

# Things you might've missed

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**ALL HOSPITALS, CLINICS ASKED TO TREAT COVID, NON-COVID PATIENTS**  
The government on Wednesday directed all public and private hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centres to ensure treatment and services to both Covid-19 and non-Covid patients.

The public health experts suggested ensuring treatment to both Covid-19 and non-Covid patients at different parts of the same hospital, read a handout of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

All private and public hospitals having 50 or more beds, clinics, and diagnostic centres have been asked to provide treatment to both Covid and non-Covid patients under separate arrangements.  
**NAGORIK OIKYA CONVENER MANNA CALLS ON KHALEDA ZIA**  
Nagorik Oikya convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna called on BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia on Tuesday.

Manna entered Khaleda Zia's residence at Gulshan in Dhaka around 8:00pm on Tuesday. He stayed there about an hour. Manna said he enquired about Khaleda Zia's physical condition and sought her early recovery.

Asked whether they talked about politics, Manna said, "No. We didn't discuss about politics. We just exchanged Eid greetings and didn't say anything else except her physical condition."

**JAPAN INCLUDES BANGLADESH IN WIDENED ENTRY BAN**

Japan has tightened border control and widened ban on entry of people from countries, including Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, to prevent the spread of

coronavirus.

A notice on the website of Japan's foreign ministry posted on Monday said the embargo would come into effect from Wednesday.

With these countries, Japan's entry ban has been extended to 111 countries and regions, including the United States, most of Asia including China and South Korea, and all of Europe.

**PRESIDENT URGES AFFLUENT TO STAND BY POOR IN CRISIS**

President M Abdul Hamid on Monday urged the rich people of the society to stand by the poor as their level best in this tough time triggered by the coronavirus pandemic and super cyclone Amphan that hit Bangladesh coastlines recently.

In his speech on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, the greatest religious festival of the Muslims, the President said, "In times of disaster, I urge rich and affluent people to stand by the poor and recently cyclone-affected people in south-western region of the country."

He expressed his profound sorrow and sympathy at the loss of lives due to Covid-19 outbreak as well as damages from the cyclone Amphan and also prayed for the early recovery of the victims.

**JOURNALISTS STAGE DEMO PROTESTING SACKINGS DURING PANDEMIC**

Dhaka Journalist Union (DUJ) demonstrated on Monday protesting frequent sackings of journalists from different news media and demanding clearance of their dues (salary and Eid-ul-Fitr allowance).

The journalists held a rally at Kawran Bazar on the day of Eid-ul-Fitr.

# Risky reopening

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All meetings should be held through virtual media debarring the physical presence of people and all offices must follow guidelines of the Directorate General of Health Service, it added.

No one would be allowed to leave their work stations between May 31 to June 15.

The circular also said public transport like buses, minibuses, launches and trains can be operated on a limited scale with a certain number of passengers, while following health safety rules. Everyone has to use mask, the circular added.

It said the respective ministry would issue necessary guidelines in this regard.

People's inter-district movement will remain restricted and they will not be allowed to go out of their homes between 8:00pm to 6:00am unless it is an emergency. All types of gatherings, meetings and programmes would also remain suspended.

Markets, shops and shopping malls will have to close after 4:00pm. However, all emergency services would remain out of the purview of the restriction.

**THE EXPERT PANEL'S SAY**

Prof Shah Monir Hossain, one of the eight members of a government-formed expert committee to supervise, monitor and support the coronavirus response, said, "It's a clear indication that we are going towards a worse situation."

The government's decision will definitely increase public health hazard as there is no doubt that people will not be able to follow safety guidelines while using public transport, especially buses and three-wheelers.

"We don't have any doubt that Covid-19 transmission will increase due to the government's decision, which will prolong the duration of the peak," Monir said.

Earlier, the committee said the Covid-19 outbreak may reach its peak in late May and the situation would remain unchanged for almost two weeks, or until the first week of June if the government continues various interventions.

"We had said the number of new cases was likely to come down to a 'tolerable level' by the end of June, unless the restrictions were relaxed too early. But now I think the transmission period will be prolonged till July to August," he warned.

Another member of the committee, Dr Liaquat Ali, also a medical scientist, said they had suggested that the government impose curfew before and after Eid vacation to contain the spread of Covid-19 infection.

"Instead of doing so, the government

# Two brothers

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Contacted, Group Captain AHM Touhid-ul Ahsan, a director of the airport, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab), confirmed that the air ambulance belonged to the R&R Aviation Limited, a sister concern of Sikder Group.

