesterday.

Local health officials said the new infections were all from the same residential compound in the city and were mostly older people.

South Korean officials ordered nightclubs and bars closed after a fresh burst of transmission linked to an entertainment district in the capital.

‘Drug dealer’

FROM PAGE 12
 where doctors declared him dead.

Three police personnel, including ASP Nihad, were hurt, the OC claimed.

Police also claimed to have recovered 1.1 lakh yaba pills, a pistol, and four bullets from the spot.

Two AL men killed

FROM PAGE 12
 noon. The three other injured were admitted to the medical facility.

In the afternoon, injured Lokman Hossain was sent to Kshatia General Hospital as his condition deteriorated, the OC added.

Bazlur said the leaders of the both groups are supporters of Salauddin Joardar Mamun, organising secretary of Kacherkol union AL and also the chairman of

Kacherkol Union Parishad.

The bodies of the deceased were handed to their relatives in the afternoon after autopsies were carried out on those at the morgue of Jhenidah Sadar Hospital, police said.

The two were buried at their family graveyard in Dhuliapara village.

Police were preparing a case in connection with the incident.

OBITUARY



Salek Uddin Ahmed, a resident of Gandaria, died on Sunday, May 10th. He was 83 years old. He left behind his only son, daughter-in-law & grandchildren. Please pray for Mr. Salek.

Virus interrupts

FROM PAGE 12
 the virus, with animation dubbing halted to keep staff safe, broadcaster Fuji Television Network said.

“We will halt broadcast of new episodes of ‘Sazae-san’ for the time being from May 17 and instead air re-runs,” it announced on Sunday.

The network said upcoming broadcasts would be episodes from two years ago, adding it would announce a date for the resumption of new episodes as soon as possible.

It is the first time the network has been forced to air re-runs since 1975, when the economic effects of an earlier oil crisis lingered.

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি	
০১	মাসপত্র
০২	বছরসি/সিডি
০৩	বছরসি/সিডি ও ব্লগ
০৪	বছরসি/সিডি
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২৩	বছরসি/সিডি

Protecting those keeping city

FROM PAGE 12
 titled Corona rukhte porichchhonnota kormider pashe (Standing beside cleaning workers to stop the spread of coronavirus), earlier in April, said Tanver.

They are raising funds through the group and providing the necessary protective equipment, soap and other relief items to garbage collectors. People in Bangladesh and abroad have also joined the initiative.

Tanver said, “The waste collectors have to move through different holdings to collect household waste. Moreover, they are engaged in sorting different types of waste to collect saleable plastic materials, which exposes them to high risk of Covid-19 infection. So, the garbage handlers could unknowingly become carriers of coronavirus. The safety of their lives is important as it is important to dispose of the garbage and, most importantly, to reduce the possibility of social transmission. Therefore, we realise that we need to ensure their safety first.”

To this end, they have designed a free package for the safety of cleaners and garbage handlers, which includes a PPE, gumboots, washable mask, PVC hand-gloves, safety goggle and two soap bars. They are also providing a food relief package for their families including 5 kg of rice, 2 kg potato, 1 kg lentil and 1 litre vegetable oil. In addition to providing this support, they have been raising awareness through social media on avoiding community transmission of coronavirus, regular use of safety equipment and highlighting the importance of the safety of cleaners and garbage handlers.

They have served more than 1,200 cleaners and garbage handlers in Tejaon,

Uttara, Mirpur, Adabor, Gulshan, Rampura, Nazira Bazar, Mohammadpur, and Niketan till now, said Tanver, adding that “Urmi Group, a garments manufacturer, who are making PPE suit for medical professionals has supported us with 500 suits.”

Apart from this, they are visiting the respective areas of waste collectors and training them on how to use personal protective equipment while on duty, he said, adding that they have also appointed volunteers in the respective wards, who give them pertinent information about the waste collectors. Alongside, they have supported the families of 720 sweepers in Nazira Bazar with washable masks, PVC hand-gloves and a pair of soaps.

Waste collector Hazrat Mia of Banasree said he has been in the profession for over two decades but this was the first time that he was given personal protective equipment. He thanked “Tanver bhai” and his organisation, ICAN BD, for helping them with the protective gear, food and other necessary items in this trying time.

Tanver said people who are active on social media have been providing lists of cleaners and garbage handlers from different parts of Dhaka. Based on that information, they are reaching out to those garbage handlers with necessary items and encouraging them to continue their good work by ensuring personal safety. This entire activity is being conducted through the contributions of people at home and abroad.

This initiative of ICAN BD, a social development organisation, has received tremendously positive responses from residents of other cities like Chattogram and many have begun to join the initiative, he said.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
 Directorate General of Health Services
 Office of the Director, Stores & Supplies
 Central Medical Stores Depot
 30, Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Sharoni, Tejaon, Dhaka-1208

Corrigendum

IFT No. CMSD/G-1907/ICT/2019-2020/D-2/71 dated 17/02/2020

Procurement of Lab Equipment (NCL)

Invitation for Tender (IFT) No. CMSD/G-1907/ICT/2019-2020/D-2/71 dated 17/02/2020 and the relevant portions of the tender documents is hereby amended to read as under:

Tender Reference	Existing Entries	Amended Entries
Section 2. Tender Data Sheet (TDS): ITT 36.1, ITT 42.2 & Column of IFT No. 10 & 11.		
Last selling date:	21/04/2020 (During office hours)	18/05/2020 (During office hours)
Tender submission date:	11:00 Hours Bangladesh Standard Time (BST=GMT+6hrs.) on 22/04/2020	11:00 Hours Bangladesh Standard Time (BST=GMT+6hrs.) on 19/05/2020
Tender opening date:	11:30 Hours Bangladesh Standard Time (BST=GMT+6hrs.) on 22/04/2020	11:30 Hours Bangladesh Standard Time (BST=GMT+6hrs.) on 19/05/2020

Director (Stores & Supplies) & Line Director, Procurement, Storage & Supplies Management of Health Services (PSSM/HS), Central Medical Stores Depot 30, Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Sharoni, Tejaon, Dhaka-1208
 Telephone: 9129231
 Fax No. 88-02-9126547
 e-mail: cmsdstore@dhaka.net

GD-821

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC LATEST UPDATES

MORE THAN 282,000 DEATHS The novel coronavirus has killed at least 282,447 people since the outbreak first emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT on Monday.

FRANCE MAY REIMPOSE CURBS France could reverse the relaxation of its nationwide lockdown if there is a resurgence of the coronavirus outbreak, Health Minister Olivier Veran warned.

RUSSIA OVERTAKES ITALY, UK Russia's coronavirus cases overtook Italian and British infections yesterday to become the third highest in the world after a record daily rise.

NEW ZEALAND TO EASE 'ALL CURBS' New Zealand will allow restaurants, cafes, cinemas, and shopping centres to reopen, as well as travel within the country to resume from Thursday as it eases most of the restrictions put in place to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

LOCKDOWN RELICS IN MUSEUMS Museums are already gathering testimony and objects to remember life under the historic lockdown. The Museum of London has launched an appeal for people to donate items that reflect their lives during the outbreak, including face masks and slippers.

UK LOCKDOWN TO LAST TILL JUNE 1 Britain's coronavirus lockdown will stay in place until at least June 1, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Sunday, as he unveiled cautious plans to lift restrictions imposed seven weeks ago.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



A detained demonstrator shouts slogans as protest against India's newly inaugurated link road to the Chinese border that Nepal claims have been built on its territory rages on in Kathmandu, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

MEASURES TO COUNTER OIL SLUMP, VIRUS Saudi triples VAT rate

REUTERS, Riyadh/Dubai

Saudi Arabia will triple value added tax and suspend a cost of living allowance for state workers, it said yesterday, seeking to shore up finances hit by low oil prices as the coronavirus pandemic pummels global demand for its lifeline export.

Historic oil output cuts agreed by Riyadh and other major producers have given only limited support to prices after they sank on oversupply caused by a war for petroleum market share between the kingdom and its fellow oil titan Russia.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, is also being hit hard by measures to fight the new coronavirus, which are likely to curb the pace and scale of economic reforms launched by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

About 1.5 million Saudis are employed in the government sector, according to official figures released in December.

"These measures are painful but necessary to maintain financial and economic stability over the medium to long term...and to overcome the unprecedented coronavirus crisis with the least damage possible," he added in a statement.

The austerity measures come after the kingdom posted a \$9 billion budget deficit in the first quarter. The government has cancelled and put on hold some operating and capital expenditures for some government agencies, and cut allocations for some reform initiatives and projects worth a total 100 billion riyals (\$26.6 billion), the statement said.

Cases surge as lockdowns ease

THE STATESMAN, DAWN/ ANN

India yesterday recorded its biggest one-day spike in coronavirus cases and Pakistan is set to open markets despite a steep rise in numbers of infections amid warning that worst of the crisis is yet to come.

Under pressure, governments in south Asia are gradually opening up their economies to reduce the pain for hundreds of thousands of people out of work for weeks and running short of food and cash.

Apart from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, other countries of the region have reported limited number of cases and deaths. Afghanistan has seen 120 deaths and 4402 cases so far.

Nepal yesterday reported ten new Covid-19 cases, which take the country's coronavirus tally to 120. The country hasn't reported any deaths. Sri Lanka is tightening lockdown with 863 cases and only 9 deaths.

Myanmar reported 180 cases with 9 deaths. Maldives has 835 cases with 3 deaths. Bhutan has only 9 cases so far.

The tallies probably reflect only a fraction of the actual number of infections. Many countries are testing only the most serious cases.

In the biggest single-day jump, India yesterday recorded 4,213 cases

CORONAVIRUS IN SOUTH ASIA

India sees record 4,213 cases in 24 hours, set to restart some passenger trains

Pakistan opens markets after recording more than 10,000 cases in a week

Nepal detects 10 new cases



in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of infections to 67,152 in the country. As many as 97 deaths were reported in the same period taking the toll to 2,206.

Of the total Coronavirus cases, 44,029 are active cases and as many as 20,917 COVID-19 patients have been cured and discharged. The recovery rate stood at 31.14 per cent this morning, a significant improvement over 26.59 per cent registered last Sunday.

With the lockdown set to end on May 17, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was scheduled to hold a meeting with chief ministers this afternoon to discuss the shutdown.

Meanwhile, in what can be seen as a step towards easing the nationwide lockdown, the Indian Railways plans

to gradually restart limited passenger trains from May 12. India has already relaxed restrictions on farming, banking and public works.

In Pakistan, government embraces further relaxation in lockdown and opened markets amid a sharp rise in death toll and cases. The government hopes that the virus will not spread as rapidly as previously had been estimated but takes measures to prepare the nation for the worst.

During the last one week, the country has recorded 200 deaths and more than 10,000 new cases of the highly contagious virus. With this addition, the overall death toll has surged to 661 with the number of coronavirus cases rising to 30,416.

230 arrested as Hong Kong democracy protest returns

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police arrested hundreds of people during weekend democracy protests -- including a 12-year-old boy -- officials said yesterday, in the first major political unrest since the coronavirus outbreak began.

The disclosure came as the financial hub's pro-Beijing leader Carrie Lam vowed to overhaul the city's education system, arguing its liberal studies curriculum helped fuel last year's huge protests.

On Sunday -- two days after virus restrictions on gatherings were eased and bars and gyms allowed to reopen -- riot police chased flash-mob protesters through multiple shopping malls. They later used pepper spray and batons against protesters and journalists in Mong Kok district.

Police said 230 people between the ages of 12 and 65 were arrested on various charges including unlawful assembly, assaulting a police officer and failing to produce identity documents.

Others were also fined for breaching anti-coronavirus measures banning more than eight people gathering in public.



Hospital authorities said 18 people received treatment for injuries.

Sunday's protests invoked memories of the seven straight months of often-violent youth-led pro-democracy protests last year, when millions hit the streets.

More than 8,000 people have been arrested so far -- around 17 percent of them secondary school students.

For the last four months mass arrests and the coronavirus ushered in a period of enforced calm. But with the finance hub successfully tackling its COVID-19 outbreak -- and social distancing measures easing -- unrest is bubbling up again.

Kabul rocked by 4 blasts

AFP, Kabul

Four roadside bombs detonated in less than 90 minutes yesterday in a northern district of Kabul, wounding four civilians including a child, police said.

Militants have carried out several roadside bombings and rocket attacks in Kabul and other parts of the country in recent weeks, but yesterday morning's blasts appeared to be the first coordinated effort for some months.

No group has claimed the responsibilities for the blasts yet.

The bombings were in an area where Afghanistan's intelligence agency recently busted a joint Islamic State-Haqani network cell accused of carrying out several attacks.

Official document from Bangladesh government regarding a license for the sale of goods. It includes a list of items such as 'ময়দান/বিভাগ', 'সংস্থা', 'দরপত্র সম্পাদনকারী প্রধান', etc., and their respective details and prices.

