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**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**

1,764
New cases in 24hrs

44,608
Total cases

610
Deaths

9,375
Recoveries

**GLOBAL
UPDATE**

367,715
Deaths

6,071,825
Total cases

Flattening the curve a far cry now

Say experts as govt eases Covid clampdown ignoring their warnings

ZYMA ISLAM and MAHABUBUR RAHMAN

On the same day the Cabinet Division issued a circular on relaxing the shutdown, the government's very own National Technical Advisory Committee on May 28 warned of an explosion of cases if health and safety measures were not implemented strictly.

In mid-April, the government formed the 17-member advisory committee to tackle the outbreak of novel coronavirus in the country. Since then, it has been giving advice on different issues on fighting Covid-19.

"It has been seen that countries that lifted the lockdown before experiencing a definite reduction in the infection rate, experienced a rise in the infection rate," said a statement signed by its Chairperson Prof Dr Md Shahidullah and Member Secretary Prof Dr Meerjady Sabrina Flora.

Dr Shahidullah is a senior child specialist and president of Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council while Dr Flora is the director of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

"Lifting the lockdown before strictly implementing the rules and requirements of preventing transmission will increase the number of positive patients and create pressure on the healthcare system," warned the statement.

The statement mentioned that the committee had previously given a similar advice to the government on May 7.

"I see no possibility of the curve flattening," said Dr Iqbal Arsalan, a member of the committee.

"This is still unpredictable. People are going around without masks for

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An employee of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport sitting on a chair at a terminal. The chairs have been marked to make sure that people do not sit next to each other but they are apparently not three feet apart. Inset, an airplane being readied yesterday as domestic flights are set to take to the sky after remaining grounded for over two months due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Engage local public reps in Covid-19 fight

PM directs authorities UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the authorities concerned to engage the local public representatives in a greater way to contain the spread of novel coronavirus.

"The prime minister issued the directive while addressing a meeting of the National Technical Advisory Committee, formed to fight Covid-19 in the country," PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told UNB.

Hasina also directed the authorities to check the spread of novel coronavirus and provide proper healthcare services to the infected patients.

The three-hour meeting

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Death count doubles in two weeks

28 more die; 1,764 new cases recorded

MAHABUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

The government has relaxed the nationwide shutdown at a time when the number of Covid-19 patients is increasing at a faster rate than ever.

The death toll has doubled in the past fortnight, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With 28 deaths reported yesterday, death toll in the country has risen to 610, up from 298 on May 15.

The country recorded its first death from Covid-19 on March 18.

Experts had suggested that antigen and antibody tests be carried out on people before reopening the businesses and official activities.

They termed the easing of the shutdown without ensuring a proper safety plan a "dangerous decision".

ANTIGEN AND ANTIBODY TEST
Talking to The Daily Star, Prof Muzaherul Huq, former adviser (Southeast Asia Region) of the World Health Organization (WHO), had recently suggested that the

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Public plight set to worsen

Govt panel recommends 80pc hike in bus fare; air fare may rise by at least Tk 300

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and RASHIDUL HASAN

The government is going to significantly raise bus fares, making travelling costlier for people already struggling with unemployment and reduced income amid the coronavirus outbreak.

A committee yesterday recommended an 80 percent hike in the fares because maintaining proper distance among passengers would reduce a bus's capacity to 50 percent of normal levels.

"We will send our recommendations to the Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges for approval. They will decide," said Yousub Ali Mollah, acting chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

The new fares will be a major blow for people struggling amid the shutdown since March 26, economists and passengers' rights activists said. Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity yesterday urged the government to give incentives to transport companies to keep travelling costs stable.

80 PERCENT HIKE

On Friday, a meeting decided that buses will carry 50 percent of normal level passengers when the services resume from tomorrow.

Transport associations then demanded that the fares be doubled.

The special committee to fix bus fares yesterday held a meeting at BRTA head office in the capital, which was attended by representatives of transport owners and workers, Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC), and Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA).

"We have recommended raising bus fares by 80 percent," Yousub told The Daily Star.

If approved by the ministry, the new fares would be applicable during the Covid-19 crisis only, he added.

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IMF to lend \$732m for urgent needs

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

The optics look perfect. The global lender of last resort coming to the rescue of a not-too-well-endowed country struggling with the economic impact of the pandemic with no strings attached.

A couple of weeks back, Bangladesh requested for emergency funding to tackle the economic impact of the global coronavirus pandemic and the International Monetary Fund responded to that call just as swiftly, sanctioning \$732 million for the country -- without any conditions.

It is the last part that seems rather surprising as it is the idea of "conditionality" that underpins almost all of the IMF's lending relationships with member states.

Whenever it lends, it insists that the borrowing government tighten its belt and exercise restraint in public spending.

This helps to achieve three objectives. One is to stabilise the public debt burden, to ensure that the resources made available are not wasted. The second is to limit the whole economy's need for foreign exchange, a shortage of which had

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Trump cutting US ties with WHO

Moves toward ending HK privileges in volley on China

REUTERS, Washington

The United States will end its relationship with the World Health Organization over the body's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, US President Donald Trump said on Friday, accusing the UN agency of becoming a puppet of China.

The move to quit the Geneva-based body, which the United States formally joined in 1948, comes amid growing tensions between Washington and Beijing over the coronavirus outbreak. The virus first emerged in China's Wuhan city late last year.

Trump also ordered his administration to begin the process of eliminating special US treatment for Hong Kong to punish China, but stopped short of calling an immediate end to privileges that have helped the territory remain a global financial centre.

Speaking in the White House Rose Garden, the US president said Chinese officials "ignored their reporting obligations" to the WHO about the virus - that has killed hundreds of thousands of people globally - and pressured the agency to "mislead the world."

"China has total control over the World Health Organization despite only paying \$40 million per year compared to what the United States has been paying which is approximately \$450 million a year," he said.

Trump's decision follows a pledge last week by Chinese President Xi Jinping to give \$2 billion to the WHO over the next two years to help

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SSC results via websites, texts today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Results of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and equivalent exams will be published today.

Examinees would get their results online and via SMS this year as the authorities decided to avoid the traditional method due to coronavirus situation in the country, said education ministry officials.

Over 13.23 lakh examinees and their guardians who registered earlier would receive their results on their phones via SMS. Rest of them would be able to see their results online.

Prof Ziaul Haque, chairman of Dhaka Education Board, said those who pre-registered would get their results between 12:00 noon and 1:00pm.

All preparations for publishing the results have been completed, added Ziaul, who is also the head of the inter-board coordination committee.

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Encroachment and throwaway plastic goods make it seem like Segun Bagicha canal in the capital's Manda is a stream of garbage. The clogged canal may cause flooding in the area during monsoon. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

ABDUCTION, MURDER IN LIBYA

'Pay the money or else they die'

Agents of abductors in Bangladesh had demanded Tk 10 lakh ransom for each victim

MOKAMMEL SHUVO and SUZIT DAS

The Bangladeshi workers who were killed in Mizda town in Libya were kept hostage on the way to Tripoli from Benghazi by a group of international traffickers, comprising Libyans, Bangladeshis and Somalis, who demanded Tk 10 lakh from each of the hostages' families.

Some family members of the victims even paid ransom to the local agents of traffickers yet could not save their family members.

The Daily Star reached the family members of eight of the 26 dead migrant workers belonging to Kishoreganj, Jashore, Madaripur and Faridpur, and came to know that Bangladeshi members of traffickers group called the families last week and demanded USD 12,000 or Tk 10 lakh if they wanted their family member alive.

At least six of the migrant workers from Madaripur and Faridpur left Bangladesh for Libya in January while the two others from Kishoreganj and Jashore reached Benghazi a few months ago and were working there. But all of them were held hostage on the way to Tripoli.

The traffickers either called or sent voice messages demanding money from May 15 to May 26, said family members of the victims.

Kabul Mridha, father of a dead worker identified as Sujon Mridha from Gopalganj, said, a Bangladeshi member of the trafficker gang called them from an account called "Hamari" and gave them a bank account number of Ahmed Mohammed Adham Salama Bank in Somalia and

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Flattening the curve

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example. People need to wear a two or three-layer cloth mask, that they will wash after every use.

"Physical distancing is being stressed upon. The law enforcers will try to maintain physical distancing, but soon the crowds will get out of control. We have seen this before Eid -- the law enforcers tried to disperse crowds, but failed to do so because they cannot jump on civilians with riot gear."

Talking to The Daily Star, he also said, "We do not have enough hospital beds, enough ventilators to deal with the crisis."

He talked about an impending transport crisis among office goers, since there has always been a shortage of transport, compared to the need.

"Even if buses have been instructed to operate at half their passenger capacity, what will happen when office goers will crowd into the buses?"

In addition, the government had formed an eight-member expert committee to supervise, monitor and support the coronavirus response, at the end of March. Its members have also advised the government on how to ease the lockdown -- but the government's current step sharply contrasts with that.

"We had asked the government to lift the lockdown phase-by-phase," said Prof Shah Monir Hossain, a member of the expert committee.

"We recommended that they identify the cluster areas and put those on complete lockdown, while easing certain other areas that are not seeing as many cases. We had asked the government not to allow reopening of markets before Eid, but they also had to think of the businesses."

"We had hoped to flatten the curve by the end of June, but that is probably not going to happen anymore because the number of coronavirus patients will increase."

While compliance is the key to controlling the transmission, it is a gargantuan task in the context of Bangladesh to enforce the rules of social distancing and other steps, said Prof Monir, also a former DG of DGHS.

Criticising the government and the committees for failing to plan a safe return to normal life, Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director of disease control at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, said, "Lockdown is supposed to be lifted at some point but they need to devise a good mechanism. But we are not seeing it."

"For instance, an infected assistant to a bus driver will act as a super spreader of Covid-19 as he usually lifts and collects passengers. So, special measures are needed to be taken for both bus drivers and helpers, but we've not yet heard of anything like that."

Prof Be-Nazir too suggested that the government should have lifted the shutdown in phases from areas that are less affected.

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former adviser (Southeast Asia Region) of the World Health Organization (WHO) and president of Public Health Foundation of Bangladesh, explained further what "phase-

wise" lifting of a lockdown could look like.

"Districts can be divided according to their number of cases. In those with under a hundred cases, the lockdown can be lifted, but that has to go hand-in-hand with strict quarantining of the cases and contact tracing."