"A government authorised air ambulance flight left Dhaka for Bangkok on May 25 at 9:13am carrying two persons," he said yesterday.

The R&R Aviation Limited's hotline number relayed a recorded message: their operation is now suspended and would resume from May 31.

Asked about the identity of passengers, the Caab director suggested contacting immigration officials. Reached over the phone, the immigration desk declined to say anything.

The Daily Star tried to contact Sikder Group but could not reach anyone.

The two brothers came into discussion when Exim Bank authorities on May 19 filed a case with Gulshan Police Station accusing them of torturing two top officials of the bank and attempting to shoot them.

Foreign ministry sources said the Bangladesh embassy in Thailand sent a letter to the Foreign Ministry of Thailand

relaxed the restrictions," he said, adding that they suggested that the restrictions be lifted at least after June 25.

"What can we do if the government doesn't pay heed to our advice?"

"I believe the government's decision will cause dire consequences regarding the spreading of Covid-19 and it will take more time to flatten the curve," he said.

**RESUMPTION OF TRANSPORT**

The civil aviation ministry yesterday said domestic flight operations will begin on a limited scale from June 1 following proper guidelines of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.

"We have decided to resume domestic flight operations on a limited scale initially between Dhaka and Chattogram, Sylhet and Saidpur," Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry Senior Secretary M Mohibul Haque said yesterday.

After observing the situation, the senior secretary said, they would consider resuming flights to all the seven domestic destinations, including Jashore and Rajshahi, after June 15.

Md Shamsuzzaman, director general of Bangladesh Railway, said they would resume operation of only intercity trains, that too on a limited scale. "The number of trains would be small and we would sell 50 percent of the tickets of each train to ensure social distancing," he said.

No AC coach would be operational as per the DGHS guidelines, he added.  
**ALL BANKS TO REOPEN**  
Bangladesh Bank yesterday asked banks to keep all their branches across the country open from May 31.

Banks will have to operate like they used to before general holidays were declared by the government, according to a central bank notice sent out to all lenders.

This means all branches of banks will run settlements of transactions from 10:00am to 4:00pm and lenders will keep their outlets open till 6:00pm every working day.

But the branches, located in the areas where the disease has spread significantly, will be allowed to operate their activities only until 4:00pm.

**EXAMS POSTPONED**

Half yearly exams of secondary schools, scheduled for June 13 to 24, will be deferred, said the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) Director General Prof Syed Md Golam Faruk.

Yesterday, the government extended the closure of all educational institutions till June 15 due to the coronavirus situation. All institutions have been closed since March 17.

on May 23 requesting it to allow the arrival of an air ambulance.

Thai government gave the permission on the same day and then a letter was sent to the Thai embassy in Dhaka, requesting it to issue medical visas for two persons.

The visa was issued on May 24 and they flew to Bangkok the next day, foreign ministry sources said.

The Daily Star called the Bangladesh embassy in Thailand twice but did not get any response. The officials also didn't respond to an email sent by this correspondent.

Flights between Bangladesh and Thailand were suspended since March 26.

Meanwhile, National Bank Limited, a concern of Sikder Group of Companies, sent an explanation signed by Abdul Baset Majumder saying that the case was filed to socially demean Ron Haque Sikder.

Contacted, Baset Majumder said, "I issued the explanation under the instruction of Zainul Huq Sikder."

Asked about the whereabouts of Ron Haque Sikder, the lawyer said, "I talked to chairman Zainul Huq Sikder."

Sudip Kumar Chakroborty, Deputy Commissioner of Gulshan Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said they are investigating the case and taking action.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

**Sonia, aged around 13, making garlands for sale at TSC on Dhaka University campus yesterday. The shutdown to slow the progress of the coronavirus spread has been taking a toll on the livelihoods of people like Sonia.**

# Burnt unit had no fire safety

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yesterday inspected 11 fire extinguishers used in dousing the flames and found that eight of them passed their expiry dates.

"The partitions and rooftops were all made of flammable substances," said Mayor Atiqul. "The hospital authorities should have thought about fire risks when constructing this extension."

He added, "They should have sought the expertise of the fire department before building this annexe."

The mayor also said a team trained to fight fire at United Hospital was hesitant to enter the annexe as it was an isolation unit for coronavirus suspects.

While the mayor thanked United Hospital for taking in coronavirus suspects, he said that all makeshift coronavirus hospitals must be made keeping fire safety measures in place.