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
Closed	Closed	\$1,690.20 (per ounce)	\$30.20 (per barrel)	0.26%	1.05%	0.75%	0.02%	BUY TK 83.95	90.03	103.44	11.71
				31,561.22	20,390.66	2,611.31	2,894.80	SELL TK 84.95	93.83	107.24	12.31



Star BUSINESS

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TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

BB finally orders banks to suspend dividends to prime the pump

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN and AHSAN HABIB

In an undaunted move, the central bank yesterday instructed banks to not give any cash dividend to both sponsors and investors until September to boost their capacity to absorb the strain on their capital base from the ongoing economic dire straits.

The move, which follows the lead of the central banks around the world, would help banks to fight against the ongoing recession as it will inject about Tk 3,000 crore in capital into banks' balance sheet, bankers said.

Banks, which are unable to keep the required provisioning against their loans, will not be allowed to declare last year's dividend, according to the Bangladesh Bank notice.

Beyond September, the BB has set four criteria for banks to offer dividends.

As per the central bank instruction, banks whose capital adequacy ratio (CAR) against their risk-weighted assets (RWA) is 12.50 and above will be permitted to give 30 per cent dividend.

They will have to provide 15 per cent stock dividend of the total volume.

The lenders, whose CAR is between 11.25 per cent and less than 12.50 per cent, can provide a 15 per cent dividend, including 7.50 per cent stock dividend.

If any bank facing provision shortfall intends to declare a dividend, it will have to ensure the required provisioning to do so.

Lenders that have managed their provisioning shortfall and are maintaining CAR of 11.25 per cent and above will be allowed to declare a maximum of 10 per cent dividend, including 5 per cent stock one.

Banks whose CAR is between 10 per cent and less than 11.25 per cent can offer 5 per cent stock dividend. And they also will have to maintain the required provisioning after the existing shortfall.

If any lender's CAR is less than 10 per cent, it cannot be offered any dividend.

Besides, all banks will have to maintain the required capital conservation buffer (CCB) along with the existing CAR as per the Basel III guidelines to declare the capital.

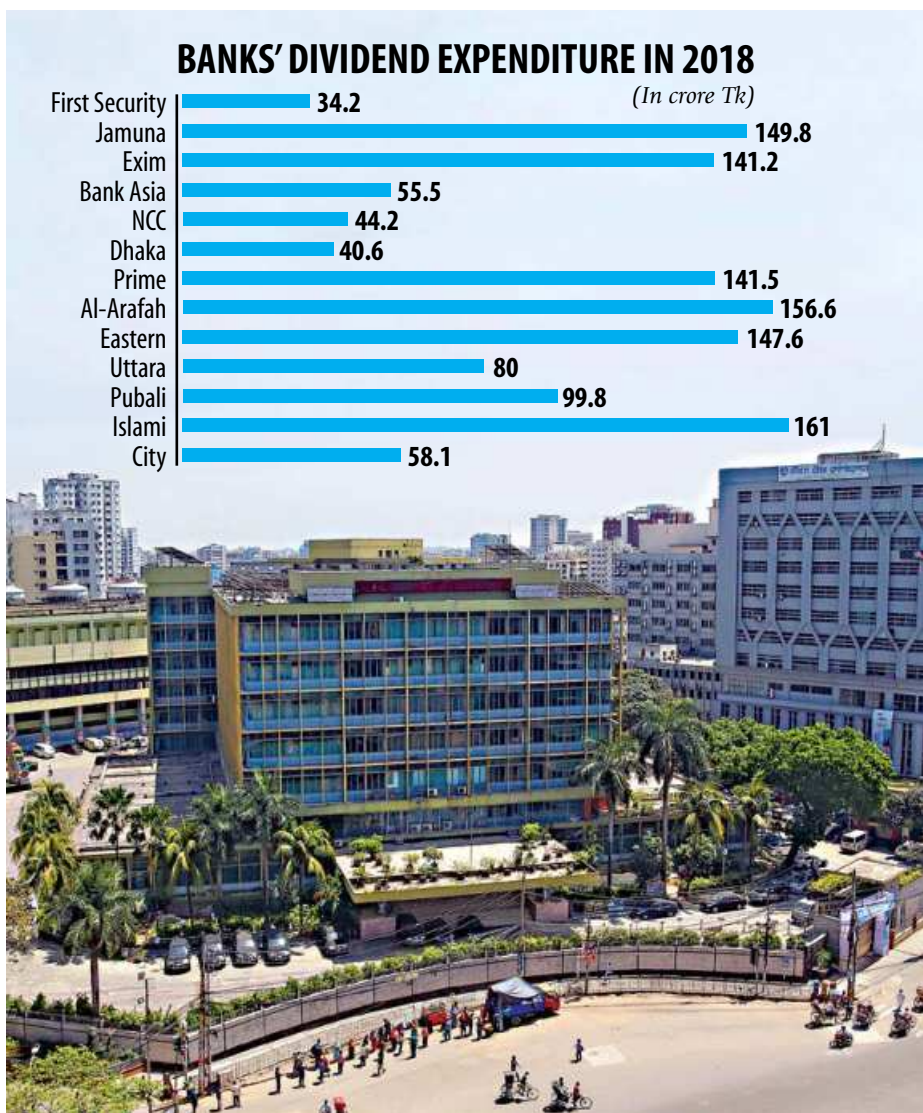
Lenders will have to keep 2.5 per cent CCB including 12.50 CAR.

Banks that have already declared their dividends have been asked to follow the instruction.

Foreign banks will not be permitted to transfer their dividend to their parent companies as well, said a central bank official.

"Banks usually do not offer only stock dividend without declaring cash. They can do so after September," he added.

Lenders and non-bank financial institutions will be able to set aside nearly Tk 3,000 crore as they are now



allowed not to provide a dividend to their directors and shareholders.

Some 30 banks and 23 NBFIs listed with the capital market provided cash dividend amounting to Tk 1,670 crore in 2018.

There are 59 banks in Bangladesh.

The central bank will declare the same instruction for NBFIs as well.

Several central banks around the world including the European Central Bank, the Bank of England and the Reserve Bank of India have instructed their banks not to offer last year's dividend such that they can prime the pump.

Depositors are withdrawing money from banks since the last week of March when the government declared the shutdown to contain the spread of coronavirus, leaving the lenders fending off an acute liquidity crunch.

This compelled the central bank to cut the cash reserve ratio and policy rate in two phases.

But the latest decision will help banks to a great extent to improve their liquidity base, the central banker said.

"This decision will help banks to tackle the ongoing economic fallout," said Md Arfan Ali, managing director of Bank Asia, adding that the lenders' capital base will be strengthened as a result.

Pubali Bank Managing Director MA Halim Chowdhury echoed the

same, saying this is a good decision beyond doubt.

"The economy is going through a tough time. The instruction will improve the financial health of banks," he added.

It is a good step to strengthen the banks' capital base and to ensure accountability, said Md Moniruzzaman, managing director of IDLC Investments.

"But postponing dividend until September might have a negative impact on the share prices."

Since the BB is allowing only the healthy banks to pay a dividend, those banks most likely already have enough cash in hand to give out the dividends, Moniruzzaman added.

"Given the condition of the economy, the central bank step is a good measure for all, be it banks, the stock market or the investors," said Mohammed Rahmat Pasha, chief executive officer of UCB Capital Management.

If the banks' health becomes precarious for giving out the dividend, it will make the situation much worse for both the investors and the stock market in the days to come.

"So, this is a logical decision."

Investors will get higher benefits in the long-run if they hold on to the stocks of the well-performing banks.

"You [the investors] have to give up something in the short-run to reap benefits in the long-run," Pasha added.

Abdul Mannan, a stock investor, however, is angry with the BB decision as he was bracing for some handsome dividends.

"If the listed banks don't disburse cash dividend, how we will get returns from the capital market at a time when stock prices are falling?" he asked.

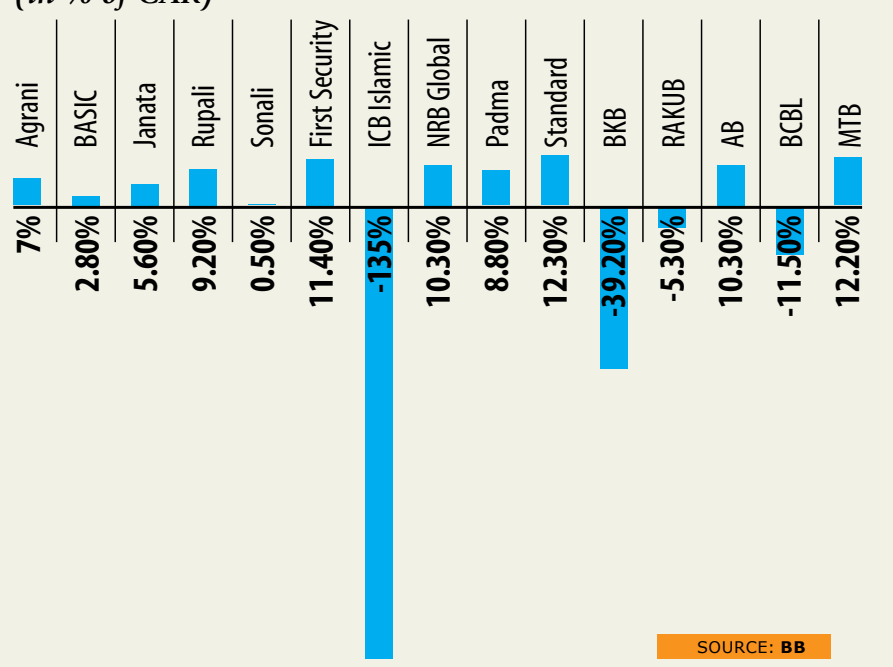
Another central bank official acknowledged that the stock market investors will be losers for the time being, but they will get back their returns eventually as the decision will strengthen banks' health.

"This was a polemic, tough decision for us. We faced obstacles in taking this stance as some bank directors strictly opposed it."

More than 50 per cent of the total dividend is usually enjoyed by the bank directors, he said.

"We hope that people's confidence in both the central bank and the commercial banks will fortify due to the latest decision. We have taken this decision in the interest of the economy," the BB official added.

Banks that fell short of BASEL III standards (in % of CAR)



SOURCE: BB

Bangladesh's bourse is the only one in the world in recess

All stock exchanges around the globe trading amid pandemic

AHSAN HABIB

Bangladesh is the only country in the world where stock trading has remained closed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Until this week, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Jordan were the three countries where stock markets had been shut.

Sri Lanka started the trading yesterday and witnessed a huge sale pressure.

The Colombo stock market's index of the most liquid shares, S&P SL 20, plunged more than 10 per cent on the first day of the trading since March 20.

Jordan, where trading had been suspended since March 16, also experienced the same when it reopened on Sunday. The Amman Stock Exchange's ASE Index dropped more than 15 per cent.

The Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) and the Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) have been closed since March 26 in line with the government's general holiday aimed at stopping the spread of the virus. The longest closure of the stock market since the Liberation War would hurt the image of the markets, according to analysts.

"The impact of the shutdown would be clear in the long-run," said Mohammed Rahmat Pasha, chief executive officer of UCB Capital Management.

"The setting of the floor price turned the markets into illiquid ones and it would be costlier to regain the image internationally."

Before the shutdown, the stock market regulator fixed the floor price of all stocks by calculating the previous five days' average prices in order to prevent fall.

But after the floor price was fixed, most of the stocks did not find buyers. The shutdown further means that none can sell shares even if they need to.

"Many foreign investors are preparing to sell shares in large volume once the market reopens," said a top official of a stock brokerage house that deals foreign portfolios.

The stock market has been suffering because of the COVID-19 all over the world, but they would bounce back strongly when the economy makes a turnaround. However, there is no such hope in Bangladesh and it will suffer more due to the wrong policy, he said.

The main blow would come if the country's capital market is kicked out of the MSCI Index.

The index captures mid- and large caps across more than two dozen emerging markets. It is a float-adjusted market capitalisation index. The MSCI Bangladesh Index was launched on Dec 1, 2009.

If the shutdown continues, it may be kicked out of the index in the next rearrangement, said a broker.

If Bangladesh is removed from the index, a huge sell pressure would occur naturally, as many foreign index fund managers invest by looking at the index, said an institutional investor.

The ongoing market closure is the longest since the last shutdown in 1969 when the mass upsurge took place. The market resumed in 1976.

Trading was closed for four days at a stretch in 2004 due to massive floods. Apart from these, the market was largely closed because of technical glitches.

"When all the stock markets are open all over the world, the closure of our market would give a negative signal to investors," said a merchant banker.

"The market should resume operations as early as possible," Pasha said.

A share trading has two parts: one is share transfer and another is transferring money. Central Depository Bangladesh Ltd (CDBL) carries out share transfer and a department of the DSE transfers the money.

"We carry out the share transfer through online and it is possible to continue trading with our limited presence in the office," said Shuvra Kanti Choudhury, managing director of CDBL.