"Districts containing between 100-300 cases can zoom into upazilas with clusters and maintain the lockdown there, while easing restrictions in other upazilas. Districts with over 300 cases have to be under complete lockdown."

The WHO has outlined six stages a country needs to reach before lifting the lockdown. These stages are: Disease transmission is under control; Health systems are able to "detect, test, isolate and treat every case and trace every contact"; Clusters are minimised in vulnerable places, such as nursing homes, schools and workplaces; and a second wave can be managed and communities are fully educated, engaged and empowered to live under a "new normal".

"We have not achieved these stages yet," said Dr Huq.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Health Watch yesterday sent a press statement, signed by its head Dr Mushtaq Chowdhury, to the media along the same vein as WHO.

"The Watch believes that the social and scientific aspects of the planned 'reopening' on May 31, 2020 and its likely consequences have not been duly considered," the statement said. It also said the government should take four steps to ease the lockdown.

"Monitor scientifically the effects of the reopening on disease incidences so that any negative outcome can easily and immediately be tracked and attended to for making strategic changes. The country has a number of important institutions which deal with data," it said.

"Strictly adhere, religiously implement and scale up the 3Ts [Test, Trace and Treat]."

"Strengthen and empower the primary health care centres at community clinics, union centres and upazila health complexes. These should be the place of first call and should be equipped with the requisite facilities, including testing [at upazila level], contact tracing, isolation facilities and initial treatments."

HEALTH SAFETY DIRECTIVES
In a circular, the Health Service Division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has directed all public and private offices to follow 12 health directives from now on.

Signed by Deputy Secretary Khandokar Zakir Hossain, the circular directed on disinfecting offices, their premises, streets and official transport and setting up thermal scanners or keeping thermometers to check body temperature.

It also suggested using each piece of surgical mask only once, reusing fabric masks after washing them properly, cleaning hands frequently, maintaining a distance of three feet from each other while eating food, and disinfecting toilet every time it is used.

It also directed the authorities to monitor whether people are following the health rules and to isolate any infected persons immediately.

Trump cutting US ties

FROM PAGE 1
Jinping to give \$2 billion to the WHO over the next two years to help combat the coronavirus. The amount almost matches the WHO's entire annual program budget for last year.

Trump last month halted funding for the 194-member organization, then in a May 18 letter gave the WHO 30 days to commit to reforms.

"Because they have failed to make the requested and greatly needed reforms, we will be today terminating our relationship with the World Health Organization and redirecting those funds to other worldwide and deserving urgent global public health needs," Trump said on Friday.

It was not immediately clear when his decision would come into effect. A 1948 joint resolution of Congress on US membership of the WHO said the country "reserves its right to withdraw from the organization on a one-year notice."

The World Health Organization did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Trump's announcement. It has previously denied Trump's assertions that it promoted Chinese "disinformation" about the virus.

The European Union yesterday called on the US to "reconsider" the decision to sever ties with the WHO over its handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

TRUMP STRIPS HK PRIVILEGES
Trump used some of his toughest rhetoric yet against China, saying Beijing had broken its word over Hong Kong's autonomy by moving to impose new national security legislation and the territory no longer warranted US economic privileges.

At the White House news conference, Trump called this a tragedy for the people of Hong Kong, China and the world, having already attacked Beijing over the coronavirus pandemic, which began in China. Trump said China's "malfeasance" was responsible for massive suffering and economic damage worldwide.

"We will take action to revoke Hong Kong's preferential treatment as a separate customs and travel territory from the rest of China," Trump said, adding that Washington would also impose sanctions on individuals seen as responsible for "smothering - absolutely smothering - Hong Kong's freedom."

He did not name any of the potential sanctions targets. Trump said his announcement would "affect the full range of agreements we have with Hong Kong," from the US extradition treaty to export controls on dual-use technologies and more "with few exceptions."

"Our actions will be strong, our actions will be meaningful," Trump added. China's state-run Global Times newspaper called Trump's announcement "recklessly arbitrary."

Trump gave no time frame for the moves, suggesting he may be trying to buy time before deciding whether to implement the most drastic measures, which have drawn strong resistance from US companies operating in Hong Kong. He also said he was issuing a proclamation to better safeguard vital university research by suspending entry of foreign nationals from China identified as potential security risks.

Sources, including a current US official, told Reuters on Thursday that the latter move could affect 3,000 to 5,000 Chinese graduate students. Financial markets saw Trump's announcement as more bark than bite and US stocks finished mostly higher as it was seen as less threatening to the US economy than investors had feared.

"I don't think a lot has changed," said Craig Allen, president of the US-China Business Council. "We haven't taken steps that really ratchet up the tension even more."

He said he interpreted the actions rescinding Hong Kong's special status as being first subject to review by various agencies and not happening immediately.



With no buses plying between Dhaka and Mawa, Munshiganj, some motorcyclists are carrying multiple pillion riders with sizable backpacks and no helmets on the highway for hefty sums. Inset, the utter disregard for safety is also seen on Dhaka-Aricha highway near Jahangirnagar University. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN/PALASH KHAN

IMF to lend \$732m for urgent needs

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prompted the country to seek the IMF's help in the first place.

And the third is to ensure that the IMF can get repaid. Since it does not take any physical collateral from countries to whom it is lending, the belt-tightening helps to act as a kind of collateral.

So the fact that the latest funding from the Washington-based multilateral lender comes without strings, as the official statement says, seems a rather uncharacteristic move.

But if one reads in between the lines, the assistance is not all it is cracked up to be.

The crisis lender says it will closely monitor how the country fares in promoting strong and inclusive growth while preserving macroeconomic stability once the public health crisis abates.

Key policy challenges for the country include tax revenue mobilisation, addressing the mounting default loans in the banking sector, and improving infrastructure and governance to enhance the business environment and attract foreign direct investment, the IMF said.

In other words, the lender is letting the country be off-leash -- for now.

But once normal order returns in the world, the country would be put back on the leash for the Tk 6,222 crore that is coming with next to no interest rates.

Bangladesh would get about \$244 million under the Rapid Credit Facility, meaning there would be zero interest rate, and another \$488 million under

the Rapid Financing Instrument that has less than 1 per cent interest.

The repayment period would be 15 years with a grace period of five years, said a finance ministry official.

Normally, IMF financing is added to the country's foreign currency reserves managed by the Bangladesh Bank as it comes through in phases.

This time, the amount would arrive in one go within a few days, and the government would issue a special bond to borrow the funds from the central bank to use the money, the finance ministry official said.

The finance ministry would now sign a letter of intent with the BB to this effect.

Of the sum, Tk 3,000 crore would be used as interest rate subsidy on the loans going to the pandemic-hit micro, small, medium and large entrepreneurs, farmers and exporters.

Another Tk 2,000 crore would go to banks to cushion them from the losses from the deferred interest payment on loans for May and June.

About Tk 16,000 crore in interest was to be paid in the two months; and the borrowers would be repaying the Tk 14,000 crore over 12 months in instalments, the finance ministry official said.

The global last-resort lender will not stop here; it would make available another \$700 million for the country if it needs.

"The IMF continues to monitor Bangladesh's situation closely and stands ready to provide further advice

and support, if needed," it said in the press release.

Bangladesh has responded quickly to the coronavirus outbreak with a comprehensive set of measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus, providing immediate relief to the most vulnerable households and affected businesses, and preserving the country's macroeconomic prospects, said Antoinette Sayeh, deputy managing director and acting chair of the IMF.

The government has unveiled various stimulus packages amounting to \$101,117 crore, which is 3.6 per cent of the country's gross domestic product, to help people, businesses, entrepreneurs, farmers, industrialists and exporters counter the impact of the pandemic.

A temporary increase in the fiscal deficit is necessary, and it will be important to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of all emergency spending, Sayeh said.

The Bangladesh Bank took appropriate steps to ease liquidity conditions and allow the financial sector to support the economy. Further easing could be considered if the economic situation deteriorates and inflation remains moderate, she said.

"A gradual increase in exchange rate flexibility should be allowed to adjust to the external shock while preserving foreign reserves."

To secure the funds from the IMF, the government would now speed up its ongoing reforms at the National Board of Revenue and in the banking sector.

Public plight set to worsen

FROM PAGE 1
"Although we will have 50 percent passengers, the operational costs will remain unchanged. Besides, we will have to spend an additional about Tk 1,000 on health safety and disinfecting procedures after every trip," said Abul Kalam, vice-president of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, after the meeting.

The government last fixed inter-district bus fares in May 2016 at the rate of Tk 0.42 for each kilometre. With the new hike, the cost of travelling from the capital's Galtali to Barishal through Faridpur would be Tk 789, excluding tolls. Before the shutdown, it cost only Tk 438, excluding tolls.

Within Dhaka city, bus fare was last fixed in September 2015 at the rate of Tk 1.70 per km. If the new rate comes into effect, the fare from Mirpur Zoo to Notre Dame College would be Tk 60 which was Tk 33 as per existing rate.

BURDEN ON PEOPLE
Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at Centre for Policy Dialogue, said, "There is a shortage of public transport. The decision to keep 50 percent of the seats vacant...would be very difficult to enforce."

He added that the 80 percent hike would be a major burden for common people.

'Pay the money or else they die'

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where his son requested him to pay them Tk 10 lakh otherwise they would kill him. He also said the trafficker did not give them any food for two days and tortured them with electric shocks.

"I gave Tk 3.90 lakh to Rob Moral, a resident of Jatrabari village in the upazila, to send to Tripoli on the first week of January," said Kabul, 49.

Rob was an agent of Julhas Sheikh, son of Majid Sheikh in Madaripur, who actually arranged everything to send Sujana to Libya. Sujana left Bangladesh on January 30.

They took Sujana to India and then to Egypt via Dubai. From Egypt they took him to Benghazi in Libya by bus.

His son used to call him using social media apps. Since January, he spent Tk 58,000 to buy food as the traffickers did not give him proper food.

"I last spoke to my son on May 16 over phone and he said they will send him to Tripoli very soon. On May 20, we got a voice message from my son, he told us to send Tk 10 lakhs if we want him alive."

Since then Kabul had been trying to contact Rob, he said.

Rajjak Howlader, 45, father of Jewel Howlader, 22, of Madaripur, said, they also sent his son to Libya through Julhas.

"We gave Tk 4 lakh and 10 thousand to Julhas through Md Zahidul, 45, one of our neighbours in January," he said. On May 20, he got a voice SMS

people.