"The government will have to take action against them if the investigation concludes that negligence happened. It is the reality," the mayor said.

The Building Construction Act provides for a punishment of seven years' imprisonment or a fine of Tk 50,000 or both in case of violation of the Bangladesh National Building Code and Building Construction Rules of 2006.

Meanwhile, a witness said there was inadequate fire-fighting measures inside the hospital.

Andre Dominic Paul's father Vernon Anthony Paul, 75, was one of the patients who perished in the inferno. Andre watched the fire happen from beginning till the end.

He was waiting outside the isolation unit around 9:40pm hoping to see a doctor when he heard a commotion; but he saw the door flung open and doctors and nurses file out.

The air-conditioner in the doctor's room sparked, spitting flames everywhere. "The sparks fell on the floor and a ward staffer rushed in with a wet mop to smother the electric fire, but the

mop probably had disinfectant on it, so the fire spread in a split second from the floor to a bed with paper files on it," he said. The ward staffer threw the mop away and ran out.

"They had no fire extinguishers inside the coronavirus unit, and they had to bring in fire extinguishers from the main building, which took some time, allowing the fire to spread. The fire hydrant was also in the main building and the hosepipe was too short to reach the flames because the isolation unit was further away," he narrated.

United Hospital authorities said the fire spread quickly, "as it was windy".

Meanwhile, fire service officials said oxygen cylinders inside the isolation units exploded and fed into the fire.

"Some of the patients died of asphyxiation and the others died by burning. They were all found lying in their beds," stated Abul Kalam Azad, senior station officer at Baridhara fire station.

"The fire service arrived at 10:04pm and by that time explosions could be heard. There was no scope of saving the patients."

The victims were Vernon Anthony Paul; Riyajul Alam, 45; Khodeja Begum, 70; Md Monir Hossain, 75; and Md Mahabub, 50. Of them, Vernon Paul and Khodeja Begum's blood samples came out negative for coronavirus and they were meant to be moved to the normal sections of the hospital, had the tragedy not occurred.

"My mother was brought here the day before Eid with asthma. She had a coronavirus test 15 days ago, but the result came out negative. But because the test was taken 15 days ago, the hospital suggested she be kept at the isolation unit," said Khodeja's son Mohammad Alamgir.

They got a second test done two days ago at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, and the results came negative yesterday. "Yesterday [Wednesday] afternoon,

trying to arrest the accused."

**'BASELESS', 'FABRICATED'**

In the statement to the media on Wednesday evening, the NBL termed the case "baseless" and "fabricated".

The statement, signed by NBL's Legal Adviser Abdul Baset Majumder, said Ron Haque did not apply for any such loan, and that the case was filed to socially malign him, the NBL and its board of directors.

It said Ron Haque did not visit the Gulshan Avenue branch of Exim Bank on May 7. "So, there is no question of any bargaining over loan and collateral."

It alleged that a director of the Exim Bank took a loan from the NBL to expand business and another loan against the name of his daughter. The director even wanted to take a loan from the NBL, remaining anonymous.

It further said Ron Haque, the NBL and its directors have been running businesses in various sectors with a good reputation.

Baset strongly protested the filing of the "baseless" case and said his client firmly believes that there will be an impartial investigation and that the culprits will face legal action.

**EXIM BANK'S STATEMENT**

On behalf of Exim Bank, Supreme Court lawyer Mia Mohammad Kawsar Alam in a statement yesterday said the complainant didn't raise any allegations against the NBL.

He said the plaintiff of the case rejected the NBL statement, which was "false", "imaginary" and "unacceptable". It was aimed at diverting the issue.

Matters such as a director of Exim Bank taking a loan from the NBL or a director's daughter seeking a loan from the NBL were irrelevant and had nothing to do with the case, Kawsar mentioned.

It is surprising that a bank issued such a statement, citing irrelevant matters, he added.

He further said the NBL denied the fact that Ron Haque sought a loan. Sikder Group is a long-term borrower of Exim Bank and the incident took place over collateral for a Tk 500-crore loan.

The lawyer also refuted the allegation that the complainant had filed the case to malign the NBL and

we approached the doctor to shift our mother and they were preparing for the transfer. We were at our home in Maniknagar when we heard about the incident. By the time we arrived, my mother was reduced to a dead body. We had to recognise her by the jewellery she was wearing," said Alamgir.

"The patients inside were all bed-ridden and therefore they could not escape. The doctors, nurses and staff could," said Dr Shagufa Anwar, chief of communication and business development at the hospital, addressing journalists yesterday afternoon.