The money transfer system of the bourse is still manual, so DSE officials need to go office and brokers also need to reopen, said an official of the bourse.

Recently, the Dhaka bourse sought permission from the regulator to open the market.

However, there is little possibility for getting the consent as two commissioners left the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission recently and the tenure of the chairman is also going to expire this month, said an official of the commission.

Robi lets rip at the ongoing price war

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

In an unprecedented move, the country's second largest mobile operator yesterday blew off its pent-up resentment against the market leader over its offer of free voice call minutes and bonus data packs on humanitarian grounds during the pandemic.

Without mentioning the name of Grameenphone, Robi officials said such a price war waged by the leading operator will push smaller carriers to the brink of collapse.

In an online press conference, Robi's Chief Executive Officer Mahtab Uddin Ahmed also expressed dismay over the regulator's approval to the Grameenphone package with a series of initiatives, one of them being 10 crore free minutes to 1 crore customers (10 minutes per user).

Grameenphone also offered monthly 30GB data to the 25,000 registered doctors of the Directorate General of Health Services with a

token Tk 1 per month for the next six months.

The top player is out to grab the market in the pretext of COVID-19 crisis and this is a clear example of price war declared by the market leader, said Ahmed, also the president of the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh.

"We expect that the market leader will be sensible regarding their offers and will keep their belief in co-existence," he said while calling upon the government and the regulator to look into what he terms an unhealthy competition.

Ahmed also warned that if the regulator does not step in to discipline the market leader, it will continue to cash in on the pandemic to further its business interests.

"Unless the regulator and the government believe that the country's interest is best served by having only one operator in the market, they ought to make their move right now, because we won't be able to sustain our business



RASHED SHUMON

if the market leader is not made to adhere to significant market power (SMP) regulations now," he added.

The rift between Grameenphone and the rest began to widen when Robi, Banglalink and Teletalk demanded some free spectrum for the time being to handle the surge in data use amid the shutdown.

Grameenphone had also later sought additional spectrum for the same purpose but maintained a stance against the idea of free allocation of spectrum.

Ahmed yesterday said different countries including the US awarded free spectrum to their carriers to help ensure better service and promote social distancing.

Robi has no other option but to make retaliatory offers to secure their market share and some packages were already underway, like 10-minute talk-time and 50MB free data for customers who used to recharge regularly but now cannot do so because of the public health crisis.

The operator will pursue aggressive data bundle offers and already chalked out a plan to support stakeholders in the company's sales and distribution channels with food supply, credit facilities and health insurance.

As Grameenphone is an SMP operator, the regulator should keep this in mind while approving its packages; otherwise, the market will have to brace for dire consequences, said Shahed Alam, Robi's chief corporate and regulatory officer.

In the Indian market, there were 12 carriers even a few years ago, but only four now exist due to an unfair competition brought about by an operator with huge financial muscle.

About the complaints of Robi, Grameenphone said now is the time to stand beside the country with collective efforts and act responsibly.

"It is regrettable that such remarks are made. We appreciate that others are inspired and coming forward," said Md Hasan, head of its external communications.



TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Work from home taking a toll

MAHMUDUL HASAN

When the multinational company Shaker Hossain introduced work from home option from the third week of March, just as the rogue coronavirus was gaining a foothold in the country, he was beside himself with relief.

Relief that he no longer would have to sit through the Dhaka traffic for two hours on his commute to and from work; relief that he has fewer chances of catching the deadly virus now.

After a few days of working remotely, the novelty soon wore off. And in its place entered insomnia, backache, weight gain, restlessness, stress and anxiety.

"It has just become a 24-hour job for me," said the mid-level employee at the multinational company.

He now opens his laptop at 9 am and shuts its lid at midnight as his bosses are giving him work, one after another.

"The day and the night seem the same to me now. A strange sense of ennui has taken hold of my life," he said, adding that his output is not satisfactory when compared with his input.

Still, he is putting up with his bosses' whims as the fear of losing his job looms large on his mind. Many of his friends from his business school have been furloughed or laid off recently.

Like Hossain, hundreds and thousands of jobholders are going through the gamut of emotions as companies shut office operations after the nationwide shutdown was announced from 26.



COLLECTED

ICT State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak has been thriving working from his home in Dhaka, conducting a raft of meetings every day.

Initially imposed for 10 days, the shutdown has been extended thrice as the coronavirus caseload escalated in the country. At present, the shutdown will be effective until May 16.

The sedentary lifestyle that Tariqul Islam Khan, a deputy general manager at the Bangladesh Oil, Gas and Mineral Corporation (Petrobangla), leads means he has gained 5 kilograms in weight in the last 40 days.

While working in his office space, he would be attending meetings and interacting with people. But, now, absolutely everything has gone virtual and managing it that way is proving to be highly stressful for him.

"Stress and anxiety are such things that can devastate any one's

life. My blood pressure is constantly fluctuating and I can't sleep at night," said Khan, who also suffers from Type 2 diabetes.

And it is not just the middle-aged jobholders who are finding the new working arrangement difficult to get a handle on.

Munir Momtaj, a young sub-editor at a news portal, working remotely was immensely enjoyable at first and did not mind doing twice the normal amount of work.

"But my life feels monotonous now without going outside for days on end," he said, while expressing an overwhelming sense of anxiety of when normalcy would return to his life.

To make matters worse, the distressing news on the novel

coronavirus pandemic is also taking a toll on the mental health of people.

Sharmin Ahmed, a faculty member of the University of Dhaka, thought she would be working on her academic interest with the free time she has been afforded for the suspension of classes.

"But I can't concentrate on my work. So many people, including some of my students, are in such distress and it is hampering my research work," she added.

The tremendous strain that jobholders are now battling for homeworking and overall sense of doom has given rise to calls from clinical psychologists for employers to be a little sensitive and reassuring.

Many people are now suffering from depression because of the fear of getting infected with the virus, fear of an uncertain professional future and economic vulnerability, said Mohammad Hossain, professor at the neurosurgery department of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

"People need to be assured of economic safety. For that, a concerted effort of the government and the rich is needed," he added.

Kazi Inam Ahmed, a director at Gemcon Group that has introduced work from home from March 18, though is looking at the bright side.

"I personally feel holding meetings over Zoom makes them more efficient. Maybe the biggest positive from this is we might learn to do more work from home, which means, considering the Dhaka traffic we can also spend more time with our families," he added.

Remote work prompts decline in demand for personal grooming products

ASHAN HABIB

The pandemic is changing the way we present ourselves to the world.

Weeks into the countrywide general shutdown and coronavirus is starting to lay waste to basic personal grooming routines as we are told to stay home and work remotely if possible.

People are washing their hair less often, going makeup-free, putting off shaving and even abandoning deodorant, according to supermarkets and fast-moving consumer goods companies.

Take the case of Samirah Rahman, who works at a foreign non-governmental organisation. She said she has not used any cosmetics in the last one-and-a-half month at least as she does not need to go to work or do the school run.

"I may have even forgotten how to use an eyeliner," she added.

Last month, makeup giant L'Oréal said the global cosmetics market was down 8 per cent in the first quarter as consumers pulled back on skincare and beauty products.

Unilever reported along these lines. The Anglo-Dutch company said the lockdown had affected its haircare portfolio in China and India, while skincare sales were also down.

Its Chief Financial Officer Graeme Pitkethly said people were spending "more time at home, more time cooking" and maybe has "less personal care occasions" now.

Didarul Alom, a high official of a multinational company, also said he let his grooming standards slip.

He has not been using any deodorant or hair gel since the lockdown started as he is confined at home. "I am not shaving either, so shaving gel and after-shaving products are not needed any more," he added.

"Our cosmetic products sales are almost zero now," said Md Iqbal Hossain, head of business of ACI logistics, which runs the supermarket chain Shwapno.

Normally, people use the colour cosmetics when they go out, but now that they are confined to home, so these products are of no use. Colour cosmetics includes eyeliner, eye shadow, foundation, face powder, lipstick, nail polish etc.

However, personal cleaning products like soap and hand wash sales have doubled between March 8 and April 25, he said. Shampoo sales also surged 40 per cent, Hossain added.

"Hygiene products are now mostly demanded by the customers," said Christabel Randolph, company secretary of Marico Bangladesh.

The Mumbai-based FMCG company that operates in the beauty and wellness space started operations in Bangladesh in 2000 with its flagship brand 'Parachute' coconut oil.

"Soap and shampoo sales remain strong. But pure cosmetic products are not doing well," Randolph added.

Development budget to become a casualty of stimulus packages

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

The annual development programme (ADP) is set to become a big casualty of the resource reshuffling that the government is set to deploy to bankroll the massive stimulus packages announced to jumpstart the economy once the rogue coronavirus has been tamed.

Over the years, the government has always increased the size of the development budget by about 20 per cent from the outgoing year.

But the ADP that the Planning Minister MA Mannan would be finalising today for fiscal 2020-21 would be 6.33 per cent higher than this year's revised development budget at Tk 205,145 crore.

To accommodate the massive spending needing in the immediate future, the government has already suspended financing to all low priority projects.

But allocation for the large projects would not be affected, however, in the next fiscal year. Some Tk 50,000 crore to this end.

The Padma Bridge project would get Tk 5,000 crore, Metro Rail project Tk 4,200 crore, Rooppur nuclear power plant Tk 1,582 crore, Payra seaport Tk 700 crore, Karnaphuli river tunnel Tk 500 crore, Padma Rail Link Tk 3,735 crore, Bangabandhu Rail bridge project Tk 2,744 crore and rail track from Dohazari to Gundum project Tk 1,500 crore.

"The health and agriculture sectors would get priority in the next ADP," Mannan told The Daily Star yesterday.

The pandemic has uncovered the shortcomings in the health sector and the government has been able to avoid a major food crisis because of the agriculture sector, he said.

So the two sectors warrant the utmost attention.

After finalisation, the ADP would be sent to the National Economic Council for approval.

Because of the social distancing being enforced since March 26 to stop the spread of the deadly bug, it is not clear whether the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council chaired by the prime minister would meet, as would have been the case under normal circumstances, to approve the ADP.

The prime minister may approve the ADP through an executive order and thereafter it would be passed in parliament. Alternatively, the prime minister and some key ministers may sit and give the consent.

"We will send the proposal and the government will decide. The situation is different this time," said Mannan.

The changing situation also compelled the planning minister to decide to finalise the ADP on a limited scale.

Only a few secretaries such as those from the finance and planning ministries and the Economic Relations Division and some members of the planning commission would be present at today's meeting, whereas all secretaries would be present on such an important meeting in previous years.

At the meeting, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics may present the provisional estimate of the gross domestic product (GDP) for this fiscal year. The GDP growth would be 5.5 per cent, down from the 8.2 per cent hoped for at the beginning of the fiscal year and higher than the projections made by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

The ADB forecasted that the Bangladesh economy would grow at 3.8 per cent and the WB between 2 per cent and 3 per cent.

FISCAL 2020-21'S ADP BY THE NUMBERS

- Budget may be Tk **205,145**cr
- 6.33pc** bigger than current year's
- Govt portion to be Tk **134,643**cr
- Foreign aid to be Tk **70,502**cr
- Tk **50,000**cr would go to large projects
- GDP growth likely to be **5.5pc** this fiscal year

VAT receipts tank on economic lull

SOHEL PARVEZ

Collection of value-added tax, the biggest source of revenue for the government, dropped 1 per cent in the first 10 months of the fiscal year to Tk 67,760 crore as the countrywide shutdown since March 26 that have brought almost all economic activities to a standstill is starting to show its effect.

In April, VAT collection, which accounts for 39 per cent of total tax receipts, plummeted to Tk 3,650 crore from more than Tk 6,000 crore a month earlier, in what can be viewed as the clearest indication of the economic toll of the shutdown.

This has led the National Board of Revenue to ask its VAT field offices to devise strategies to boost collection as the overall receipts of the indirect tax fell far behind the revised target of Tk 108,600 crore for this fiscal year.

To attain the revised target, revenue officials have to collect Tk 20,000 crore in both May and June against the average monthly collection of Tk 6,777 crore in the first 10 months.

"We are aware of the latest situation. The situation may prevail or improve. Whatever the situation is, we have to proceed by devising required strategies to attain the target," said the NBR director, issued by Md Jamal Hossain, NBR member of VAT implementation, on May 10.

The revenue authority would now be targeting items that generate higher revenue, the directive said, citing areas such as cigarette, mobile usage, mobile financial service providers, internet and medicine.

Intensive communication should be established with big firms. Besides, attention should be given on realising VAT arrears and collection of VAT-at-source, it said.

As part of its efforts to mobilise VAT collection, the NBR has asked its field offices to stay open next Friday, which happens to be the 15th of the month, which is the last day for businesses to file returns for April.

The NBR received 31,000 returns last month, which is half the number it got the previous month.

This has prompted the revenue watchdog to direct its offices to enquire whether firms that did not file statements for March were actually closed or they ran their operations in secret.