At least two of the stimulus packages announced by the government were related to the transport sector. The companies can take advantage of those packages, he said.

Bus companies should try to keep the operational costs at a low level and make very little profit during the crisis, he said, adding that if necessary, they can ask for more stimulus packages.

"Common people should not be made the victim to provide benefits to the bus operators," he told The Daily Star.

AIR PASSENGERS TO PAY MORE
The time has come to say goodbye to budget air travel as airlines will have to keep almost half the seats empty, said officials at different airlines and the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB).

According to CAAB guideline, the airlines must keep at least 30 percent of the seats empty on every flight to ensure social distancing. There will be an empty seat between every two passengers unless they are from the same family.

But officials at different airlines said they will have to keep at least 50 percent of the seats vacant to follow the guidelines.

Passengers will have to pay an additional Tk 300 to Tk 500 to fly on Dhaka-Sylhet, Dhaka-Chattogram and Dhaka-Saidpur routes, they added.

Kamrul Islam, general manager of public relations at US-Bangla Airlines, said in a 76-seat Dash-8Q 400, they will have to keep 38 seats empty and for an 72-seat ATR, they will have to keep 36 vacant.

Sources at different airlines said passengers would have to pay Tk 3,000 to Tk 3,200 for a ticket to Chattogram, Sylhet and Saidpur from Dhaka. The rates were between Tk 2,500 and Tk 2,700 before the pandemic.

The government on Thursday decided to resume flight operations on a limited scale from Dhaka to the three destinations from today.

MOVE CONDEMNED
Consumers Association of Bangladesh in a statement termed the proposed bus fare hike "unacceptable" and urged the government to refrain from such a move.

Its President Golam Rahman said the general public should not have to compensate for the losses incurred by transport companies.

The government should announce stimulus packages, or subsidise the sector, the statement said, adding that fuel prices should be lowered.

Racism cannot be 'normal' in US

Says Obama of latest police killing

AFP, Washington

Former president Barack Obama said Friday he shared the "anguish" of millions of Americans over the death of a black man killed by police in Minnesota and that racism cannot be "normal" in the United States.

"This shouldn't be 'normal' in 2020 America," Obama said of the death of Minneapolis man George Floyd and several other recent racial incidents in the country.

"It can't be 'normal,' the first African-American president of the United States said in a statement. "If we want our children to grow up in a nation that lives up to its highest ideals, we can and must do better."

Floyd's death on Monday sparked three nights of rioting in Minneapolis and protests against police brutality in other US cities.

Death count

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government test the office-goers to check infection.

The antigen test is a quick method to detect fragments of proteins found on or within the virus by testing samples collected from the nasal cavity using swabs.

Through the antibody test, it is checked whether a person has developed an immune system against Covid-19. It also determines whether a person has previously or recently been exposed to the coronavirus.

"It takes only 10 minutes to conduct antigen and antibody tests. It will not take more than two days to find out the situation of coronavirus infection in a factory where about 1,000 people work," he said.

Those who would be tested positive in the antigen tests would be sent to isolation, he said, adding that by following this technique, the spread can be prevented in the coming days.

Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director of disease control at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, said the next 15 days would be crucial for Bangladesh.

The country has a good reputation for overcoming cholera and diphtheria crises. "If we can properly maintain the personal hygiene, we would be able to overcome the novel coronavirus as well," he said.

"But as a health expert, I'm not seeing any visible plan of the government to combat the deadly virus in the coming days which is frustrating."

DAILY BRIEFING
Prof Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of DGHS yesterday said a total of 9,987 samples were tested in 50 labs across the country.

"In the last 24 hours, 1,764 people tested positive for Covid-19. With them, the total number of infection has reached 44,608," she said.

Meanwhile, 360 Covid-19 patients have recovered during this period, pushing the total number of recovered patients to 9,375 and the recovery rate to 21.02 percent, the DGHS official said.

A total of 469 people were put under isolation in 24 hours, she added.

Among the 28 deceased, 25 were male, she said, adding that 18 were from Dhaka, seven from Chattogram, two from Rangpur and another was from Sylhet division.

Of them, four were between 31-40 years old, four between 41-50, nine between 51-60, six between 61-70, three between 71-80 and two between 81-90 years old, Dr Nasima also said.

SSC results

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will announce the result through videoconference in the morning and Education Minister Dipu Moni will later hold a press conference on the results through Facebook, said Mohammad Abul Khair, public relations officer of the education ministry.

This year, the SSC and equivalent exams began on February 3, with the theoretical and practical tests ending on February 27 and on March 6 respectively.

The government earlier planned to publish the results on May 7 or May 8, but could not publish it due to school closure due to Covid-19.

Some 2,047,779 students took part in the SSC and equivalent exams held at 3,512 centres. Like the previous years, results will be also available on the education board website.

Examinees can get the results from the education board website -- <http://www.educationboardresults.gov.bd/> -- and also from the websites of respective education boards.

Engage

FROM PAGE 1
at the Gono Bhaban discussed different measures taken by the committee to check the spread of the deadly virus and provide healthcare services to patients.

Committee President Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikus, PMO Secretary Tofazzal Hossain Miah, PM's private physician Dr ABM Abdullah, Health Services Secretary Ashadul Islam and other members of the committee were present.

The government had formed the 17-member committee on April 19 with a view to containing the spread of Covid-19 in the country.

Railway selling its tickets online-only

Half of capacity to be sold to ensure social distancing, says minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Railway (BR), set to resume train operations from today on a limited scale, started selling all tickets online from yesterday afternoon, to ensure health safety of passengers and staffers.

Besides, no food would be supplied inside trains, and passengers will have to arrive at the station one hour ahead of the schedule to help check body temperatures.

BR would sell 50 percent of the tickets for each train to ensure social distancing, and all trains would be operated following the existing schedule. Eight intercity trains would start operations from today while 11 more will be added from June 3.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan told reporters about the measures after holding a meeting with officials at Rail Bhaban yesterday.

The minister came up with the operation plan two days after the government announced to open public transport, rail and rivers on limited scale from today, over a two months after a shutdown enforced from March 26 to contain spread of Covid-19 in the country.

Usually, BR sold 50 percent tickets from counters and 50 percent online, but now all tickets would be sold online for health safety reasons, the minister said.

But, BR, as a government agency, would not increase train fares although it would carry limited passengers, he said.

Sujan, however, expressed apprehensions that railway may face huge pressure of passengers if the government increased bus fares as demanded by bus owners.

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AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN... A few streetlights near Kamalapur Inland Container Depot (ICD) are precariously leaning over electric wires, as last weekend's heavy storm left a few casualties around town. The photo was taken on Friday afternoon.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

IMPROVING COVID-19 FACILITIES

ADB provides \$231,178 grant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is providing a grant of \$231,178 to augment novel coronavirus disease related facilities in 134 urban primary health centres, called Nopor Swastho Kendro, across the country.

The health centres are providing primary healthcare services to the urban poor under the ADB-supported Urban Primary Health Care Services Delivery Project in nine city corporations and four municipalities, said a press release.

"We are pleased to provide this grant assistance to further strengthen the government's efforts in managing the Covid-19 pandemic and delivering related services to the people," said country director Manmohan Parkash.

"This initiative will be a model of providing both Covid and non-Covid related healthcare services for over 8 million urban poor through Nopor Swastho Kendro in Bangladesh. The programme will also create awareness about Covid-19 prevention and management and help the health workers and doctors detect and treat patients early," Parkash added.

The assistance will help set up hand
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MITIGATING DHAKA'S WATERLOGGING

DNCC mayor inaugurates excavation of 1.8km canal



Mayor Atiqul Islam oversees canal excavation works yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) Mayor Atiqul Islam yesterday inaugurated excavation work of a 1.8km canal -- stretching from Ashkona Hajj camp to Banorupa Housing at Khilkhet -- to reduce waterlogging problem of adjoining areas.

The canal, which belongs to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), cannot flow smoothly due to obstacles at different points. This results in waterlogging at different areas including Ashkona, Prembagan and near Hajj camp, said officials.

"Residents [of those areas] blamed the city corporation for waterlogging. This portion of the city has been built in an unplanned way. People built houses here and there, without leaving options for rainwater to recede," the mayor said while inaugurating the work in the graveyard area of CAAB.

Different housing companies are also not following guidelines, he said.

"We are excavating the canal to help locals, even though we have a shortage of funds. It is the duty of CAAB to the job and they should do it properly," the mayor said.

Atiqul also said residents of some areas in Moghbazar are facing a waterlogging crisis due to unclean drains of Dhaka Wasa. But locals blame the city corporation, he said.

Mentioning CAAB and Wasa, the mayor said, "Either you take the responsibility to solve the problem or give us the fund to

solve it."

The Tk 3 crore excavation project will finish within the next 3 weeks, he hoped.

In March 2019, the mayor initiated a drive to free Ashkona, Uttarkhan and Dakkhinkhan areas from waterlogging, caused mainly by landfill and sludge, through excavating a retention canal.

Multiple housing companies and some locals are responsible for such disastrous activities. But neither CAAB nor Wasa executed the decision to excavate the retention canal, thus putting locals in peril for the past 15 months.

A DNCC official said there is no drainage system in the above-mentioned areas.

Floodplains have been filled up by a housing company and others hindering natural flow of sewerage and stormwater up to the Balu river, he said.

"If we can connect the retention canal from the culvert at Ashkona with the AD-8 canal project, residents of the newly-included wards will be free from year-long waterlogging," he said. "We have to excavate 485 metres and remove 27,000 cubic metres of soil. We need to clean the sludge of the rest bypassing the CAAB graveyard," he added.

Another DNCC official said urban sprawl has taken place in the city's eastern fringe, filling up floodplains and obstructing the normal flow of water.

Such mindless acts at various points create waterlogging in the metropolis, he added.

18 High Court judges take oath

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eighteen High Court judges, whose services were confirmed recently, were sworn in yesterday.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain administered the oath through video conference in the afternoon from his Kakrail residence in Dhaka.

Judges of both the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court virtually attended the oath ceremony from their homes, SC sources said.

The judges are: Justice Md Abu Ahmed Jamadar, Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman, Justice Fatema Najib, Justice Md Kamrul Hossain Molla, Justice SM Kuddus Zaman, Justice Md Atoar Rahman, Justice SM Abdul Mobin, Justice Khizir Hayat, Justice Shashanka Shekhar Sarkar, Justice Mohammad Ali, Justice Mohi Uddin Shamim, Justice Md Riaz Uddin Khan, Justice Md Khairul Alam, Justice SM Moniruzzaman, Justice Ahmed Sohail, Justice Sardar Md Rashed Jahangir, Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman, and Justice KM Hafizul Alam.

