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Stalked by hunger in foreign lands

Facing hardships amid virus fallout, over 1 lakh Bangladeshi workers in Middle East in need of food assistance

JAMIL MAHMUD and RASHIDUL HASAN

Over one lakh Bangladeshis in different Middle Eastern countries are suffering acute hunger while many other Bangladeshis have become unemployed amid the shutdown of economies across the world.

In different parts of the world, Bangladeshi migrants are struggling to pay their rent, buy essentials and bear the cost of mandatory coronavirus tests.

Bangladesh's permanent representative to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, Golam Moshir said over five million Bangladeshi migrants work in the Middle East and at least one lakh of them are suffering hunger while most of them are gripped by uncertainty.

Officials at multiple embassies in the region agreed that the number of their fellow country people facing food shortage would be over one lakh. But they requested not to be named.

Bangladesh embassy officials in Saudi Arabia handed out food parcels to around 8,000 Bangladeshi workers in phases.

Thousands of others immediately need food aid because many have not been able

to earn in over two-and-a-half months, Moshir, also Bangladesh ambassador in Saudi Arabia, told The Daily Star.

Besides, many of the two to three lakh Bangladeshis, who work in Saudi Arabia illegally, do not even leave their living quarters fearing that the authorities would launch a crackdown on illegal migrants amid an ailing economy, he said.

Officials in Bahrain, Malaysia, Italy and Greece also said food parcels and cash support might soon be needed for the migrant workers.

About one million Bangladeshis, including thousands of undocumented ones, live in Malaysia, Greece and Italy.

On April 5, the expatriates' welfare ministry announced a Tk 4.5 crore fund after different missions requested for resources to provide migrants with support, according to a ministry release.

On April 23, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad announced another Tk 3 crore fund for "immediate food support", said another release.

Bangladesh embassy in Manama received

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A woman from the capital's Jatrabari cannot hold back her tears after seeing the test report that her father, 60, tested positive for Covid-19. She was perplexed over what to do. Her father, the only breadwinner of her family, has no income for about two months as he could not run his auto-parts business amid the nationwide shutdown. The photo was taken at Muga General Hospital.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



969
New cases in 24hrs



16,660
Total cases



250
Deaths



3,147
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



289,036
Deaths



4,295,764
Total cases

School feeding finally resumes at homes

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Government officials and teachers are distributing fortified biscuits to the houses of over 30 lakh primary school students so that they are not deprived of nutrition while schools are closed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

"We have started distributing 30 to 50 packets of biscuits at a time for each student at their homes," School Feeding Programme project director Ruhul Amin Khan said.

He added that field-level government officials, teachers and representatives of NGOs are distributing the biscuits while following health guidelines and maintaining social distance.

"We are giving 30 packets of fortified biscuits in the areas where we have fewer stocks of biscuits. The beneficiaries were supposed to get these biscuits in March and April," he added.

He said that they plan to reach all beneficiaries by May 15, but they would realistically need till May 20 to reach all students.

"After finishing this round, we will reach all students with another round and if the crisis continues, we will also continue the initiative," he said.

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Shutdown likely to stay till May 30

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The government is likely to extend the ongoing shutdown of most of the public and private offices till May 30 to curb further spread of Covid-19 in the country.

It may also extend the Eid holidays for a couple of days. Depending on the sighting of the moon, the Eid-ul-Fitr will be celebrated either on May 24 or 25.

The ongoing shutdown is to end on May 16.

Seeking anonymity, a member of the cabinet told The Daily Star that the government may extend the shutdown till May 30 and the Eid holidays for a couple of days.

A secretary of the government also echoed the cabinet member's words. "I have learnt that the government is going to extend the ongoing shutdown. An announcement in this regard is expected to come in a day or two," said the secretary on the condition of anonymity.

Sources at different ministries gave similar information.

The government moves to extend the shutdown at a time when the country is witnessing a growing number of deaths and coronavirus cases. It will be the six extension of the shutdown that was enforced on March 26 to check the spread of the deadly virus.

Most of the public and private offices have been shut since then. All essential services and vehicles carrying goods remain out of its purview. Some government offices involved in providing emergency services have also been kept open on a limited scale.