The VAT Commissionerate in Dhaka North and Chattogram detected some firms that were up and running although they declared their businesses were shut because of the shutdown.

Nearly 90 per cent of the government revenue comes from tax collection, of which 65 per cent are from indirect taxes, including VAT and other duties.

However, the pandemic is expected to significantly reduce tax receipts, said the Asian Development Bank last week.

Non-tax revenue will also be severely affected by the reduction of imports and other fee sources. A minimum revenue loss of 2 per cent of GDP (\$6.7 billion) is projected by the government, said the Manila-based lender in a document.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ
কমান্ডিং অফিসারের কার্যালয়
২ আর্মড পুলিশ ব্যাটালিয়ন
মুজাপাছা, ময়মনসিংহ

স্মারক নং-কিউ এম-২৭৩/২০১৯-২০/১১৮৩

তারিখঃ ১১/৫/২০২০খ্রিঃ

উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র আহ্বান বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা 'দি পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট আইন-২০০৬ ও পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা-২০০৮, ২০০৯' এবং তদীয় সংশোধনী অনুযায়ী ২০২০-২০২১ অর্থ বৎসরে ২ আর্মড পুলিশ ব্যাটালিয়ন, মুজাপাছা, ময়মনসিংহ এর লট তিরিক কাজের টিকাদার নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে প্রকৃত বাংলাদেশী টিকাদারদের নিকট হতে সীলমোহরকৃত 'উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র' আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

০১।	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ	স্বর্ণটি মন্ত্রণালয়।		
০২।	এজেন্সী	বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ।		
০৩।	সম্মাহক সত্তার নাম	কমান্ডিং অফিসার (এসপি), ২ আর্মড পুলিশ ব্যাটালিয়ন, মুজাপাছা, ময়মনসিংহ।		
০৪।	সম্মাহক সত্তার কোড নং	৩-২২১৩-০৪০০		
০৫।	সম্মাহক সত্তার জেলা	ময়মনসিংহ।		
০৬।	কি জন্য আহ্বান	লট নং-০১, ০২, ০৩, ০৪ ও ০৫-এ বর্ণিত কাজের টিকাদার নিয়োগ।		
০৭।	আহ্বানের সূত্র	দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি স্মারক নং-কিউএম-২৭৩/২০১৯-২০২০/১১৮৩		
০৮।	তারিখ	১১/৫/২০২০খ্রিঃ।		
মূল তথ্যাদিঃ				
০৯।	সম্মাহ পদ্ধতি	উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি (OTM)।		
তহবিল সংক্রান্ত তথ্যাদিঃ				
১০।	বাজেট এবং তহবিলের উৎস	পুলিশ হেডকোয়ার্টার্স, ঢাকা হতে সংশ্লিষ্ট বাজেট অর্থ বরাদ্দ প্রাপ্তি সাপেক্ষে।		
বিশেষ তথ্যাদিঃ				
১১।	দরপত্র প্যাকেজ নং	১২/২০১৯-২০২০		
১২।	দরপত্র প্যাকেজ এর নাম	২ এপিবিএন, মুজাপাছা, ময়মনসিংহের লট নং-০১, ০২, ০৩, ০৪ ও ০৫-এ বর্ণিত কাজের টিকাদার নিয়োগ।		
১৩।	দরপত্র প্রকাশের তারিখ	১১/৫/২০২০খ্রিঃ।		
১৪।	দরপত্র তফসিল বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ	০৩/৬/২০২০খ্রিঃ বেলা ১৪:৩০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত।		
১৫।	দরপত্র গ্রহণের তারিখ ও সময়	০৪/৬/২০২০খ্রিঃ বেলা ১২:৩০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত।		
১৬।	দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ ও সময়	০৪/৬/২০২০খ্রিঃ বেলা ১৩:০০ ঘটিকা।		
১৭।	দরপত্র তফসিল বিতরণ/সরবরাহকারী অফিসের নাম ও ঠিকানা	(ক) ডিআইজি, এপিবিএন কার্যালয়, বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ, উত্তরা, ঢাকা এবং (খ) কমান্ডিং অফিসারের কার্যালয়, ২ এপিবিএন, মুজাপাছা, ময়মনসিংহ এর কার্যালয় হতে দরপত্র তফসিল (সিডিউল) বিক্রয় করা যাবে।		
দরপত্র গ্রহণ ও খোলার স্থান: কমান্ডিং অফিসারের কার্যালয়, ২ এপিবিএন, মুজাপাছা, ময়মনসিংহ।				
দরপত্রের দলিলপত্রাদির বিবরণঃ				
১৮।	দরপত্র ক্রয়ের ক্ষেত্রে টিকাদারের প্রাকযোগ্যতা	(ক) হালনাগাদ ব্যবসায়িক বৈধ ট্রেড লাইসেন্স (খ) হালনাগাদ আয়কর পরিশোধের সনদপত্র (গ) ভ্যাট নিবন্ধন সনদপত্র (ঘ) তফসিলভুক্ত বাণিজ্যিক ব্যাংকের আর্থিক সচ্ছলতা সনদপত্র (ঙ) নাগরিকত্ব সনদপত্র (চ) সংশ্লিষ্ট কাজের অভিজ্ঞতা সনদপত্র (ছ) এফিডেভিট মুদ্রে ফর্ম/প্রতিষ্ঠানের মালিকানা ঘোষণাপত্র (জ) প্রতিষ্ঠানের ক্ষেত্রে ফর্ম/প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিজস্ব প্যাতে প্রকৃতির স্বাক্ষর সত্যায়নসহ ক্ষমতা অর্পণ দিতে হবে। ১ম শ্রেণির গেজেটেড কর্মকর্তা কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত সকল দলিলপত্রাদিসহ ফর্ম/প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্যাতে আবেদনপত্র প্রাপ্তি সাপেক্ষে দরপত্র তফসিল (সিডিউল) বিক্রয় করা হবে। দরপত্র তফসিল ক্রয়ের সময় ফর্ম/প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিজস্ব সীল সঙ্গে আনতে হবে। অন্যান্য শর্তাবলী দরপত্র তফসিলে উল্লেখ করা হবে।		
১৯। কাজের বিবরণঃ				
লট নং	লটের পরিচিতি	দরপত্র তফসিল (সিডিউল) এর মূল্য (অফেরতযোগ্য)	দরপত্র জামানত	কাজ সমাপ্তির সময়সীমা
০১	স্বাস্থ্যবিধান সামগ্রী (কোড নং-৩২৫২১০৮) সরবরাহ কাজ	৭৫০/-	৩০,০০০/-	২০২০-২০২১ অর্থ বৎসর
০২	অন্যান্য মনিহারি (কোড নং-৩২৫৫১০৫) সরবরাহ কাজ	৭৫০/-	৩০,০০০/-	
০৩	ব্যবহার্য দ্রব্যাদি (কোড নং-৩২৫৬১০৩) সরবরাহ কাজ	৮৫০/-	৬০,০০০/-	
০৪	ফোর্সের কমব্যাট পোশাক (ইউনিফর্ম) সেলাই কাজ	৭৫০/-	৩৫,০০০/-	
০৫	১২ (বার) আসন বিশিষ্ট ০৩ (তিন)টি উন্নতমানের মাইক্রোবাস মাসিক হিসেবে কাজে সরবরাহ কাজ	৭৫০/-	৩০,০০০/-	
সম্মাহক সত্তার বিবরণঃ				
২১।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার নাম	মোহাম্মদ নাজরুল হোসেন।		
২২।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার পদবী	কমান্ডিং অফিসার (এসপি)।		
২৩।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার ঠিকানা	২ আর্মড পুলিশ ব্যাটালিয়ন, মুজাপাছা, ময়মনসিংহ।		
২৪।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার সহিত যোগাযোগের মাধ্যম	ফোনঃ ০৯০২৮-৭৫৩৪৪, ফ্যাক্সঃ ০৯০২৮-৭৫২০১		
২৫।	বিশেষ শর্তাবলীঃ	ক) নির্দিষ্ট সময়ের পর আর কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে না। খ) দরপত্র দাখিল সংক্রান্ত বিস্তারিত তথ্যাবলী দরপত্র গ্রহণকালে অফিস হতে এবং দরপত্র তফসিলে পাওয়া যাবে। গ) দরপত্র বিক্রয়িত উল্লেখিত প্রতিটি কাজের জন্য পৃথক পৃথক নামে পৃথক পৃথকভাবে উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র দাখিল করতে হবে। ঘ) দরপত্র পিপিআর/২০০৬ ও পিপিআর/২০০৮ মোতাবেক সকল শর্তাবলী কার্যকর হবে। ঙ) সম্মাহক সত্তা কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে সকল দরপত্র গ্রহণ অথবা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।		

Emergency rooms cannot turn away patients

Change this abominable mindset

We are appalled by a report in this paper that relates the harrowing tales of family members of critically ill patients who have been denied treatment for hours or simply turned away by emergency wards in both private and public hospitals. The ongoing pandemic has no doubt left hospitals overwhelmed, but in many cases, emergency patients have been made to wait for hours before any kind of medical attention, resulting in death. Hospital staff have even refused to see patients in fear after hearing that they displayed Covid-19 symptoms.

In one instance, a man's mother who had breathing problems and was unconscious, did not receive any kind of medical attention for a few hours after she was taken to the DMCH. Her son was made to wait in line at the emergency ward where there were no doctors to attend his mother. He was also told that he needed a prescription to get an echocardiogram done. By the time she was given oxygen, it was too late. It is shocking and abominable that a patient would be denied emergency treatment because the paperwork had not been done! An official of the DMCH also said that there were no ICU beds available at the hospital. Even Gautum Aich Sarkar, the additional secretary of the Ministry of Food, died after being denied emergency care at eight hospitals because he had a fever.

Emergency wards of hospitals turning away critically ill patients, no matter what symptoms they are displaying, is just not acceptable and violates all ethical codes that healthcare professionals and hospitals are bound by. This terrible mindset—that patients can be turned away because they might have Covid-19, is morally reprehensible and must be stopped immediately. Patients with other serious ailments such as kidney and heart disease who have needed immediate attention have been turned away as well.

It is clearly the responsibility of the Health Ministry to step in and give clear directives and enforce them strictly, to all hospitals, whether public or private, that they cannot turn away such critical patients no matter what symptoms they display. It is understandable that health professionals are at risk of contracting the virus when they treat patients. Which is why strict safety protocol and necessary protective gear have to be provided to all health professionals and other employees of the hospitals. This should have been ensured weeks ago when the Covid-19 patients were first detected. Hospitals must also employ extra medical staff to deal with emergency patients. The reports of dead patients being left for hours before relatives could see them expose the sheer disrespect for the dead that have reached grotesque proportions in the present crisis. The Health Ministry must, on an urgent basis, provide the resources, guidance, equipment and personnel required to handle emergency patients, as well as to provide dignified treatment of those who do not make it.

Reality of reopening malls and markets

Safety directives flagrantly ignored

In an attempt to ease the nationwide lockdown and resume economic activities, selective shopping malls and other businesses were allowed to function on a "limited basis" starting from May 10 to mitigate the economic losses that have been weighing heavy on them by the day. However, we are appalled to learn from a recent report published in this daily that on the very first day, many shoppers and store staff defied the safety directives set by Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), risking their own lives and those of the general public.

In an attempt to curb the spread of the virus, DMP issued around 12 directives for all those who would be visiting the malls and markets during the pandemic, prior to the reopening. But the report states that different markets around Dhanmondi, Elephant Road, Islampur, Nilkhet, Panthopath and Science Lab intersection blatantly disregarded the precautionary measures. And to make matters worse, roadside vendors were seen selling clothes on the footpaths near Baitul Mokarrom, Gausia Market and New Market with equal disregard. Numerous buyers and sellers were seen without masks or gloves, many shops did not have hand sanitisers for the customers and some people were seen shopping with their children, violating the government's health guidelines. The directives were meant to be strictly maintained—that there should be installation of disinfection chambers at the entrance of every shopping mall, setting up of thermal scanners and separate temperature measurement systems, barring of people without masks from entering markets, and banners illustrating the importance of following health safety and social distancing guidelines—none of which are being followed in most market places.

Surprisingly, in a situation in which monitoring is essential, there were barely any law enforcement personnel to ensure whether the safety standards were being followed or not. The flagrant disregard for safety measures risks a second wave of coronavirus infections, which we cannot afford given how overburdened our healthcare system already is. As both deaths and infections continue to gain momentum, the authorities must immediately intervene to strictly implement the directives set forth since the public seem unable to comply. If these directives cannot be met, returning to full lockdown seems to be the only safe option.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

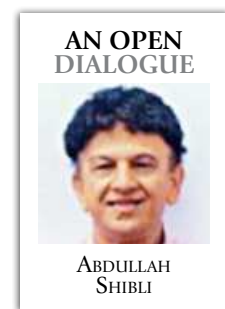
letters@thedailystar.net

Remdesivir sparks hope

I am delighted to learn that Eskayef Pharmaceuticals Ltd has come forward with a solution to tackle the coronavirus infection with a drug named Remdesivir. This news serves as a ray of hope during the pandemic. According to Eskayef, the drug will be available in the market as soon as they get approval from the Directorate General of Drug Administration. I urge the responsible authorities to take the necessary steps and approve mass production and distribution of the drug without wasting any precious time.