President Md Abdul Hamid had appointed them on May 30, 2018 as additional judges of the HC for two years.

The law ministry on Friday issued a gazette notification, saying that the president regularised the appointment of the 18 HC judges in consultation with the chief justice as per the constitution of the republic. The confirmation will come into effect from the date of taking oath, according to the gazette notification.

HC, Appellate Division to continue virtual operations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain has decided to run the functions of both the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court virtually without physical presence (of lawyers) from today (May 31) till June 15, in light of the coronavirus situation.

The Supreme Court administration issued a circular to this effect, saying that the chief justice has taken the decision after discussing with the judges of the Appellate Division.

Meanwhile yesterday, the chief justice has constituted 11 High Court benches for holding hearing and disposing of the cases virtually till June 15.

The judges who have been assigned to conduct the HC benches are Justice Borhan Uddin, Justice Obaidul Hassan, Justice M Enayetur Rahim, Justice Jahangir Hossain, Justice Sheikh Md Zakir Hossain, Justice JBM Hassan, Justice Md Nazmul Islam Talukder, Justice Md Ashraf Kamal, Justice Md Mojibur Rahman Miah, Justice

Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar and Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman, according to another notification issued by the Supreme Court administration.

Judicial functions of more than 300 subordinate courts across the country have been taking place virtually since May 11 amid the ongoing coronavirus spread.

About 21,000 people, who are accused of criminal cases, have already secured bail from those courts in last 10 working days.

The virtual court functions started on May 11 after a gap of 46 days in order to deal with the urgent cases.

The regular activities of courts across the country including Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court remained closed since March 26 due to ongoing coronavirus outbreak. The closures are scheduled to continue till yesterday (May 30).

On May 10, Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain issued some directives for the courts about dealing with urgent cases using information and communication technology during the ongoing closure.

UN issues stamps honouring peacekeepers, Bangabandhu

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

On the occasion of the "2020 International Day of the United Nations Peacekeepers (Peacekeepers Day)" on May 29, the UN Postal Administration, jointly with the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN in New York, issued a set of commemorative stamps as a tribute to the UN peacekeepers and marking the birth centenary of Father of the Nation of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The commemorative stamp folio features Bangladesh's flag, logo of MUJIB 100, portrait of Bangabandhu and images of UN peacekeeping services around the world.

The images include the iconic posture of two Bangladesh female helicopter pilots, first ever deployed in the UN history, said a statement of the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN yesterday.

Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN Ambassador Rabab Fatima said, "This is a humble, yet fitting tribute to Bangabandhu's visionary leadership and doctrine of peace which defines our foreign policy; to our commitment to UN peacekeeping; as also to our valiant and selfless



peacekeepers."

To observe Peacekeepers Day at the UNHQs in New York, UN Secretary-General António Guterres laid a wreath in honour of all fallen peacekeepers and paid tribute to those who carry their service in the cause of peace.

He subsequently held a virtual ceremony to award Dag Hammarskjöld Medals posthumously to 83 peacekeepers who lost their lives in 2019. Two Bangladesh peacekeepers, Constable Mohammad Omar Farouk and Sainik Atiqul Islam, who made supreme sacrifice in line of duty in 2019, were also given this posthumous award.

BraCU to waive non-tuition fees for summer semester

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brac University has announced it will waive all non-tuition fees for Summer semester while giving out need-based financial aid to students affected by the coronavirus crisis.

The university will also provide special assistance to students who lack internet access, to help them attend online classes, said a university statement yesterday.

VC Prof Vincent Chang announced a Student Assistance Fund amounting to Tk 15 crores or 25 percent of total tuition and fees.

The assistance for the Summer 2020 semester will appear in four forms, which are as follows: (1) all non-tuition fees will be waived. This is generally equivalent to 10% or more in tuition and fees. (2) The installment plan will be broadened to include a much larger number of students. (3) Need-based financial aid will be given to students in particular financial distress. (4) Special assistance to facilitate internet access for students who lack it.

PADMA BRIDGE

30th span installed; 4.5km now visible

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 30th span of the much-anticipated Padma Bridge was installed yesterday, bringing 4.5 kilometres of the structure into view.

The span, linking 26th and 27th piers, was installed at Janjira end, Dewan Md Abdul Kader, project manager (main bridge), told The Daily Star. The 6.15km bridge will have a total 41 spans.

Project authorities have installed four spans amid the shutdown.

Still, the project authorities are working with 70 percent local manpower. All Chinese nationals involved with the important project are working now.

"We are hopeful about resuming full fledged work within two weeks. Most local workers already returned to the construction site after Eid. But they are now in 14-day quarantine," Kader said.

The uncertainty over two spans, which construction work in China got stuck by Covid-19 pandemic, is nearly over as ships with those materials already left China and expected to reach Mongla port within June 15. The overall progress of the project is 79 percent as of April this year, he said.

The physical progress of the main bridge and river training were 87 percent and 71 percent respectively until April, he added.



Wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing, senior leaders of BNP lay wreath at the grave of party founder and former president Ziaur Rahman at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the capital yesterday, marking his 39th death anniversary.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Prosecute traffickers, ensure stern punishment

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants demands following massacre in Libya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM) yesterday expressed deep concern on the recent killing of 26 Bangladeshis in Mizdah, a town close to Libya's capital Tripoli.

"We demand strong follow-up from Bangladeshi embassy on the prosecution of the perpetrators and mete out stern punishment," read a press release of the organisation signed by its Chairman Dr C R Abrar and Co-chairman Syed Saiful Haque.

BCSM notes with deep regret that for quite a long time, international human smugglers and traffickers and their Bangladeshi counterparts have been very active in recruiting aspirant migrants to Europe with the promise of facilitating their movement through the North African coast.

"We demand that the home ministry, particularly the immigration police and other law enforcement agencies be more vigilant and accountable. They need to establish a system of rigorous scrutiny of those who depart for north African countries with travel visa and do not have prior travel record," they said.

Bangladeshis working in the Gulf who fear deportation due to Covid-19 are their recent targets. Over the last couple of months more than 700 Bangladeshis have been apprehended by the Libyan coastguards and sent to detention camps where they are subjected to torture and abuse, the press release said.

The organisation recommended to ensure repatriation of Bangladeshis who have been apprehended and detained in camps soon after flights resume and also press Libyan government to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The District Legal Aid Associations in collaboration with the civil society should ensure legal support to the aggrieved migrants, BCSM said in the release.

Zebunnessa no more

CITY DESK

Zebunnessa Khatun, wife of late Dr Jamshed Bakht, a renowned physician of Sylhet, and mother of Dr Zaid Bakht, chairman of Agrani Bank, died at a city hospital on May 29. She was 90, says a press release.



She left behind sons Dr Shamsher Bakht, Dr Zaid Bakht, Dr Shoaib Bakht, daughter Rokeya Islam, grandchildren and many relatives to mourn her.

She was laid to rest at Banani graveyard in the capital.

Imamul Kabir Shanto passes away

CITY DESK

Imamul Kabir Shanto, a freedom fighter and Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology (SMUCT) founding chairman, died from coronavirus at the Combined Military Hospital in the city yesterday morning. He was 66, says a press release.

He established Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology, Sundarbans Courier Services (Pvt) Ltd and Shanto-Mariam Foundation.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque yesterday expressed profound shock at the death of Imamul Kabir Shanto, the release adds.

In a condolence message, the minister prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family.



Wearing masks and maintaining a fairly spaced-out queue, people collect launch tickets at a counter in Barishal city's Fazlul Haque Avenue yesterday, ahead of the resumption of public waterways transport operations in a limited manner from today.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Railway selling

FROM PAGE 3

"All we are doing now is on trial basis. We will take further decisions about operation of trains following government decision after June 15," he said.

The minister also said all the passengers have to wear face masks and maintain all health guidelines. All tickets for visitors and month tickets have been suspended, Sujan further added.

He said no trains would stop at Airport, Joydebpur and Narsingdi stations. None would be allowed to

travel without tickets, he added.

People will be able to buy tickets five days ahead of their journey date, Sujan said.

The eight trains which would start operation from today are: Chattogram-bound Subarna Express and Sonar Bangla Express; Sylhet-bound Kalni Express; Panchagarh-bound Panchagarh Express; Chapainawabganj-bound Banalata Express; Lalmonirhat-bound Lalmoni Express; Khulna-bound Chitra Express; and another train Paharika/Udayan express which

operates between Chattogram and Sylhet.

The trains which would start operation from June 3, are Teesta Express, Benapole Express, Nilsagar Express, Rupsha Express, Kapotakkho Express, Modhumoti Express, Meghna Express, Kishoreganj Express, Upakul Express, Brahmaputra Express, and Kurigram Express.

Railways Ministry Secretary Salim Reza and Bangladesh Railway Director General Md Shamsuzzaman, among others, were present at the press briefing.

Call for green

FROM PAGE 12

yielding varieties of seed and fertilizer to farmers on easy terms. **CONTROL ROOM TO MONITOR FOOD PRICES**

The government has set up an emergency control room to monitor food prices and distribution of food aid across the country. A senior government officer has been appointed to lead the team. The team will collect information about stock, transportation, distribution and prices of essentials such as rice, wheat, edible oil, sugar and kerosene oil from local administrations and keep the prime minister and cabinet members updated on a regular basis. The government has also formed a seven-member cabinet sub-committee to tackle the problems of exorbitant price hike and poor food distribution system.

SURPRISE VISIT TO GOVT OFFICE

Bangabandhu today pays a surprise visit to Agricultural Development Corporation. He inquires officers of regular activities of the office, listens to various demands of the employees and assures them of addressing those issues soon. He also asks the authorities to take immediate action against those who are absent during his visit. The prime minister holds a meeting with the senior officials of the organisation and reviews their plan on agricultural development. He also gave them some instructions on increasing agricultural production across the country.

DRUGS IMPORT ON EMERGENCY BASIS

The government is going to import essential drugs worth Tk 2 crore on an emergency basis to tackle the acute shortage of pharmaceutical products in the market. Besides government agencies, registered private entities will be allowed to import drugs from abroad.

SOURCE: June 1, 1972 issue of Dainik Bangla

Take care of embankments

FROM PAGE 12

300 metres inland from the original location, at many places.