The government has formed a four-member panel headed by Debasish Bardhan to investigate the incident.

United Hospital too is doing its own investigation and submitting a report on Sunday, said Dr Anwar. "We have formed an internal committee of 12 people, with personnel from security, human resources department and clinical management."

The hospital also filed a case with the Gulshan Police Station, reporting "unnatural deaths".

"This is just a temporary establishment. I am not aware whether we needed to get a fire safety clearance for this emergency structure," said Maj Mohammed Moinul Hossain, manager of administration and security at United Hospitals Ltd, when asked why they did not get a fire safety clearance from the department concerned.

He could not state for sure how many fire extinguishers were inside the isolation unit.

"There were fire extinguishers in the area adjacent to the isolation unit, which is about 20 or 25 metres away. We also had a fire hydrant in the main building, but the fire hydrant can only reach a certain extent, following which we need the help of professional fire fighters," he said. "Besides, the fire got too big to handle in a very short amount of time."

# Flash flood lashes Sylhet's Gowainghat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Flash floods triggered by heavy rains since Monday has inundated Gowainghat upazila of Sylhet, while overflowing water of the Sari river submerged vast area in the upazila.

The flash floods flooded hundreds of houses and disconnected road communications in the region, said Nazmus Sakib, upazila nirbahi officer in Gowainghat.

He also said that at least hundred trees and several houses were damaged due to nor'westers on Tuesday night.

Shahiduzzaman Sarkar, executive engineer of Water Development Board (WDB) in Sylhet, said the Sari river was flowing 48 centimetres above danger level at 3:00pm on Wednesday.

The situation, however, started improving, he said, adding that the water in the river was flowing 55 centimetres below the danger level at 9:00am yesterday.

He further said that no embankment or dam of the river was damaged due to the flash flood.

Meanwhile, Sultan Ali, agriculture officer in the upazila, said at least 15 hectares of Aush seedbed that was under risk were safe as the water started receding.

Abul Kalam Azad, district fisheries officer of Sylhet, said several fisheries were flooded in the upazila and resulted huge loss.

The authorities were inspecting and calculating the loss, he added.

UNO Nazmus Sakib said "The flash flood could not damage much of the livelihood and farmlands, but left two roads – Gowainghat-Jallog and Gowainghat-Lengura – ravaged."

# Cyclone

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looking for dray places and food.

Many people told this correspondent that they had been starving for the last couple of days and were yet to receive any government aid.

Sagar Sheikh from Golakhali village in Koyra said, "We have no way to survive. We have no accommodation and food. Nobody helped us."

He has decided to take shelter at his relative's house in a nearby village.

Sources said about two lakh people in the area have been badly affected by the cyclone. The local administration has so far distributed 50 tonnes of rice, 500 packets of dry food and Tk 75 lakh among the cyclone victims in the upazila.

Harshit Mandal, a local, also used to live near the Harinkhola embankment.

Asked if he received any relief, he said, "Only providing relief would not solve our problems as we don't have a place to live. We urge the government to repair the embankment as soon as possible."

The entire area would become uninhabitable if the embankment was not repaired, Harshit said, adding that the locals were already suffering from different waterborne diseases.

Dr Sujat Ahmed, civil Surgeon of Khulna, said huge quantities of saline water entered the area during the cyclone which was causing the diseases.

"People will face a crisis of drinking water due to salinity which would worsen the situation," he said.

The civil surgeon expressed concern that the salinity might cause health hazards in the area for a long time.

Khulna Livestock Officer Kazi Mostahim Billah said about 60 percent of the district's livestock was affected by the cyclone. Around 40,000 cattle have been shifted to another upazila.

Koyra UNO Shimul Kumar Saha said he visited the affected areas. "I have informed the higher authorities about the prevailing situation there."

# Trump planning new arms sale to Saudi Arabia, says senator

AFP , Washington

President Donald Trump's administration wants to sell arms to Saudi Arabia again, one year after pushing through a controversial \$8.1 billion contract despite congressional opposition, an influential US senator revealed on Wednesday.

"The administration is currently trying to sell thousands more precision-guided bombs to the President's 'friend,' Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman," New Jersey Democrat Bob Menendez said in an op-ed published online by CNN.

The government wants to conclude the sale, the details of which have not yet been made public, "even though the Saudis seemingly want out of their failed and brutal war in Yemen," he added.

Menendez, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, recalled how the previous contract to sell various arms to Saudi Arabia as well as the United Arab Emirates was blocked by Congress after the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.