Samia Jahan Shefa, Rajbari

How to flatten the recession curve and finance Bangladesh's economic recovery



AN OPEN DIALOGUE

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

ECONOMIC recovery following the coronavirus lockdown will require massive government intervention and tons of money. The Bangladesh government has already introduced a series of measures to contain and mitigate the initial assault by the virus. On the economic front, it has unveiled 18 stimulus packages amounting to Tk 95,619 crore to pull various sectors of the economy out of the coronavirus-induced slump and protect the poor and newly unemployed. As the economy reopens in earnest, factories will need loans, businesses will ask for contracts, and the hungry and the unemployed will seek food, healthcare, and jobs. The total needs will exceed Tk 100,000 crore.

Fortunately, the government has the ability to generate the resources needed for the stimulus package. It can use the various tools at its disposal, including tax and spending, loans and guarantees, monetary instruments, and foreign exchange operations. Since the pandemic has created both demand and supply shocks, governments everywhere have resorted to a policy mix that includes fiscal, monetary and sectoral measures. As Fahmida Khatun wrote in an earlier oped in this daily, Bangladesh government and its agencies must "use all types of monetary policy tools that they have at their disposal, such as lowering interest rates and quantitative easing to pump money into the financial system." As expected, the lion's share of the funds will come from borrowing.

The reason is, while Bangladesh Bank has lowered interest rates (Repo) and reserve requirements, announced new financing facilities, relaxed capital buffers, and other countercyclical measures, lowering interest rates to encourage businesses to borrow can work only if consumer demand for shuttered business picks up again. With so many of the garment employees either out of work or coping with reduced wages, it cannot be a surprise that closed businesses (such as transportation sector, retailers, supermarkets, and booksellers for example) will not expect a surge in demand on the first day they reopen. Similarly, restaurant workers, rickshaw pullers, or many middle-class employees have no incomes, and this will undercut their ability to spend. In addition, remittances from abroad have taken a hit, and all of these add up to a demand shock.

Economists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the University of Chicago argue that during the current economic crisis induced by the pandemic, lack of demand could trigger viral recessions. This idea is explored in a new working paper by Veronica Guerrieri of the University of Chicago, Guido Lorenzoni of Northwestern University, Ludwig Straub of Harvard University and Ivan Werning of MIT. "If some sectors of the economy shut down entirely, affected workers will curtail their spending dramatically. Spending by other workers could make up for the shortfall—only if the goods and services that can still be

produced are substitutes for those that cannot. The abrupt drop in consumers' spending on plane tickets or hotel bookings is unlikely to be offset by more purchases of teleworking software instead, for instance. In such a situation, the economy experiences a "Keynesian supply shock", where demand falls by more than supply."

The point is, the government will have to pump money into the economy, both by spending more on feeding the vulnerable groups and building healthcare infrastructure. Borrowing is no longer considered to be a sign of bad governance and often advocated to act as a counter-cyclical force during a recession. While borrowing (both domestic and

adequate liquidity in the financial system to support the operations of financial institutions, and has announced that it will buy treasury bonds and bills from banks. In this moment of crisis, BB can additionally help the government finance the stimulus package by monetising treasury bonds.

Admittedly, the national debt of any country is a major concern for policymakers. Loans have to be paid back, even when the borrowing happens from domestic sources. While deficit financing or debt leveraging has always been a controversial tool in the arsenal of development finance, in a moment of crisis, printing money is a necessity and the real cost of deficit financing is less



IMAGE: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

external) has been at the receiving end of the public's ire for short periods of time, particularly during the financial crisis of 2007-2010 when some European countries faced high domestic and foreign debt, the current economic slowdown has forced the hands of many governments to support printing money to stimulate the economy.

Bangladesh is not in a position to raise the Tk 100,000 crore plus needed for the recovery by relying exclusively on raising taxes, tightening of regulations, cutting unnecessary expenditures or slashing salaries for public servants, as suggested by some. Bangladesh Bank (BB) has announced that it will ensure

than the nominal, since inflation and time discounts ease the financial burden on the nation.

Glenn Hubbard, a professor of finance and economics at Columbia University, and former Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers in the USA, argues strongly for printing money during a crisis. "I think the Treasury did the right thing. I think the Fed is doing largely the right thing," he said. "There shouldn't be an ongoing dance of borrowing money and printing money. This isn't the lesson to learn from this episode."

In other words, borrowing money by selling treasury bonds to the central bank, and "printing money" is essentially

the same thing. As another economist, Professor McCulley of Georgetown University put it more bluntly, "How do we pay for it? We print the damn money."

If the government prints more money, there are risks. First of all, the government might not be able to pay it back. This will happen if the debt burden gets too high. According to the "Joint World Bank-IMF Debt Sustainability Analysis" released in September 2019, the overall risk of debt distress for Bangladesh is low. Public debt in Bangladesh stood at USD 91 billion in the fiscal year ending in 2018, around 34 percent of GDP.

The other risk is inflation. At some point, the economy will recover, and BB needs to keep an eye on the price level and keep it below the six percent target. In future, inflation could be low for a long time, but it also could rise. There is a lot of pent-up demand in our economy—the capacity to supply goods and services has been hurt, and its coincidence with a collapse in supply might lead people to expect rocketing prices. The saving grace is that in some circumstances, the drop in demand induced by a supply shock may be larger than the decline in supply—a source of deflationary, rather than inflationary, pressure.

Japan's central bank has been buying huge chunks of the government's bonds—effectively financing the central government of the world's third-largest economy for years—without triggering the kind of inflation that traditional economic views would expect.

However, some words of caution are required. First, as mentioned above, inflation might get out of control. Secondly, the debt to GDP ratio could spiral towards the danger level—90 percent of GDP. Higher debt ratio and inflation will trigger macroeconomic instability and throw the exchange rate out of kilter.

Thirdly, in many of the developed countries including the USA, easy money has led to misallocation, inefficiency, and lack of oversight. In the USA, the USD 3 trillion stimulus will be financed by "monetisation of debt". And, given this ease of access, it has led to some well-publicised cases of abuse, waste and fraud. Small business loans were gobbled up by big companies, leaving very little for the needy ones.

Similarly, in Bangladesh, how much of the Tk 5,000 crore given to RMG owners will actually be given to the workers? Besides, BB has also taken measures to delay non-performing loan classification and this has already raised some eyebrows.

On the brighter side, Bangladesh, along with other developing countries, has sought the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) help. A Special Drawing Rights (SDR) allocation is one way the IMF could respond. The last SDR allocation was in 2009, in response to the global financial crisis. However, in such an allocation, all members receive SDRs based on their IMF quotas, so a large share of the money goes to developed countries like the United States, leaving little for stressed emerging markets. However, it has been suggested that as an alternative, IMF emergency lending capacity, if invoked, could allow the Fund to allocate it to those most in need.

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and works in information technology. He is Senior Research Fellow, International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI), a think-tank in Boston, USA.

Protecting our frontline healthcare workers should be the top priority

RIASHAD MONJUR and MD ZAKIUL HASSAN

GIVEN the existing shortage of healthcare workers (HCWs) in Bangladesh, infection and subsequent exclusion of HCWs from an already strained workforce could leave our health system grossly unprepared for the impending peak of the Covid-19 crisis. According to the World Health Organization, one of the most serious threats sabotaging our ability to control Covid-19 is the global shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE). As high-resource health systems struggle to provide adequate PPE to their frontline HCWs, it is becoming increasingly evident that HCWs in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) will bear the brunt of this global supply chain shortage.

Despite having one of the best health systems in the world, Italy confirmed that 10 percent of all positive cases of Covid-19 were among HCWs, with 105 HCW deaths. So far in Bangladesh, over 600 physicians have tested positive for Covid-19, according to the Bangladesh Doctors Foundation on May 6. Bangladesh recorded its first healthcare worker death from Covid-19 on April 15. Several hundreds of other frontline HCWs have been infected including 375 nurses, 116 technologists and 62 ward boys. We fear these numbers are likely to increase dramatically as testing efforts are ramped up over the coming weeks.

Frontline HCWs in Bangladesh work in overcrowded environments and have poor infection prevention and control mechanisms, making them more susceptible to contracting Covid-19. With Dhaka being one of the most densely populated cities in the world, health

facilities often have up to four persons per ten ten metre square of floor space, partly due to patient caregivers who provide much of the daily nursing duties. This proximity between HCWs, patients and caregivers serve as a dangerous pool for rapid transmission of Covid-19. Moreover, a national survey in 2014 demonstrated that less than two percent of HCWs adhered to recommended hand hygiene techniques, partly due to poor infrastructure and lack of infection prevention and control training.

In the context of these existing baseline pitfalls, the extreme shortage of PPE is yet another deficiency in the arsenal of our HCWs in their fight against Covid-19. In Bangladesh and other LMICs, HCWs are having to reuse disposable PPE without appropriate decontamination, and they are relying on cloth masks during their shifts. This has sparked widespread anxiety amongst many medical professionals, especially as many patients have been hiding their true history due to stigma. In order to maintain a resilient and adequate workforce through the peak of this national crisis, we suggest the following strategies should be adopted.

Firstly, all HCWs working on the frontlines should be required to undergo "refresher" training based on appropriate infection control practices such as those put forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Instead of isolating every HCW inadvertently exposed to patients with Covid-19 and shrinking the workforce, HCWs could universally wear masks and perform strict self-monitoring, isolating only if symptoms develop; a strategy followed in Singapore.

The extreme shortage of PPE is yet another deficiency in the arsenal of our HCWs in their fight against Covid-19. In Bangladesh and other LMICs, HCWs are having to reuse disposable PPE without appropriate decontamination, and they are relying on cloth masks during their shifts.

Secondly, HCWs are more concerned about their safety rather than financial incentives. Recognising our limited economic resources, rational rather than "gold standard" PPE use may be applied. For instance, the CDC recommends N95 respirators plus a face shield when caring for Covid-19 patients. The extreme shortage of both in Bangladesh means other strategies, such as the use of medical masks on both patients and providers, can be used instead, with a recent randomised trial showing similar effectiveness. To ease HCWs further, a public health campaign

should be adopted to encourage patients to honestly disclose their true history by addressing their concerns, dispelling myths and rebuilding trust.

Thirdly, we recognise that a large proportion of HCWs will inevitably become infected, observing the trend in high-income countries. Given the shortage of testing kits, we believe HCWs should be actively prioritised and systematically tested to identify, isolate and then swiftly reintroduce HCWs following recovery. To maintain an adequate workforce, we emphasise the 7/14 rotation model where different groups of HCWs will rotate each week and then have 14 days of quarantine. This will reduce the risk of exhausting the workforce and allow HCWs to recover physically and mentally.

Finally, it is important to remember that our doctors and nurses are also human. Many are experiencing significant symptoms of anxiety, depression and insomnia as well as the fear of infecting their families, which is particularly problematic in Bangladesh given our multi-family dwellings. Psychosocial support must be offered as they shoulder the burden of this pandemic by putting their lives at risk. This may include routine peer debriefs, crisis hotlines and availability of psychological therapy as needed.

Supporting and fostering a resilient frontline healthcare workforce will be critical during such trying times.

Riashad Monjur is a graduate student at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Dr Md Zakiul Hassan is an Emerging Infectious Disease Researcher and Assistant Scientist at International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr). All views expressed here are personal.

What does Nurjahan need?

Can we think of a human centred approach to tackle the Covid-19 crisis?



TASMIAH T RAHMAN

I was talking to my household care worker, i.e. domestic worker, Nurjahan (not her real name). A person who can do it all—not only does she cook and clean, she

does groceries when needed, waters my plants, feeds my cat and gives me immense mental support when I'm down. She has been on leave since the lockdown started in Bangladesh. Nurjahan and her husband live in a tiny one bedroom home in a slum to save as much as possible for their daughters, who live in their home village with her mother. While she works in three houses, her husband is a rickshaw puller. Her family is one example of where the "lockdown" has hit the hardest. My conversations with her regarding this crisis made me realise that we are hardly taking their voices into consideration. While I understand that a more centralised approach is being taken now for the poor and vulnerable, perhaps a human centred approach will help individuals more by providing community level solutions.

When I asked if they are practicing social distancing (first of all, this is a concept that was difficult for her to understand!), she said it is simply not possible because there is just no space. She added, "Frankly many of us also don't want to do this, because it is up to God to give a disease. We have had *thankuni pata*, so it will not touch us." Many people in her slum have taken this leaf which supposedly strengthens the immune system. This is the basic understanding of many poor people in the country.