As a result, about 50 bighas of land along the rivershore will be inundated permanently.

Bithika Mondol, who lost her home in the cyclone, said her family is going to lose three bighas of land lying on the outer boundary of the dam built by the locals.

"The river would gradually devour the land," she explained.

Although the local administration so far distributed 50 tonnes of rice, 500 packets of dry food and Tk 75 lakh among the cyclone victims in the upazila, many are yet to receive any relief.

"Nobody came to give us food yet as it is very hard to reach our village," Debobroto alleged.

He said the water resource minister visited the area on Thursday but only gave a speech from a speedboat.

'LACK OF COORDINATION'

People of Koyra alleged that dams, first damaged badly on May 25, 2009 from cyclone Aila, have not been repaired properly in the last 11 years.

The Water Development Board (WDB) of Satkhira district is the custodian of the dams that fall under the Khulna district.

According to Water Development Board sources, on May 25, 2009, 60km of dams in Koyra were completely destroyed by Aila.

After the damage, locals were trapped in salt water for three years.

Although WDB repaired the dams, locals alleged that the custodian used more sand than soil while repairing the structures on 13/14 and 14/2 polders along the Kopotakkho and Shakbaria rivers. Thus, the embankments were left in poor condition.

Imtiaz Uddin, general secretary of Koira Unnayan Sangram Samiti, complained of irregularities and lack of transparency in the repair works.

Tk four crore in 2018-2019 and Tk three crore in 2019-2020 were allocated for embankment renovation but no signboard was displayed during the development work, he said.

"Although the site of the embankment is in Khulna, the maintenance is the responsibility of Satkhira Water Development Board. As a result, local MPs and upazila chairmen are not able to supervise the work properly."

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Shimul Kumar Saha of Koyra admitted that there was a lack of coordination.

"We don't get them [Satkhira WDB officials] at the coordination meetings. So,

we cannot discuss the possible solutions of the problem with anyone," he said.

"I have informed the higher authorities about the prevailing situation."

GM Mohsin Reza, president of Koyra Upazila Awami League and former upazila chairman, said the main contractor for the repair work was never seen in the area whenever the embankments were built.

"After he got the job, he sold the work to another contractor on a fixed commission. The second contractor divided the work into smaller parts and handed it over to other contractors. After this change of hands, only 40 to 45 percent of the [government] allocation was left to do the work at field level. People of the Water Development Board were also involved in this," he alleged.

Noting that the people of Koyra upazila have suffered more from Amphang than Aila, Akhtaruzzaman Babu, MP of Khulna-6 constituency, said he did not get enough time to take up the embankment renovation issue since he took office early last year.

Executive Engineer of Khulna Water Development Board Satkhira-2 Md Arifuzzaman said 40km of dams have been destroyed in Koyra and locals are repairing

it voluntarily.

He denied allegations of irregularities in dam construction and repair.

When asked about using more sand than soil in the dams, the engineer said, "We hand over and accept the work from the contractor as per the tender and schedule, so there is no scope for any irregularities."

Arifuzzaman blamed natural calamities and high salinity in the local soil for the weak structure of the dams.

Food officer

FROM PAGE 12

a case accusing the three of stealing the rice. Wahid Munjour Sohad, deputy assistant director of Bogura ACC, said a local court sent the arrestees to jail yesterday afternoon after they were produced before it.

Meanwhile, two probe committees were formed on Friday to investigate the incident, said Bogura Food Controller SM Saiful Islam.

The committees were asked to submit their reports to the authorities concerned within three working days, he added.

Saiful said they recommended that the officer-in-charge of Sabeckpara LSD should be suspended.

Jamuna swells rapidly

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danger level, WDB sources said.

"The water level was recorded at 8.02 meter at the hard point of the Jamuna at the district headquarter on May 22. The water level is now 12.25 meter at the same point," KM Rafikul Islam, deputy divisional engineer of Sirajganj WDB, told the Daily Star.

Due to the immense pressure of water, the 20-meter flood protection embankment was damaged yesterday, as the spars of the embankment have eroded in the river. Rafikul said, adding that water development workers are trying to restore the affected area.

The water level will be increasing over the next two or three days, after which it will decrease again, he said, adding that there is nothing to be worried about.

"After Amphang, water level has increased in the upstream of Jamuna and Brammaputra at the hill slopes of Assam. Due to the onslaught water from upstream, water level is increasing in Jamuna in Sirajganj," he said, adding, "This, however, is a temporary problem. The flood forecasting centre has assured that the water level would start decreasing in a day or two."

Due to the increasing water level, paddy, jute and other crops in over 20 unions of the five upazilas have been inundated.

Low laying areas of Sonatani, Jalalpur, Koujuri of Shahzadpur upazila, Kawakola, Mechra of Sirajganj Sadar upazila, Khasrajbari, Maizbari, Tekani, Natuarpara, Char-Girish and Nishchintapur of Kazipur upazila, Sthal, Ghorzan and Sadiachandpur of Chowhali upazila have been submerged.

The Agriculture Extension Department (AED), however, said the cultivated land has been submerged but the extent of the damage could not yet be confirmed.

"Jute land of about 90 acres, 50 acres other crops, and 580 acres of vegetable field have reportedly been damaged. But the total loss will be found after the water recedes," said Md Habibul Haque, deputy director of Sirajganj AED.

On the 1.41 lakh hectares of land on which Boro is being cultivated, 71 percent of the paddy was harvested last week, he said, adding that the sudden increase in water level is nothing to worry about as the farmers are harvesting in the water.

If the water decreases within a week, there will be no harm caused to the Boro crop, Habibul said.

Month-long wait for getting tested!

FROM PAGE 12

but I'm not sure whether I have Covid-19 infection," he added.

Like Anisur, many people in Savar have been asked by the Upazila Health Complex authorities to wait a couple of weeks or a month to go for Covid-19 test.

Authorities say they have no option left as a huge number of patients are turning up daily, but the authorities have a limited capacity.

People have to queue at Savar Adhar Chandra Govt High School, near the health complex, to enlist their names and other information first. The authorities there later ask them to go for tests on specified dates

to give samples.

Only 10 from the queue can directly go for test daily, officials said.

Visiting the school compound yesterday, this correspondent found another garment worker Soni Rahman who has been coming to the school since May 18 to have his wife tested for Covid-19 as she has been showing symptoms.

His wife's name was included in the list yesterday but he did not know when she could go for test as authorities could not give a specific date.

Thirty-two year old Roni Ahmed said that he went there to get tested on May 27 with high fever.

"They asked me to give samples on June 27 for Covid-19 test... I am very sick. Who will take the responsibility if I die by then?" he said.

Roni said he called the IEDCR hotline number, after failing to get tested, but they only gave him a number of the upazila health complex.

"They did not say anything... What should I do in this situation?" he asked.

RMG worker Ruma Akter has had fever for 15 days but she is doing well now. Her employers have asked her not to join work unless she can show a Covid-19 test report.

She also lined up for test but the hospital

authorities asked her to visit the health complex one and a half month later, Ruma said.

Contacted, Dr Saemul Huda, upazila Health and Family planning officer, said they have the capacity to collect 60 samples daily.

Savar is an overpopulated area and many are coming daily to get tested. That's why they are maintaining a serial, he said, adding it would be better if they could collect 500 samples a day.

The doctor said they have already consulted with local garment factory owners and another PCR lab will be set up soon to test workers.

Pandemic grips LatAm, US

FROM PAGE 12

has the second highest number of cases in the world after the United States.

"In 26 years, I've never seen so many people living in fear, so many people going hungry," said Alcione Albanesi, founder of charity Amigos do Bem, which distributes supplies to communities in the impoverished Sertao region of Brazil's northeast.

"Everything has ground to a stop. But hunger doesn't stop."

Chile also logged another record number of deaths on Friday, pushing its total to almost 1,000.

POSITIVE SIGNS

In European countries that seem on the other side of their outbreak peak, there has been pressure to lift crippling lockdowns despite experts warning of a possible second wave of infections.

Tourism-dependent Greece said it will restart its two main airports for arrivals from 29 countries from June 15. But some European nations hard hit by the virus are not on the list, including France, Spain, Britain and Italy.

In Austria, hotels and cinemas were allowed to take in customers again on Friday under special guidelines, provided masks are worn.

"It is very important that things return to normal, because I am a person who lives alone and is very interested in culture," film buff Rotrud Turanitz said at Vienna's Admiral Kino cinema.

Hotels and shopping centres in Ukraine's capital Kiev also reopened yesterday.

Turkey too has moved ahead with easing its restrictions as mosques opened for the first time in months, drawing hundreds of worshippers in masks for mass prayers in Istanbul.

And Denmark said it would reopen its border to visitors from Germany, Norway and Iceland from June 15, although Britain and the rest of the EU will have to wait a few more months.

Across the Atlantic, the US capital Washington DC resumed outdoor dining with social distancing precautions in place, while Los Angeles restaurants and hair salons also reopened.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said the state was "on track" to begin reopening in the week of June 8, even as the death toll in the US spiked by 1,225 on Friday.

Disney World in Florida said it will be up and running again from July 11.

China even welcomed its first Europeans since suspending visas in late March, with a plane carrying 200 mainly German workers landing near Beijing.

ECONOMIES SHATTERED

The economic damage from weeks of lockdowns continues to pile up, with Chile taking out a two-year \$24 billion credit line with the IMF.

India's economy grew at its slowest pace in two decades in the first quarter, and Canada and Brazil also said their GDP figures shrank.

As the lockdowns finally lift, some people are revelling in the return of long-missed creature comforts.

In Japan traditional bathhouses have begun to open again, much to the delight of businessman You Sasaki, who told AFP he had been counting down the days to his next soak in the warm pools of Yumominosato onsen, just outside Tokyo.

"This feels good. Feels great," the 50-year-old said as he sat in a tub.

"The last time I came here was the end of March. The onsen is always special. It's hard to explain in words."

Buried WWII plane found

FROM PAGE 12

and spent 45 minutes exploring it and taking photographs before identifying it, Hartley told CNN.

After they returned home to begin researching it they discovered the plane dated back to World War II.

Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF) Museum confirmed to CNN it believed the plane to be a Bristol Beaufighter TFX, with the aircraft serial number JM333, from the 254 Squadron RAF.