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

It also issued a gazette notification on May 4, announcing its decision to reopen shopping malls, shops and other businesses from May 10 on a limited scale ahead of the Eid.

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Treat patients or be shut down

Health ministry warns pvt clinics, hospitals to ensure patients are not turned away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All private hospitals and clinics should have separate arrangements for treating suspected Covid-19 patients, and they cannot refuse any patient if they have the particular treatment facilities, said a health ministry circular.

"No patient can be refused treatment if there are treatment facilities. If the hospitals are to refer the patients to other hospitals, that has to be done only after ensuring arrangement of treatment in consultation with the Covid-19 hospital control room of the health directorate," said the circular signed by Iqbal Hossain, a deputy secretary at the Health Services Division.

The circular issued on Monday also said the kidney patients suffering for a long and taking treatment, including dialysis, should be provided with necessary treatment if they are not Covid-19 positive. Failure to comply with the government order will result in taking legal actions, including revoking of licence, against the hospitals or clinics concerned if allegations are proved, the ministry said.

The new government order came on

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Virus death toll crosses 250

969 more reported infected in 24 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's death toll due to coronavirus reached 250 with 11 deaths recorded yesterday.

In the last 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, 969 more people tested Covid-19 positive, taking the total number of detected patients to 16,660.

Meanwhile, 245 patients have recovered from their illness during the same period, taking the total number to 3,147.

"The recovery rate now stands at 18.89 percent and mortality rate is 1.5 percent in terms of all patients detected so far," Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the Directorate General of Health Services, said in a briefing yesterday.

Among yesterday's deceased, seven were male and four were female.

Five of them were from Dhaka, two from Narayanganj, two from Chattogram division, one from Sylhet division and one from Narsangdi. Three of the deceased were aged between 51 and 60 years, five between 61 and 70, two between 71 and 80, and one between 81 and 90.

In the last 24 hours till yesterday, a total of 6773 individuals' samples were tested for the virus -- fewer than the previous day when samples of 7,208 individuals were tested.

Beginning on January 28, a total of 1,36,638 individuals' samples have been tested for the virus in 38 labs across the country.

Yesterday, Patuakhali Science and Technology University started testing for Covid-19.

Majority of the Covid-19 patients -- around 60 percent -- were from Dhaka city as of Monday, according to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research website.

More than 22 percent of the total infected patients are from Dhaka division, excluding Dhaka city.

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ACC sues 20 over stealing rice for poor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has filed total 15 cases against 20 people, including 14 representatives of the local government, for their alleged involvement in the misappropriation of about 54,000kg subsidised rice allocated for the poor and vulnerable people.

The cases were filed between April 12 and May 11, according to a press release issued by the ACC yesterday.

ACC Chairman Iqbal Mahmood said everyone involved in misappropriation will have to face legal action.

He said, if necessary, the ACC will form a task force to monitor the investigation and legal proceedings of the cases.

Of the accused, seven are chairmen of different union parishads (UPs). They are Alauddin Paltu of Barguna's Kakrachira union, Shahidul Islam of Barishal's Andamanik union, Mirza Golam

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The pontoon of Sadarghat Launch Terminal is rusting. The terminal has been out of use since March 24 when the government suspended operation of passenger vessels for an indefinite period due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

PHOTO:
FIROZ AHMED

Flights may resume with empty seats

Caab issues carriers guidelines; says flights only after May 16 if situation did not worsen

RASHIDUL HASAN

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) has issued guidelines for air operators, airports and passengers as part of its efforts to resume flight operations on domestic and international routes on a limited scale after May 16.

The flight operations will resume only if the Covid-19 situation improves or remains steady, Caab Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said they asked all airlines to keep at least 25 percent seats vacant on each flight to ensure social distancing, which is crucial to avoid coronavirus transmission.

In its guidelines, the regulatory authority of the country's civil aviation also asked the air operators to keep at least a gap of a seat between two passengers, he said. "In case a passenger is travelling with husband or wife or any other family member, this will not be mandatory.

"We have issued detailed directives for the air operators, passengers and airport authorities on May 10, outlining the guidelines to follow during flight operations"

Talking to this correspondent, top officials of different private airlines, however, said the airfare would go up significantly if they were to follow all the guidelines, making it hard for them to make profits or even survive.

Asked, the Caab boss acknowledged that the fares would

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