The idea of social distancing is not just alien in Dhaka slums—it is impossible for social and economic

reasons too. People come back to their rooms only to sleep. Nonetheless, Nurjahan told me how the showers and kitchens are now maintained so that people can go one by one to wash and cook food, thanks to local volunteers from an NGO who raised awareness and asked them to use these common areas according to a schedule.

Nurjahan also mentioned that since the lockdown was announced, many people went back to their villages, so the slums are not so crowded now. Her sister-in-law went home when the government announced the "holiday", but the factory where she works asked her to return to work despite the lockdown. She had to walk for hours and found it extremely difficult to reach Dhaka without public transport. In the end, she gave up and stayed home. The recent announcement to open up garment factories has been a confusing change of events for these workers, and Nurjahan is worried about how her sister-in-law will join work without any available transport for her to return in. However, she has received her salary arrears via Bkash.

Thankfully, Nurjahan has food and cash at hand at the moment, but she is not being allowed to go out to buy groceries. Her husband has almost no earnings as a self-employed rickshaw puller and her brother's small car mechanic shop in the village is also closed. His employees have left and he has paid them whatever he could. Currently, he is still paying rent and utility bills for that shop. Once this crisis is over, he has to start over. He needs immediate cash support and a long term financial plan to stay in business. Many are in need. But the "fear of catching a cold and dying from it" does not pose a larger threat than going hungry with their family, she said.

The government of Bangladesh has ramped up emergency responses. As of May 1, the urban poor are to get Tk

2000 (approximately USD 23.71) per household for 50 lakh families. When I asked if her extended family received any support, she mentioned that her brother, who is a person with disability, received cash support of Tk 1500 (approximately USD 17) from BRAC in her village, which she is very happy about. She also received food support from Sajeda Foundation last week that will last her almost a month. However, she still thinks that her husband and brother need to earn a living for

because employers are more cautious and more afraid than we are. We are often confused about what is being announced by the government and how we should move, behave, get food etc. Often we verify these news from local leaders or NGO representatives in slums. It will be good if local leaders talk to us from time to time. Messages come on the phone about how to prevent this virus. Maybe the directions can also come as voice messages so that we know what to do.

us go. They should treat us with more dignity because people do not know how to act. Hitting us and scolding us will not help us in getting the right information.

Without work, we will not be able to survive long. Going out to work is better for us, instead of staying in the cramped slum quarters. If I stay at home all day with my husband, we fight more! He shouts more since he sits all day, frustrated without any money. Women are often getting beaten up in houses and we hear them scream. There should be some sort of community awareness and a "community watch" that can go door to door and discuss issues of domestic violence. Also, if I get sick, I will need medical care. It will be good to know more about how I can get that treatment, closer to where I live. Right now, there is a new medical centre where people can go if they have symptoms that match this illness, but many people are not admitting that they have fever, out of fear. There needs to be more information available on what to do, if someone gets sick. "Miking" (public announcements via microphones) will help because people listen to those.

My brother was doing so well with his business and was helping the whole family. Can he also not get cash support for paying his employees and rent? And then when the situation is better, he needs more support so that he can continue his business. Can my elder daughter start her classes also? She is just sitting at home. Her school is closed and there is no online and phone based teaching in local villages. Maybe they can have classes where they can sit in the open field and study, so children can social distance but also go to school.

Tasmiah T Rahman is the Head of Strategy and Business Development, Skills Development Programme, at BRAC. These views are her own and do not reflect the view of her organisation.



This aerial view of the Korail slum shows how difficult it would be to practice social distancing in such a congested area.

STAR FILE PHOTO

the family as a whole. More than 80 percent of the country's people work in the informal sector and they are being hit the hardest, as they simply cannot sit at home and live off their limited savings.

I asked Nurjahan what she thinks she needs as solutions to these problems, and the following are a few things she suggested, in her words.

Social distancing is not being maintained. It is best to let us go to work, where we can maintain social distance and follow safety procedures—

The way food is being distributed is not equal for all. Only strong people can go in front and collect, while physically weak people stay at the back. I can go and stand in the line all day but my brother, who is a person with a disability, cannot go. So it will be better if he can be reached at home with daily essentials. We are also not allowed to go to *bazaars* to buy essentials. The police are scolding us on the streets and criminalising us, but what if someone has emergency needs? There should be a way to let

Opening up the economy with smart, scientific and sectoral solutions

ASIF M ZAMAN

IN the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a big debate now on the trade-offs between lives and livelihoods in Bangladesh and many other developing countries. Unlike many developed nations, livelihood does not just mean addressing the basic needs—rather it is a matter of survival. In other words, ignoring livelihoods in Bangladesh may lead to severe recession or even famine. In grim terms, the reality is loss of life, either by hunger or by pandemic. A recent Yale study shows that the benefits of lockdown is lower for the developing countries than the developed ones.

So the lockdown, which is adversely affecting livelihoods, may not be a long term model for Bangladesh. In fact, in some cases it may be counterproductive. For example, in slums or low income settlements, workers live in a very congested environment and social distancing is next to impossible to maintain at home. Thus, these people are aimlessly roaming around without any purpose, beating the sole purpose of the lockdown. The rate of contacts per person may be lower if the workers can be moved back to their workplaces, where proper protocols of social distancing and personal hygiene can be maintained more effectively. These protocols should cover both workplaces and the homes of the workers, as well as transport. The International Labour Organization (ILO) recently warned that opening up the economy without preparations will lead to a second wave

of pandemic.

Therefore, as the lockdown continues, we should think of smart, science based and sectoral (3S) approaches of how to open up the economy.

By "smart solutions", we mean effective but cheap, innovative but easy-to-use solutions to minimise the risk of Covid-19 in the workplace. Hence, it requires the cross-fertilisation

of ideas from different disciplines: public health experts, clinicians, industrial-organisational psychologists, economists, architects and engineers. Lessons from the best practices across the world, from the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO) to Kerala's umbrella solution need to be compiled, customised and tested. We have learnt that architects and urban

planners are already experimenting with innovative solutions in the slums of Dhaka. The solutions for workplace safety must have solid scientific foundations—the risk assessment of a workplace and strategies for mitigation must be scientific (i.e. science-based solutions). The innovations have to be data based, implying that data will drive the solutions and its effectiveness



PHOTO: COLLECTED

can also be measured in a scientific way, for example, by using randomised control trials. Understanding the (social) science of technology adoption and the willingness to pay are critical in diffusing such technology. Based on the risk assessment findings, customised protocols for the various sectors—manufacturing, service and construction—need to

be developed so that these sectors can start operating by minimising the risk of contagion. These will be part of the sectoral solutions. For example, industrial engineers can redesign the workplaces of RMG industries to ensure adequate physical distancing with little changes. The shifts of workers can be increased to minimise the number of workers at one point of time. The operations should ensure physical distancing, avoid contact between workers and maintain hygiene. The workers' flow or movements need to be properly designed and monitored. There should be protocols during entry to the factory and during their stay. Guidelines should be in place if anybody develops symptoms; psychological counselling is required to elevate worker morale. Special equipment like automatic/foot operated hand washing stands or disinfection chambers using food grade disinfectants can be installed at the gate of each floor.

Whereas worker flow solutions are needed for industries with factories, the service sector requires customer/client flow solutions. Worker flow solutions focus on keeping product delivery efficient and ensuring worker safety. Customer/client flow solutions ensure customer/client satisfaction and the safety of both customer/client and the service provider. The construction industry, on the other hand, needs to come up with site management protocols. These may include site entry/egress procedures, limiting number of workers on site (crew shifts), maintaining worker hygiene, cleaning

tools before sharing, delineating different risk zones within the site, etc. The construction project schedules need to be designed so that workers can work in parallel, avoiding labour intensive functions.

All of the sectors need to have customised protocols if employees become infected with Covid-19. This protocol should include procedures for detecting symptoms, isolating the infected ones and arranging hospitalisation if needed.

The huge stimulus package of the government can be tied to the compliance of the guidelines for workplace safety. Adoption of new risk minimising technologies can also be subsidised through the stimulus package. It is not only financing; building awareness among the entrepreneurs is also critical in successful implementation of such guidelines.

The preparation of sector-wise customised protocols for resuming work is a mammoth task. These protocols have to be approved by the appropriate regulatory bodies of the government. The private sector can play a key role in helping government develop these guidelines, for they have the sectoral expertise. We know that some private sector firms have already started to market a wide range of solutions to jumpstart the economy. These efforts should be encouraged and incentivised by the government in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic.

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



FIRST FLIGHT OVER THE NORTH POLE

May 12, 1926
Aboard the semirigid airship *Norge*, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, American scientist Lincoln Ellsworth, and Italian engineer Umberto Nobile made the first undisputed flight over the North Pole on this day in 1926.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Loudly lament
- 5 Scottish lord
- 10 Mystique
- 11 Makes blank
- 12 Sports figure
- 13 Feels the absence of
- 14 Trap to catch computer hackers
- 16 Less than wonderful
- 20 Meager
- 23 Stunned wonder
- 24 Practical
- 25 "Tomorrow" singer
- 27 Sturdy wood
- 28 Sights
- 29 "Uh-uh"
- 32 Spot on a shirt
- 36 Polite word

DOWN

- 1 Scrub
- 2 Sedan or compact
- 3 Persia, today
- 4 Prints, in cop jargon
- 5 Small singing groups
- 6 Must
- 7 Braying beast
- 8 Originally called
- 9 Snaky shape
- 11 Vacant
- 15 Days gone by
- 17 Put up

- 18 Tot's scrape
- 19 Casual tops
- 20 Sound of disappearing
- 21 Miles off
- 22 1987 Suzanne Vega hit
- 25 In a frenzy
- 26 Boris's partner
- 28 Bay
- 30 Bridge utterance
- 31 Rx amounts
- 33 Cabinet part
- 34 Ibsen's home
- 35 Chuck of "Meet the press"
- 36 Score amts.
- 37 Spike of film
- 38 Water, in the Seine



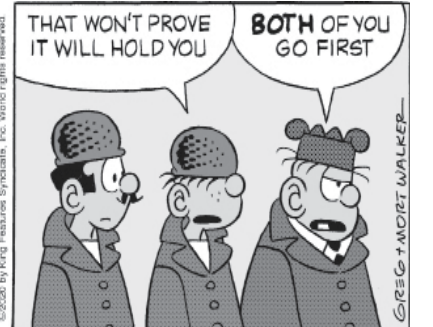
YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

Kajol might not be able to speak out, BUT WE MUST

ALI RIAZ

Mysterious events surrounding the 'disappearance' and 'recovery' of photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol are by now well known. Gone 'missing' from his office in Dhaka on March 10, Kajol was 'discovered' by the Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) at the border with India in the early morning of May 3 while he was trying to 'trespass' into his homeland. His disappearance came soon after a case was filed against him and 31 others including an editor of a daily newspaper by a lawmaker of the ruling party. While his family was struggling to file a case of abduction and rejected by the police until a court order to this effect was issued, two other cases under the draconian Digital Security Act (DSA) were filed against him.

Interestingly, the police were more inclined to register a case against him than look for an abducted person whose family and friends were desperately requesting the police to look for. The reluctance was mindboggling to say the least, but unfortunately an all-too-familiar episode experienced by many families whose loved ones have gone missing or picked up by plain-clothed people. After being 'discovered' and arrested, Kajol was produced before a local court at Jashore - handcuffed behind his back - like a criminal, and in violation of the High Court's clear instructions in this regard. He was charged for violation of the passport act. While the court granted bail in that case, he was immediately arrested under Section 54. Authorities told the media that they will proceed with the three cases against him.

These we know, but little do we know what happened in the 53 days in between. The authorities seem to have no interest in finding out how he was abducted, who took him, where he was during the period and how he ended up in a place more than 228 km away from his office, that too at the borderland. Judging by previous incidents of enforced disappearances and those who were fortunate to be returned alive by their captors, we may never know from the victims what really happened. Like all previous incidents, the law enforcing agencies have expressed no intention in trying to find out.

Kajol was not the first to become a victim of enforced disappearance. In the past decade this has become the new normal. In 2019, according to the human rights organisation Odhikar, 34 persons were victims of enforced disappearance. Of them, 8 were found dead, 17 were released or produced before courts and 9 remained traceless. According to Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), between 2014 and August 2018, of the 310 abductees, 33 persons returned. In some instances, those who were found dead, their families and friends claim that they were picked up by, allegedly, plain-clothed members of the law enforcing agencies. Some were shown arrested by police weeks and months



Lawmen escort handcuffed photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol to a court in Jashore on May 4, 2020.

after they went missing, and others remain traceless. There are instances where the police stations have declined to register cases of a missing person, as was the case of Kajol.

Those who survive the ordeal to see their loved ones again have always chosen to remain silent. Whether Kajol, once an outspoken journalist, will have to tread the same path is yet to be seen. The deafening silence of those who return speaks volumes. It has a message none can ignore: that their captors, whoever they are, have the capacity to harm them and perhaps their loved ones even after they return home.