Ian Thirsk, RAF Museum head of collections, said in a statement to CNN that the aircraft crashed on April 21, 1944 soon after take-off from nearby North Coates in Lincolnshire after both engines failed.

"The crew were uninjured and escaped to safety," Thirsk added.

Speaking to CNN, Hartley said she had been surprised to stumble across the "amazing" wreckage, given that she and her partner had walked on that stretch of beach many times before.

"(I had) never seen anything like it before in my life," she said.

"We took the dog on her usual walk and all of a sudden we saw this wreckage," she added. "It was an amazing find."

"My partner has lived in Cleethorpes for 30 years and he's walked that same walk (all that time) and never come across it before."

She said that before the unique discovery she "wasn't interested in history at all" but now she would like to find out more about those who flew the aircraft.

However, because of the danger posed by unpredictable tides at Cleethorpes beach, people have been warned not to look for the wreckage.

Writing on Facebook Thursday, Cleethorpes Coastguard said: "We know there will be interest by many people but

Man sent to jail over rape in Narayanganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'GANI

A Narayanganj court on Friday sent a man to jail on the charge of raping a mentally challenged woman.

The accused -- Alamgir Hossain (40) -- is a resident of old Syedpur area in Sadar upazila of the district.

Police said the 60-year-old woman used to roam around the streets by herself quite often. Taking advantage of the situation, Alamgir took the woman to a quiet place and raped her on Thursday night.

When the woman started screaming, locals rushed to the spot and caught Alamgir. Later, he was handed over to police, said the law enforcers.

On Friday morning, the woman's daughter filed a case with Narayanganj Sadar Model Police Station. Then, the accused was shown arrested in the case, said Shamim Hossain, sub-inspector (SI) of the police station.

The accused was produced to a court that sent him to jail.

The woman was sent to a hospital for treatment, said Asaduzzaman, officer-in-charge of the police station.

ADB provides

FROM PAGE 3

washing stations and screening booths, provide WHO standard PPE suits to about 2,700 doctors and health workers working under the project, launch awareness programmes about Covid-19 prevention and management, and provide training on Covid-19 detection and treatment to health workers and doctors.

The grant assistance is sourced from ADB's Urban Climate Change Resilience Trust Fund, under the Urban Financing Partnership Facility.

ADB has a strong track record of responding rapidly to provide targeted support to Bangladesh in times of emergencies. On May 7, ADB approved \$500 million to strengthen Bangladesh's efforts to mitigate the socio-economic impact of Covid-19.

On April 30, ADB approved a \$100 million concessional loan to support the government in its efforts to address the immediate public health requirements of combating the pandemic.

BUILDING & LAND SALE
(Suitable for Factory/ Hospital/University)
Two Buildings (each 6 Storied@ 90,000sqft) total 1,80,000sqft, Land 5.50 bigha with Electricity /Gas/Water Facility. Both Buildings Accord Approved with Full Compliance. Presently Garments Factory running at Dhaka Road, Vogra before Gazipur Chowrastra.
Contact: 01711-525563, email-1960skt@gmail.com

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
Hereby JSC ASE EC notifies you on holding the open tender for the right to conclude the contract under 'Supply of sand for Rooppur NPP Site'. The documentation is published on the official procurement site of the nuclear industry http://zakupki.rosatom.ru, procurement No. 200525/0536/566.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
Hereby JSC ASE EC notifies you on holding the open tender for the right to conclude the contract under 'Supply of aggregate-natural sand for Rooppur NPP Site'. The documentation is published on the official procurement site of the nuclear industry http://zakupki.rosatom.ru, procurement No. 200525/0536/563.

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME THE EFFECTS OF CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

The Daily Star in association with BSRM organised an online discussion titled "Sustainable solutions to overcome the effects of Coronavirus pandemic on the construction sector" on May 19, 2020. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM,
Senior Business Correspondent,
The Daily Star and Moderator of the session

Bangladesh's construction sector is set to face challenging times because of the coronavirus pandemic as it would slow down the economy, disrupt development activities and put workers out of jobs. In today's programme, we will discuss both the short- and long-term solutions to overcome the effects of the pandemic on the construction sector.



ENGINEER S M KHORSHED ALAM,
President, Bangladesh Association of Construction Industry (BACI)

Some important fields of work related to construction have come close to a halt. We need to consider the investments made in these areas. The marginalised groups, which include labourers and others such as technicians, engineers, and management staff, are unable to continue work. The equipment and materials are being left unused. Banks have already lent us the working capital for the projects, but we are unable to utilise it.

Construction usually has a specific timeframe which can be divided into four quarters. The first quarter consists of government planning and programming. The second quarter is mainly concerned with the procurement of the materials. The third and the last quarter are very important since the implementation is mostly carried out during this period.

Unfortunately, we entered this pandemic situation in the month of March. The next three months make up the last quarter of the financial year, which is crucial in attaining the turnovers for construction activities. Consequently, turnovers worth 6,000 crore taka have been affected in the labour portion. About 30 percent of the materials are now not in use. We are also unable to repay the bank loans along with interest.

The government has currently instructed us to resume essential construction projects to be able to support the marginalised labour sector. However, starting work, even in a limited way, is difficult because our labourers are not fully aware of the complexities of the pandemic situation. There are also issues regarding the transportation of the materials.



ALAMGIR SHAMSUL ALAMIN,
President, Real Estate & Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB)

It will take time for the real estate sector to resume work. This sector has around 211 sub-sectors which we call backward linkage industries. If these backward linkage industries are not back in operation, we cannot continue to work with just labourers.

There will undoubtedly be delays in project handover to customers and landowners since we have missed the opportunity to work during the dry season. According to currently available information, about 30,000 apartments which were supposed to have already been handed over to the customers are still under construction.

For now, we must shift our focus on reviving the stagnant economy. Reviving the economy will require new cash flow. This cash injection can come from bringing in undisclosed income into the economy. We are already aware that Bangladesh has a parallel economy with a massive amount of undisclosed income. On certain occasions, the government has allowed the use of undisclosed income in this sector, but the policy regarding this has not had the best results. The government needs to form a policy where, for the next five years, this

undisclosed income can easily be brought into the economy.

The real estate and construction sectors are essential for boosting the economy since they have a vast number of sub-sectors linked to them. These sectors also employ a large number of workers whose employment needs to be ensured. We also need to ensure jobs for our expatriate workers who are returning home. The upcoming annual budget needs to take these issues into account.

During any crisis, customers are unwilling to invest in real estate, and hence this sector always faces a colossal impact. To recover from the pandemic, the real estate sector requires government policies such as long-term home loans which are accessible to the public.



MD. ABDUR RAZZAK,
General Secretary,
Imarat Nirman Sramik Union
Bangladesh

Around 35 lakh construction workers have been rendered jobless due to the Coronavirus outbreak. Besides, there are more workers connected to the manufacture of construction materials as well. All these workers and their families are suffering, consequently. We have asked the government to provide rations for these families. To fight the pandemic, all of us need to come together and work accordingly to help these workers overcome their desolation.



A F M SAIFUL AMIN,
Professor, Department
of Civil Engineering,
BUET

Since this pandemic has hit the world in such an unexpected way, there are no standard protocols in place to counter its effect. To save lives, construction works in almost all countries have halted. Without a vaccine or a probable treatment method, starting full-fledged construction work will not be feasible due to the labour-intensive nature of this sector. Till then, construction work will most likely only be able to go on at a slower rate. However, to ensure that work is not completely stopped, we are trying to keep the emergency operations ongoing by implementing various methods to ensure safety. Another approach being followed is that we are working with a small number of labourers at first and then when we are sure that this group of workers are healthy, we are slowly adding more workers to the team and following the same protocol. For this, these workers will require on-site shelter to keep the effects of the pandemic at bay.

Besides, we also need the support of the supply chain. The government can play a role here to ensure that materials reach the construction sites safely and securely.

Our priority must be the safety of our human workforce and we must move forward by minimising these health and safety risks.



DR AHSAN H MANSUR,
Economist, Executive
Director-Policy
Research Institute and
Chairperson-BRAC
Bank

The home loan system in our country does not include sustainable practices. Serious mismatches are occurring between assets and liabilities. Banks are giving out loans for 10-15 years whereas the deposits last for three to five years maximum. Therefore, a big mishap occurs here. We still have not been able to implement long-term borrowing instruments.

I do not agree that black money can be utilised to help the real estate sector. This approach can only create a temporary demand. We are already facing a lot of corruption in the country and catering to such approaches will continue to encourage this practice. There is no harm in turning earned money into white money by paying taxes as many countries undertake this approach. I humbly request you to not mix earned and unearned money.

We need to ask the government why the bond market is not being developed to provide long-term loans.

The government's new policy of a nine percent interest rate will not be favourable for everyone because it is a one-size-fits-all approach. With a particular interest rate for everyone, those who will be able to pay back

earlier will get preference for obtaining loans. Thus, our banking sector will not be able to help our construction sector much, unless a yield curve approach is adopted. Every country has a yield curve where the interest rate is higher for long-term loans and lower for short-term loans. There is no way for the real estate sector to bypass this approach.

The joint venture approach can be beneficial as it mitigates risk. A positive aspect is that Bangladesh's real estate sector is not as fragile as the Western countries because our capital is not more than 50 percent in the overall investment package. The real estate sector needs to think about what to sell after selling a certain number of apartments. It needs to think about how financing can be brought under the market or incentive approach, instead of relying on government directives.

The government is conducting land trades though they are not supposed to play a role here. The realtors are supposed to fulfill the construction requirements and hand over the apartments to REHAB. REHAB can then provide the best deals to consumers at the lowest prices. Currently, only a certain group of government affiliates possess numerous



M. FIROZE, Adviser,
Marketing & Product
Development, BSRM

I believe the construction sector, regarding the coronavirus crisis, is the safest one, compared to other sectors. Since most of the construction works involve working outside, maintaining social distancing is not too difficult. Also, the construction workers have been undertaking safety measures such as wearing masks and gloves for a long time due to other hazards such as dust pollution. Therefore, if further support is provided, this sector can revive soon.