Human rights groups, including the Human Rights Watch, have alleged that law enforcement agencies are involved in the enforced disappearances, but the government has denied these allegations. In a meeting of the United Nations Committee against Torture in June 2019, where Bangladesh submitted its report for the first time since ratifying the Convention 20 years ago, there were calls for ending the practice. Bangladesh representatives, including the Law Minister, flatly denied any incidents of enforced disappearances. Anisul Huq said, "We do not agree to the proposition that enforced disappearances occur in Bangladesh frequently." This line of denial has been pursued by the government all along. For example, in the second half of 2017 when enforced disappearances had increased so precipitously that the head of the country's National Human

Rights Commission (NHRC) acknowledged that people were living in fear of becoming a victim at any time, the government doubled down on its claim. The Home Minister claimed that some people disappear willingly to embarrass law enforcers. The police chief insisted that disappearances have been taking place since the British colonial period. All these created a sense of impunity among those who are engaged in these acts. It has become normalised along with the growing numbers of extrajudicial killings.

If the government is correct that the state-actors are not involved, it only means that non-state actors have become so powerful in the country that they can abduct anyone, kill the abductees if they want or leave them on the roads when they are inclined to do so. This narrative can only be acceptable in a state where mafia and drug kingpins have established their complete control and have created a parallel state. In such instances, as has happened in some of the Latin American countries, these non-state actors are so powerful that they succeed in silencing the survivors and their families. This is a marker of the emergence of a parallel state. If such a parallel state has emerged, should it warrant the state to gather information from the survivors and act against these non-state actors? The instances where the people who went 'missing' or were picked up by plain-clothed people were produced before the court by the police after days

and weeks, raise serious questions. Often the narrative of the police defies simple logic as to how the missing persons were miraculously found on the street.

If the state agencies are not involved contrary to the claims of the relatives of the victims and the human rights groups, does it not fall upon the state to find the perpetrators and prove that the government was correct all along? Yet, there has been no urgency from the part of the government to do so. There is a simple way to address this: by allowing an independent inquiry into this alarming phenomenon. Bangladesh should sign the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), and immediately set up an independent commission which would work with the UN Working Group to find out who is responsible for the disappearances, and provide answers to the questions of families as to where their loved ones are located.

Kajol has survived, barely. Since these cases against him are about to initiate their proceedings, the second phase of his torment has begun. Kajol's 'disappearance' and 'discovery' have once again brought many questions to the fore. He might not be able to speak out, but we must.

Ali Riaz is a distinguished professor of political science at Illinois State University, and a nonresident senior fellow of the Atlantic Council, USA.

Disappointment of a son

MONOROM POLOK

On 3rd May, after 12 am, I turned on my computer and began to write a short article regarding my missing father. I didn't know back then that I was about to get a call and would be able to talk to my father in two hours.

After speaking to my father, I confirmed with the police that he was indeed in Benapole police station, and that it was him that I talked to. Of course, I recognised the voice at the very first moment but after so many days of waiting and pain and drama, it was hard to believe that the ordeal was finally over. But I was soon going to find out it wasn't. Not even close.

I was on my way to Benapole when I was informed that my father was on his way to the court, and another case was filed against him (number 3). I waited in court and it felt like an eternity before he finally appeared. I saw him as the police were getting out of the auto-rickshaw. He was looking out from the inside to see if any familiar faces could be seen. I charged ahead and hugged him, told him I'm here. Seeing he wasn't wearing a mask, I gave it to the police officers who put it on. At the near end of the day, his bail was approved and the order to free him finally came. My lawyer ran to get the papers, and in that moment they took him out of the cell in court and put him in the prison van. But my father's bail was approved. I asked everyone there, "My father just got bail. Won't you let him go?" Only one officer replied in one word looking away from me: "No". I looked at my father's eyes as they were putting on his handcuffs. My father asked me, "Holo na?" I ensured him that he got bail for the BGB case, but they are holding him for something else. I told him not to worry, it's going to be over soon, unsure in my own heart. The lawyer came back and was in shock. He asked me what reason they gave me for taking him. His bail and order to be freed had been made. I looked around, wondering where they might have taken him.

Close to midnight, I got to know there was another case by another station, Number 4. The next day I somewhat understood what happened and got copies of the legal documents. Soon I found out we can't ask for bail before the court opens because we couldn't do it the day before in emergency court. I realised there's nothing more I could do. Considering my father's order to go home if nothing more could be done, I came back home. I entered our home the same way I left. Alone. A disappointment in the name of a son.

It is extremely difficult for my family and me to believe that even after struggling for 53 whole days, remaining in the dark about where my father Shafiqul Islam Kajol was, whether he was alive or dead, whether he will return or not, we still have to wait longer to be with him. What was the use of my mother filing a General Diary and me filing a case suspecting abduction?

The whole world is hostage to COVID-19. It is likely my father is exposed to the coronavirus due to the lack of preventive measures in jail. The jails are congested places. Even when my father is moved around by the police, they touch him, and do not maintain social distance. He is not a criminal. He is not a threat to anyone. People serving time have been allowed to go home due to coronavirus. My father still hasn't gotten the chance to present himself in front of a court due to courts being shut down.

We appeal to the Government of Bangladesh to consider my father's pre-existing health conditions and mental state and the mental trauma that we, his whole family, have been going through for the past 53 days. We appeal to the government to free my father and reunite him with us and drop all charges against him, out of humanity and out of kindness. We request everyone to come forward with their own efforts to help free my father, to Free Kajol. My mother, sister, and I are unable to eat, sleep or drink, as we are constantly worrying for my father's physical and mental health and exposure to coronavirus. Please help us.

Monorom Polok is the son of journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol.

'LAST MAN STANDING'

DR HELENA ASHA KNOX

Some of us speak words and these words become weapons. Some of us use actions in our daily lives - gestures of kindness and compassion, anger and disagreement, change and hope - and these gestures evolve into weapons as well. Others create with different visual media and through them they speak without a word, they indicate without a finger pointing, they shake us without touching us physically. And they challenge, yes they challenge, without filtering the reality. Kajol is one of these kinds.

It is no surprise that those wanting to control our realities, bodies and activities do not appreciate such people with emancipatory approaches. They fear the speaking, the indicating and the shaking, because it reveals the illusion they wrapped us in.

Kajol shows through his images invisible narratives, situations of conflict and represents a reality. Police and governmental violence executed against protesters and the consequences of human conflict, oppression and the destruction of the environment

around us are just examples of those hidden realities, nobody wants us to see, but Kajol is turning his lens towards.

The online exhibition, created to present Kajol's work and raise voices questioning his disappearance, gives the audience a chance to access an experience, which reminds us of the reality we lived in before the global pandemic. These experiences are becoming crucial for every one of us in order to look beyond the walls of our locked down personal existence. The exhibition represents with its small space, just enough to turn around, the feeling of this constriction, but relates as well to the anxieties Kajol's disappearance creates and the content of the showcased pieces.

We need people such as Kajol to make us aware of the world and situations we live in and others are confronted with. People who are uncompromising, courageous and daring.

We demand the return of the last man standing.

Dr Helena Asha Knox is the co-founder of Kaalo 101.



Some of the photos taken by Shafiqul Islam Kajol were exhibited online under the title 'Last Man Standing'. The exhibition was organised by WhereisKajol.

PHOTOS: SHAFIQUUL ISLAM KAJOL



La Liga aiming for June 12 restart

REUTERS, MADRID



La Liga president Javier Tebas has said he hopes Spanish soccer will resume on June 12 after being halted for over three months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

All clubs in Spain's top two divisions began testing players for the virus last week and many including La Liga champions Barcelona started individual training, the second step of the league's four-phase protocol for returning to action.

Real Madrid resume individual training on Monday.

"I'd like to restart on June 12 but we have to be prudent and it's not just up to football, it's also up to society, we all need to focus on complying with measures to protect health," Tebas told Spanish television network Movistar on Sunday.

Tebas confirmed all matches will take place without spectators, as will be the case when Germany's Bundesliga restarts next week, and he said the league was working on ways to add to the atmosphere although he did not give details.

He also said fixtures would be spread out so that there are matches every day.

"Now that we are not going to have fans in the stadiums we are going to have some innovative ideas for broadcasting the games," Tebas added.

"There's going to be football every day once La Liga returns."

The league reported on Sunday that five players across the two divisions had tested positive for the virus and had been ordered to stay isolated at their homes. They will not be able to return to training grounds until they have tested negative.

Tebas added that three staff members had also tested positive for the virus but he said the number of cases was far lower than expected, insisting there would be



Lionel Messi (L) trained at the Joan Gamper centre pitches yesterday as Barcelona continued their practice sessions ahead of the La Liga restart. Meanwhile, Eden Hazard joined his Real Madrid teammates in their first practice session after a two-month halt.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

no increase in the risk of players getting infected once matches started.

"We were expecting around 25 or 30 based on the numbers in the Bundesliga and how much the virus has penetrated Spain. Out of 2,500 people tested we have only eight positive cases, which is good news," he said.

"Infection during a match is practically impossible as we have done a study which we're releasing which will show there is a minimum risk in matches if we all respect the health measures."

RULES AND MEASURES

Football will have changed a lot by the time

it returns from this COVID-19 enforced break and a number of new rules are set to be introduced.

Teams will be allowed to make as many as five substitutes during a game, and LaLiga president Javier Tebas has already expressed his support of the move.

LaLiga sides can have 23 players in their matchday squads.

FIFA will allow for VAR to be done away with, LaLiga intends to keep using it and changes will be made to the VAR facilities to protect the officials.

LaLiga will be responsible for providing images of training sessions for a number

of clubs during the period, and it's been asked that clubs don't disclose any medical information from training in order to avoid rumours of cases spreading.

Temperature of everyone entering the stadium will be checked, hotels will be used exclusively by players and only certain flights can be taken.

Teams travelling by bus will use two buses, with away players tested before traveling and home players tested 24 hours before kick-off.

All players will have to change their kits at half time, spitting will be a yellow card and press conferences will be done remotely.

Obasi was offered bribe?

AFP, ABUJA



Former Nigeria striker Chinedu Obasi alleged on Sunday he was asked to pay a bribe to feature at the 2014 World Cup, before eventually missing out on selection.

Obasi, 33, who has been a free agent since leaving Swedish outfit AIK in January, made his last Super Eagles appearance in 2011 and had club spells in Germany with Hoffenheim and Schalke.

"I was supposed to be at the World Cup in 2014, I was playing with Schalke in the Champions League everything was going fine. At the end of the season, I was given an invitation for the World Cup preparations for friendlies in South Africa," Obasi said on social media.

"So, two days before the list came out, I was asked to pay some money if I wanted to be in the team," he added.

Obasi, who won a silver medal at the Beijing 2008 Olympics and played at the 2010 World Cup, said a move away from the Bundesliga fell through after missing the tournament four years later.

"I felt like I've paid my dues for the country, if you're a new player, I can get that but for me, it was a bit personal and very heart-breaking because I got injured -- I was supposed to move from Hoffenheim to England," he said.



French Open without fans?

REUTERS, MUMBAI

The French Open, which was postponed to September from May due to the novel coronavirus outbreak, could be held without fans, the organisers of the claycourt Grand Slam have said.

Roland Garros had been scheduled for May 24 to June 7 before the French tennis federation (FFT) pushed it back to Sept. 20-Oct 4 in a bid to save the tournament from falling victim to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last week the FFT said all tickets purchased for this year's French Open would be cancelled and reimbursed instead of being transferred.

"Organising it without fans would allow a part of the economy to keep turning, (like) television rights and partnerships. It's not to be overlooked," FFT President Bernard Giudicelli told French newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche.

"We're not ruling any option out."

The tennis season was suspended in early March due to the pandemic and the hiatus will continue at least until mid-July with many countries in lockdown.

Wimbledon has been cancelled while the status of the U.S. Open, scheduled to take place in late August, is still unclear.

The FFT was widely criticised when they announced in mid-March that the French Open would be switched, with players bemoaning a lack of communication as the new dates clashed with the hardcourt season.

Organisers said last week they had been in talks with the sport's governing bodies to fine tune the calendar amid media reports that the Grand Slam tournament would be delayed further by a week and start on Sept. 27.

The delayed start would give players a two-week window between the end of the U.S. Open, played on the hardcourts of New York, and the Paris tournament.

"The 20th or the 27th, that does not change much," Giudicelli said.



Bayern Munich practised for the last time at the Allianz Arena yesterday before going into seven-day quarantine ahead of the resumption of the Bundesliga season.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bundesliga teams in isolation

REUTERS, BERLIN



BUNDESLIGA

German soccer teams started the week in isolation on Monday after going into seven-day quarantine ahead of the Bundesliga season restart on Saturday, with club bosses saying completing the campaign amid the coronavirus outbreak will not be easy.

The German Football League (DFL) decided last week to resume the first and second division from May 16 after a two-month

suspension, making it the first major sports league to attempt a restart.