The good news is that since the government had not stopped the operations of some landmark and mega projects, this sector still has not faced a disastrous situation. Construction of houses in the informal sector, based on people's own initiatives and finances, especially in rural

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Work in the construction sector should resume in phases following proper safety protocols.
- 2. National Contingency Plan and Standard Operating Procedure for the construction sector should be formulated immediately.
- 3. New cash flow is required to revive the construction sector, particularly real estate sector. However, allowing investment of black money is not a sustainable solution to this crisis.
- 4. Adequate funds for workers' healthcare should be allocated in the upcoming budget.
- 5. No new mega construction project should be undertaken in the near future and the ones in the pipeline should be kept on hold.
- 6. The government should bear the additional costs for health compliance on the construction sites in the form of incentives.
- 7. A separate fund can be created to tackle disputes and claims from contractors, consultants, etc., since they are facing tremendous losses.
- 8. A backup plan can be created if banks provide moratorium facilities to the developers for their working capital.

plots, leaving no space for the realtors to carry out further construction. Such practices will continue to increase if no actions are taken and the problem of limited availability of housing will persist.



DR MD SHAMSUL HOQUE, Transport
Expert, Professor-
Department of Civil
Engineering, BUET
and Director-BRTC
(Research, testing and
consultancy wing,
BUET)

The government must prioritise progressive projects and do an overall revision since we had undertaken a lot of construction projects before the virus emerged. Back then too, it was doubtful as to how we would be able to handle multiple projects and now, the risk has increased. We are going to face both time and cost overruns due to this pandemic. Therefore, no new projects should be undertaken and the ones in the pipeline should be kept on hold.

We should create online approval protocols for the consultants so that they can work remotely, since no decision can be taken, revisions done, or designs approved without them. We also need to define our workplace guidelines.

It should be noted that some additional costs will be incurred for corona and health compliance on the job sites. The government has to bear these costs in the form of incentives.

Since coronavirus is not going away any time soon, we need to have a well-trained implementation team, be it at the government end or implementation end. Contractors should also conduct internal surveillance. We can also implement CCTV-based remote surveillance. During normal times, workers tend to not use protective gears due to discomfort and they will be more reluctant to use them now, during the rainy season. Therefore, we need to raise awareness to prevent this from happening.

The government should also be prepared for high levels of disputes and claims from contractors, consultants, etc., since they are facing tremendous losses. We should make our dispute clauses effective so that their claims can be catered to. A separate corona fund can be created to tackle uncertainties. Since the transportation sector involves a lot of multipliers which can provide a good stimulus to the economy, a lot of policy and cash incentives are required to revive this sector.

areas, is continuing.

Though we have lost some time to undertake the repair work on roads and bridges during this general holiday, we still have time to do this work if the government takes an initiative. Since the construction sector is vast, by involving many areas such as the real estate sector, power plant projects, etc., the government can undertake initiatives to progress work in phases in these areas. We can create a blueprint of which sectors to prioritise and revive. In this way, crowding will be reduced in the sectors where the revival work will be ongoing, especially after the Eid holiday.



ENGR F R KHAN,
Managing Director,
bti-building
technology & ideas
Ltd.

For the time being, we are trying to complete our ongoing projects and hand them over as soon as possible. In that way, we will gain confidence from our clients about their future investments in this industry. In turn, the future clients will bring long-term opportunities. We have talked to the banking sector and they have agreed to help in this regard.

Even if customers take loans of 20 to 25 years, they repay them within five to seven years. Customers have to register with one-fourth the buying price of the property, with a very high registration cost of 16 percent. That is why the rest of the properly earned money is left undeclared. We believe that if the undisclosed income can be brought into the economy, even for the short term, there will be a possibility of cash flow and customers will return. Banks can help in this regard by giving out low-interest rate loans to our customers.

A backup plan for developers could be created if banks provided moratorium facilities to the developers for their working capital, where they will pay only the interest for one year and then create a schedule for paying the equated monthly instalments (EMIs) later on. Hence, even if customers cannot pay on time, the projects can still be completed timely by the developers.

People are interested in buying a house through paying EMIs only if the EMI is slightly higher than the amount they are already paying in rent for their current residence. During the current crisis, people

will not take the risk of paying EMIs and might not invest in the real estate sector altogether.

All the big companies of the sector are maintaining sanitation standards in ongoing projects during the pandemic. We have also formed a separate team for survey vigilance.



DR MD. TAREK UDDIN,
PEng., Professor,
Department of Civil
and Environmental
Engineering (CEE),
Islamic University of
Technology (IUT)

A country's infrastructure is the backbone of its economy. COVID-19 has caused us to invest in healthcare infrastructure. Developing post-COVID-19 infrastructure will be a major challenge as well.

We must understand that working remotely is not possible for all sectors. The government will begin prioritisation of projects and cut down costs of different projects while implementing new policies. Handling this new kind of situation is also a challenge for the government.

We must move forward with a phase-wise plan. All projects cannot be shut down. For example, the Padma Bridge project is still ongoing. We must focus on figuring out which sectors to invest in more, such as the health sector and ICT sector.



MD. ABU SADEQUE,
PEng., Executive
Director, HBRC

I believe money acquired illegally should not be allowed to be turned into whitened investment in the real estate sector.

I would like to highlight some of the positive effects of the pandemic. The situation has compelled us to adopt new technologies. For example, rods previously had to be welded manually by workers on site. BSRM is now ensuring prefabrication of rods in factories before delivering them to sites. Another such example is ready-made concrete. Also, instead of making cash payments, we can now rely on electronic payments for purchasing, selling, and supplying materials.

We require a National Contingency Plan since we are uncertain of how long the pandemic will last. A standard operating procedure (SOP) is needed as well for the construction sector. Neighbouring countries have already formulated SOPs; hence Bangladesh should follow in the same footsteps.



PROF DR M SHAMIM Z BOSUNIA, Chairman
and Managing
Director, Abode of
Consultants (Pvt)
Ltd and Former
President, Institution
of Engineers,
Bangladesh

Total dependency on foreign consultants is not ideal. There are two to three lakh local consulting engineers, architects, planners, technicians, and CAD operators in our country. We should utilise our local resources to the full extent possible.

Regarding the Padma Bridge project, a living space that can house about 4,000 people has been created for the workers so that work can continue. The workers are not allowed to leave the designated lodgings, and there have been no complications so far. The number of work shifts has also decreased. The only issue is that no consultants are available. There should be a separate hospital for construction workers. Any worker who comes to the hospital must be immediately tested and given treatment.

For the construction sector, if proper guidelines are followed, then construction work can go on. The construction sector does not have permanent workers, they have only day labourers. Since the workers are living on daily payments, they cannot survive if work in construction sites is paused. There are two to three times more workers in the construction sector than in the RMG sector; hence the construction sector can never be shut down. The cramped work environment in construction companies must change as well.

If needed, we must ask the government to increase the stimulus packages, lower the interest rates further, and develop long-term solutions.

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DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
Closed	Closed	\$1,726.30 (per ounce)	\$37.84 (per barrel)	32,424.10	21,877.89	2,510.75	2,852.35	BUY TK 83.95	91.47	102.07	11.55
								SELL TK 84.95	95.27	105.87	12.14



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TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

No love for NBFIs from BB yet

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Five years ago, Siddiqur Rahman, an employee of a private organisation, took a loan worth Tk 50 lakh from a non-bank financial institution to build his dream home.

Rahman has always been regular with his loan instalments.

But his pristine record looks set to be tarnished as his employer has slashed his salary to cope with the cash flow crisis brought on by the pandemic-induced shutdown.

So a facility that the central bank has extended to bank borrowers would come in handy for Rahman and his fellow NBFIs borrowers.

The Bangladesh Bank has asked all

banks to transfer all interest accrued or to be accrued between April 1 and May 31 this year from all of their loans to an interest-free blocked account.

Both the BB and the government are now mulling over rebating a portion of the interest from the borrowers' account.

No such move is in the works for NBFIs' borrowers, which is a discrimination of sorts.

As of now, there has been no package for the sector, although the financial health of the majority of the NBFIs is precarious and could do with the propping up against the pandemic-induced onslaught on their businesses.

For instance, the BB on May 11 has instructed banks not to give any cash dividend to both sponsors and investors

of banks until September to boost their capacity to absorb the strain on their capital base from the ongoing economic fallout.

A similar move for the country's 34 NBFIs would be a good bulwark for them.

"We have already completed our annual general meeting. And the

dividend will be distributed within the next few days," said Momin U Islam, managing director of IPDC Finance, an NBFIs.

So the central bank should give clear instruction to the NBFIs to this end in the quickest possible time, he said.

The BB has already cut the banks' cash reserve ratio (CRR) in two phases by a total of 150 basis points to 4 per cent, a move that has helped banks ease up on their liquidity crunch.

But the NBFIs have yet to get such a facility, said Islam, also the chairman of the Bangladesh Leasing and Finance Companies Association (BLFCA).

Against the backdrop, the BLFCA has requested the central bank to cut both statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) and CRR by 100 basis points each.

At present, the NBFIs have to maintain 2.50 per cent as both SLR and CRR.

The central bank has recently rolled out two separate stimulus funds worth Tk 50,000 crore for the large, small and medium enterprises and the service sector, which are being hit hard by the pandemic.

Of the total fund, the central bank will provide Tk 25,000 crore from its own sources by creating two separate refinance schemes.

But NBFIs will not get their desired

support from the packages as the fund will be distributed in proportion to their outstanding working capital.

So, the BLFCA has requested the central bank to form a dedicated refinance scheme worth Tk 10,000 crore for the NBFIs sector, Islam said.

"The ongoing liquidity crunch in the NBFIs sector will ease if the fund is constituted."

The NBFIs usually mobilise a good portion of their funds from banks, but they are now in a liquidity crunch if their own.

"So, the banks could withdraw their funds from NBFIs, which will exacerbate the crisis. We requested the central bank to ask banks not to do it," he added.

Contacted, a high BB official said the financial sector regulator is now thinking of slashing the CRR for NBFIs and creating a fresh refinance scheme shortly.

The central bank has yet to fix its stance on suspending dividends and transferring interest from loans to an interest-free blocked account for NBFIs, he added.

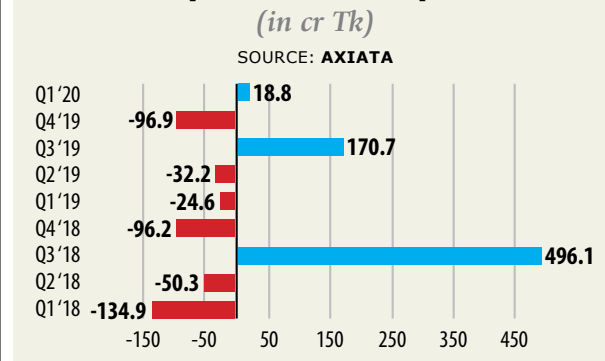
But NBFIs borrowers like Rahman is praying the BB takes a positive decision soon.