Teams have been sent into mandatory seven-day isolation after testing for the virus in order to reduce the risk of infection before playing in empty stadiums with only a handful of staff and officials, to help prevent the spread of the virus.

Several clubs, including champions Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund and VfL Wolfsburg, have picked hotels in their cities to cut travel times to training locations and airports for the weekend matches.

Others like Schalke 04, who face

Dortmund in the Ruhr valley derby, and Borussia Moenchengladbach are using hotels at their stadiums.

Bayer Leverkusen and Union Berlin have moved to more isolated hotels in the countryside, as have bottom club Paderborn who will spend the week in a nearby thermal springs town.

Players and staff wore face masks as they departed for hotels where distance between tables at team lunches and dinners will become routine, as will single rooms where players will make their own beds to reduce unnecessary contact with other people.

Federations, athletes continue support

SPORTS REPORTER

Since the government declared shutdown on March 26 in an attempt to prevent the spread of coronavirus, sports personalities and sporting authorities have been helping those in financial trouble - both within the community and outside of it.

Following the footsteps of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), the other sporting federations and sports welfare associations have also come forward to help people in their suffering.

On Monday, Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) president Air Marshal Air Chief Marshal Masihuzzaman Serinbat made a donation to the BHF account to help needy hockey players, coaches and umpires.

"The BFF president today [Monday] handed over a fund to the BHF account and we will start sending the money to some 50 needy players, coaches and umpires as we, some BHF officials, have raised a fund of Tk 5 lakh to assist them. Our target is to disburse Tk 5,000 each among the listed people. We will also try to help 20 more needy players before Eid-ul-Fitr," BHF's acting general secretary Mohammad Yousuf told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh Tennis Federation treasurer Sheikh Mohammad Aslam informed that they have raised more than Tk 2 lakh as some BTF officials responded to his calls to help the needy players and coaches.

"As most of our players have come from needy families, we have decided to

distribute the fund among some 40 players and coaches and we are going to hand it over to them within a couple of days," Aslam told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh Athletics Federation general secretary Abdur Rakib Montu informed that they have already raised Tk 5 lakh to help former and current athletes, coaches and judges, especially those who are facing financial trouble.

"A committee formed to select needy athletes, coaches and judges is scheduled to sit today [Tuesday] to finalise everything. They will take a decision on how many players and officials need help and how much help they need," Montu told The Daily Star adding that he is also helping needy athletes get relief from their respective districts.

National badminton player Mohammad Ammar, along with other shuttlers, have already made an instance by cultivate paddy in Haor area of Sunamganj as well as providing daily essentials to the under-privileged people and needy badminton players. Following the steps of Ammar, Bangladesh Badminton Federation general secretary Amir Hossain Bahar help some 37 former and current shuttlers and coaches who have been in trouble due to the shutdown.

With the uncertainty over the resumption of sporting, it is not sure how long the individuals and federation officials can continue helping the less-fortunate athletes, but such help will certainly give a bit of relief to them in their hour of great distress.

Raina wants overseas T20 ban lifted

REUTERS, MUMBAI



INDIA'S 2011 WORLD CUP-WINNING BATSMAN Suresh Raina has called on the country's cricket board (BCCI) to lift its ban on players participating in overseas Twenty20 leagues.

The BCCI does not allow active players to sign for franchise-based leagues outside the country in a bid to protect the prestige of its own Indian Premier League (IPL), which attracts many of the world's top cricketers.

Raina said there were many active Indian players left on the sidelines of the lucrative annual T20 tournament who were also being denied the chance to play abroad.

"I hope the BCCI can get together with the ICC (International Cricket Council) or with franchises and allow players who don't have BCCI contracts to play in overseas leagues," Raina said during an Instagram chat with his former India teammate Irfan Pathan.

"I feel there are a lot of players, including Yusuf (Pathan), myself, Robin Uthappa -- a



lot of quality players who can go overseas and learn a lot, no matter which league it is."

Once considered an automatic selection for India's limited-overs sides, Raina played 226 one-dayers and 78 T20 internationals but has not worn the blue jersey since July 2018.

The 33-year-old is also a key member of Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings side in the IPL.

"We aren't in the BCCI contracts list, some of us don't have IPL contracts, we aren't playing international cricket, and the competition in domestic cricket isn't what it is at the international level," Raina said.

Warne heaps scorn on Ponting for Ashes call

AGENCIES



Australian cricket legend Shane Warne has poured scorn on Ricky Ponting for a captaincy call that haunted the 2005 Ashes series.

After thrashing England in the first Test at Lord's, Ponting's great Australian side went on to lose one of the closest series in history 2-1, with a two-run loss in the second Test at Edgbaston the major turning point.

That Test featured many talking points, starting with leading fast bowler Glenn McGrath's warm-up injury that ruled him out after he stood on a cricket ball and rolled his ankle.

McGrath had taken nine wickets in a man of the match performance, but if his injury was the beginning of the end, it was a stunning call by Ponting to send the home team in after



winning the toss that really turned the momentum.

It's a long-held theory that the captain who wins the toss should bat unless there are several factors working in the bowling team's favour, most notably a green pitch and heavy conditions overhead.

Adding weight to that theory in the case of the Edgbaston Test was that Ponting had the greatest spin bowler of all-time in his side, with Warne always preferring the chance to bowl in the fourth innings, when the pitch

was worn and conditions were at their most difficult for the batting side.

Yet Ponting backed his pace attack, minus McGrath, to skittle England for a low score, a decision that blew up in his face when England compiled a commanding first innings score of 407.

Reliving the Edgbaston thriller with Michael Vaughan, Kevin Pietersen, Marcus Trescothick and Steve Harmison for Sky Sports, Warne didn't hold back when asked about Ponting's decision at the toss.

"Nasser [Hussain] goes down as one of those people that had one of the worst-ever decisions when he said 'we'll have a bowl, thanks' at Brisbane [in the 2002/03 Ashes], but at least at The Gabba the ball swings or does something on day one," Warne said.

"Punter's [Ponting's] decision to bowl first was just the worst decision ever, by any captain. So take a back seat, Nas, Punter has got your back."

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Facebook group ICAN BD steps up to safeguard city cleaners

MD MIZANUR RAHMAN HIMADRI

"Stay home, stay well; beware of the virus... these are nothing but some fancy words for people like us who are working to keep you healthy by cleaning your city during a pandemic. But what did we get for this? Nothing.

"We had just been left to die. In the midst of all of this, a man and his friends have come forward to help us with personal protective equipment," a waste collector in Rampura said while talking about the hardships their community is facing during the Covid-19 crisis.

According to a survey, households in the capital generate around 4,500 tonnes of waste in a single day and more than 21,000 cleaners and garbage handlers are involved in the management of this waste. During the outbreak of the highly transmissible virus, the waste collectors are at a higher risk of infection as they do not have any PPE or any proper training; they are working now as they always have -- with their bare hands.

"Two years ago, when I was working to achieve universal health coverage in Bangladesh under the USAID-funded health finance and governance project, I had seen how waste collectors felt unprotected every time when collecting garbage without protective gear," said Tanver Hossain.

With an aim to support the vulnerable group, he along with two friends created an Facebook group called ICAN BD, through which they undertook an initiative

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Clad in protective suit and wearing masks, waste collectors drag garbage vans in Gulshan-2 area of the capital recently. ICAN, a social development organisation, has so far provided such safety gears to around 1,200 waste collectors in different parts of Dhaka for free.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Gonoshasthaya wants temp approval for its testing kits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gonoshasthaya Kendra has requested temporary approval of its coronavirus testing kit, saying that the validation process was being delayed.

The non-profit healthcare organisation also applied for a space somewhere around the capital's Dhanmondi to provide dialysis to kidney failure patients who have Covid-19 too.

There have been reports that patients suffering from kidney failure and Covid-19 have died without treatment because hospitals are reluctant to admit them, Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Zafrullah Chowdhury said.

"Our own testing has found the kits accurate more than 90 percent of the time. But validation by the government is getting delayed. Therefore, we seek temporary approval so we can test the people who are failing to get tested and are dying," he told a press conference at Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital in Dhanmondi.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) was supposed to issue a letter yesterday, asking for 200 Rapid Dot Blot kits, but Gonoshasthaya Kendra didn't receive the letter, he said.

"We don't know why that is," the veteran physician

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

DU decides not to hold online classes

Cites many students' inability to join

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka University authorities yesterday decided not to go for online classes for the time being considering a large number of students' incapability to attend.

The decision came following a meeting between the deans and the vice-chancellor Prof Md Akhtaruzzaman, said a university press release.

"Attendants of the meeting mentioned that a large number of students, who are currently staying at their village homes, are not capable of joining online classes as many do not have internet access and other digital facilities. Besides, many have financial insolvency and other obstacles, and so, under these circumstances, it would not be possible to hold online classes right now," read the release.

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FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

Land for landless peasants



Bangabandhu is seen blessing a young student at the Rangpur Circuit House on May 11, 1972, while the students are trying to leap over the wall to greet the prime minister.

May 12, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

KHASLAND DISTRIBUTION PROGRAMME ADOPTED

The government has taken a decision to distribute khas land among landless peasants, says Land Minister Abdur Rab Semiat. Under this scheme, initially, three lakh landless peasants will get land for cultivation purposes, he adds. The minister further says that the peasants will not be required to pay any fees for obtaining khas land. The total number of landless peasants in the country is 26 lakh. Currently, the government has 4 lakh 62 thousand acres of khas land available for distribution, informs the minister.

The minister also shares that the government will form cooperatives of landless peasants and allocate large chunks of khas land to develop cooperative farming. There will be economic units comprising of 75

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

'Drug dealer' killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

An alleged Rohingya drug peddler was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Cox's Bazar's Ukhia upazila early Sunday.

The dead, Shawkat Ali, 28, used to live in Balukhali Rohingya camp, said Marjina Akhter, officer-in-charge of Ukhia Police Station.

On information, a police team, led by Ukhia Circle ASP Nihad Adnan Taiyan, raided Moragachtola area around 2:00am to recover a consignment of yaba tablets, said the OC.

Sensing the law enforcers' presence, the drug peddlers opened fire. Police retaliated, triggering the "gunfight", she said.

At one stage, Shawkat was hit, but his cohorts managed to flee, the OC said, adding that the injured was taken to Ukhia Upazila Health Complex

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

Virus interrupts world's longest-running cartoon



AFP, Tokyo

Production of the world's longest-running cartoon and a mainstay of the Japanese weekend has been interrupted by the coronavirus, forcing the broadcast of re-runs for the first time in decades.

"Sazae-san", which first aired in 1969, revolves around the life of Mrs Sazae, a cheerful but klutzy full-time housewife who lives with her parents, husband, son, brother and sister.

The 30-minute episodes aired Sunday nights are very popular, and for many in Japan have come to denote the end of the weekend.

But the cartoon, recognised as the longest-running animated TV series by Guinness World Records, has been hampered by the outbreak of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Two AL men killed in infighting

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Two Awami League activists were killed and three others injured in an attack by members of a rival group of the ruling party in the district's Shailakupa upazila yesterday.

The dead -- Obhi Hossain, 25, and his cousin Laltu Hossain, 45, -- were from Dhuliapara village in the same upazila, police said.

Locals said there was a long-standing rivalry between two groups of local AL men, led by Mokbul Muhuri and Abdur Rashid Khan, in Dhuliapara village over establishing supremacy.

Around 11:30am yesterday, some supporters of Rashid, carrying spears, machetes and other sharp weapons, attacked a group of supporters of Mokbul, leaving five of the latter's followers injured, said Shailakupa OC Bazlur Rahman.

Obhi and Laltu died on the way to the upazila health complex around

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Rickshaw-pullers looks on as illegal motorised rickshaws confiscated by police are kept on a pavement in the capital's Tejgaon area yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Fears of second wave grow

Wuhan reports a second day of new cases as parts of Europe, New Zealand ease restrictions

AFP, Paris

Swathes of Europe began the long process of reopening from coronavirus lockdowns yesterday, but the first new infections in weeks at China's ground zero offered a sobering reminder of the dangers of a second wave of cases.

The mixed fortunes illustrate the high-wire act governments face across the globe as they try to get economies moving while keeping in check a pandemic that has now killed more than 283,000 people and infected over four million.

As France and Spain basked in a relaxation of restrictions and Britain plotted a path to normality, the Chinese city of Wuhan where the pandemic was born reported a second day of new cases after a month without a sign of the virus.

And neighbouring South Korea announced its highest number of infections for more than a month driven by a cluster in a Seoul nightlife district.

With millions out of work and economies shattered, governments are desperate to hit the accelerator, but most are choosing a gradual approach as fears about a resurgence of the virus linger.

In parts of Europe, officials have been emboldened by declining death rates, with France's toll dropping to 70 on Sunday -- its lowest since early April -- and Spain's daily fatalities falling below 200.

'JUMPING WITH JOY'

The French were able to walk outside without filling in a permit for the first time in nearly eight weeks yesterday, while teachers began returning to primary schools and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5