"I will get a great respite from the ongoing dire straits if a portion of the interest is reduced from my loan account," said an anxious Rahman.

Robi springs back in profit

But future looks grim

Robi's profit over the quarters



Md FAZLUR RAHMAN

Robi returned to the black in 2020 on the back of higher data revenue and heavy data consumption in the first quarter of the year.

The country's second-largest mobile phone operator posted a net profit of Tk 18.77 crore between January and March, compared with net losses of Tk 24.6 crore in the same quarter a year earlier and Tk 96.9 crore in the previous quarter.

While it is a heartening development for the operator as it gears up for listing on the country's bourse, the profit streak is unlikely to continue into the following quarter, which coincides with possibly one of the gloomiest economic slumps in recent memory.

Soon after the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 were announced on March 8, the country went into shutdown, a development that sent the operator's data usage spiralling.

But its voice call business, which is still its bread and butter, was, however, affected in April and May as the shutdown meant a portion of its low-income subscribers were out of work, while its retailers could not open shops either.

The current revenue situation took the company where it was three to four years ago, said a Robi official requesting anonymity as he is not authorised to speak with the media.

"We are experiencing daily revenue shortfall of about Tk 4 crore, which is 16 per cent of our daily revenue right now," said Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, chief executive officer of Robi, in a media briefing recently.

But, Robi has much to take heart from its first quarter performance.

The operator clocked in Tk 1,947.7 crore in revenue in the first three months of 2020, generating 6.48 per cent higher growth year-on-year.

Of the revenue, 33 per cent came from the data segment, which is the highest in a single quarter, said Robi's parent company Axiata Group in its quarterly report recently.

Robi's users are now consuming more data than ever, averaging 2.4 gigabytes per month as of March, also the highest in the market, the report said.

Some 43 per cent of its total 4.97 crore customers had a smartphone in March and customers pushed the digital service growth.

At the end of the quarter, 3.23 crore internet users were enjoying Robi's data service, the report said.

"Robi experienced yet another excellent quarter with expansion recorded across all key metrics," said Jamaludin Ibrahim, president and group CEO of Axiata, which holds 68.7 per cent shares in the operator.

The carrier managed to cut overall operational expenditure, especially in the network management, staff costs, bad debts and sales and marketing costs.

As a result of high operating leverage and lower staff costs, Robi's earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation, which is a measure of a company's overall financial performance, grew faster than revenue at 10.1 per cent, improving margins by 1.3 percentage points to 40.4 per cent.

Tk 2,000 for filing in returns online next fiscal year



SOHEL PARVEZ

The government is likely to offer Tk 2,000 to individual taxpayers next fiscal year to lure them to file returns online, as it looks to accelerate the shift from the manual filing of annual income tax statement, according to finance ministry officials.

Bangladesh aims to become a digital economy by 2021 and over the past decade, it has made strides in many areas. Yet, its advancement in digitisation in the financial sector and tax administration is lagging.

In the case of revenue administration, the majority of customs documents can be processed online, while the businesses can submit VAT returns online. However, taxpayers are yet to deposit VAT to state coffers electronically.

For income tax, one of the successful ventures of the tax department has been the issuance of Taxpayers Identification Numbers (TINs) online.

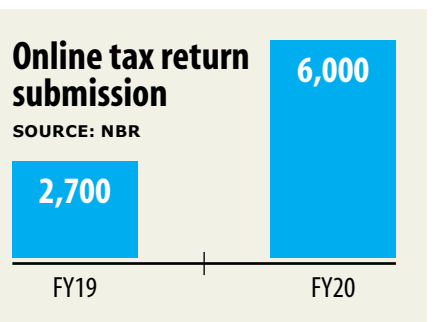
And in September 2011, the government launched a project with a \$25 million loan from the Asian Development Bank to ensure online filing of tax returns, digitise land records management system in selected districts, and improve the access to tax and land information in specialised information and service centres.

As part of the project, the tax administration in November 2016 introduced e-filing.

But the response from taxpayers has been abysmal.

The Manila-based multilateral lender said 44,000 taxpayers submitted online tax returns in 2017, which is about 3 per cent of the total tax returns filed in fiscal 2016-17, showed the NBR data.

But e-filing of returns dropped off in the following years. For instance, the tax authority received just 2,700 returns online



in fiscal 2018-19.

This fiscal year, the number of online filers were about 6,000, which is less than 1 per cent of the returns submitted.

The cumbersome process of e-filing of tax returns has been blamed for the dismal response so far. To file returns online, taxpayers have to physically collect user ID and password from the field offices.

But the finance ministry officials are hoping that the rebate might convince individual taxpayers to take the hassle of

making that trip to the field office to collect the log-in credentials.

The move to encourage e-filing comes at a time when it is believed that digitalisation of the tax administration offers significant potential for developing countries to increase their revenues.

"Evidence from even the lowest capacity countries (e.g. Liberia) suggests investments in digital capability in tax administration can be a game-changer," said the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in a report styled 'Tax and Fiscal Policy in Response to the Coronavirus Crisis'.

Besides, the pandemic, which has left people to stay put at home for weeks on end to flatten the curve on coronavirus, has magnified the need for digitisation of the tax system, as the countrywide general shutdown since March 26 meant many could not file in tax paperwork on time.

Were a digitalised system in place, taxpayers might have been able to do the head from their homes.

ABB rallies around EXIM Bank MD

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Association of Bankers, Bangladesh yesterday urged the authority concerned to take due steps against the allegations of torture on the EXIM Bank Managing

Director Mohammed Haider Ali Miah.

"A report was published in different media outlets on May 26. We have observed that the headline of the report is -- the MD of EXIM Bank was tortured and fired at," said the press release issued

by the ABB, a forum of private banks' managing directors.

The ABB expressed grave concern over the incident reported in the newspapers.

The organisation expects that the authority concern would take appropriate

measures after carrying out proper investigations.

Such an incident will put an adverse impact on bankers as well as the concerned persons and entities at home and abroad, it added.

Could today be a new dawn for the bourse?

AHSAN HABIB

The stock market is set to be unbolted today after a good two months and that too under the leadership of new faces at the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC).

This unlocking can be viewed as a reset and reboot of the stock market of sorts, one that is breeding hopes of renewed confidence in the bourse.

The last commission, led by M Khairul Hossain, ended its nine-year-long tenure leaving the stock market ill at ease.

During his time, the Dhaka Stock Exchange's market capitalisation increased by just 16.71 per cent to Tk 312,235 crore.

Turnover, one of the major indicators of the market, is now in the neighbourhood of Tk 221 crore. When the commission had begun its tenure, it was Tk 524 crore.

Why has the confidence crisis cast a shadow over this commission?

The answer lies at the tasks of the new commission: It is necessary to understand what are the factors that led to the crisis in the first place over the last decade.

When the last commission took charge, the market was just coming out of one of its worst crashes. So, the stage was set for it to

reform the market with a firm hand.

The commission had formed many rules and regulations and even bought a costly software to stop manipulation.

However, manipulation was a common phenomenon in the last decade as the regulator did not exercise its power. As a result, many junk stocks were trading above the price of well-performing companies.

This impacted the confidence of investors, local, foreign and institutions.

In some cases, the regulator did fine the manipulators. However, it was disproportionate to the harms caused.

The newly appointed commission, led by Shibli Rubayat-Ul-Islam, should be strong against the manipulation because it would be fruitful for the market in the long run.

The last commission had failed to compel the sponsors of listed companies to comply with the rule of holding a 2 per cent share of their company individually and 30 per cent jointly. So, the sponsors just washed their hands off the companies before they tanked and didn't try to lif them.

This happened several times, creating woes for general investors.

The new commission should focus on it because if sponsors have an insignificant

stake, they would not feel the urge to work for the betterment of companies.

Asset management companies also dented investors' confidence. Here again, the regulator played a decisive role by extending the tenure of mutual funds by another 10 years and allowing a return on units instead of cash dividends.

A foreign investor sued the BSEC as their stake was too high and they were expecting higher profits from at least three funds as they were maturing.

Now, they would have to wait another decade to log in profits.

The commission had amended the rules in favour of assets management companies at the expense of general investors. The new commission is expected to work for the sake of investors.

The commission should not mind if the index is going up or down because this is not its headache at all.

In the last 10 years, many companies came and raised capital from the stock market and became a non-performing company subsequently. And a few issue managers were involved in these cases.

The regulator should ensure that no issue manager gets the chance to do it again.

When a company is going down, the BSEC has the authority to replace the board to make it a profitable one.

The last commission also failed to bring any big companies to the market and was rather dependent on the issue managers.

The market has an appetite for well-performing big companies and their listing can restore confidence.

The new commission should concentrate on bringing the local and multinational companies to the market and remove barriers standing in their way.

The main barriers are the lengthy initial public offering process and weak corporate governance among non-listed companies.

The priority should, however, be to remove the floor price to make the market liquid.

The last commission fixed the floor price on March 19 for all stocks based on the average price in the last five days to avoid further fall.

The floor price has turned the market illiquid because it was not market-driven. Many foreign investors were angry at the decision because they prefer a liquid market.

As the economy is squeezing and people's purchasing power fell, companies are expecting lower profits. This may lead to

crash but it won't be worse than the artificial price brought on by the floor price.

Product diversification should be another goal of the new commission. The bond market needs to get priority and some initiatives may make the market vibrant.

The market is rumour-based as listed firms do not disclose information on time. They will only share information after a final agreement is inked. But before the final agreements, they usually sign initial deals.

And stock prices react much before a company makes available price-sensitive information. So, the BSEC should think about the timing and stage of the price-sensitive information before rumours fly around.

Listed firms are bound to explain if their financial status deviates significantly. But many companies give a single line explanation and this ultimately means nothing to investors. As a result, rumours take hold.

The new commission would have to focus on how to remove the confidence crisis.

And it would not happen unless the commission focuses on maintaining rules and regulations by all the stakeholders, ensuring punishment for the manipulators and bringing reputed companies to the stock market.

Trump walks back on threat after outrage

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump on Friday tried to walk back a Twitter threat to respond with deadly force to three days of violent protests in Minneapolis over the police killing of an unarmed black man.

After his online comment that "looting leads to shooting" drew a warning from Twitter and widespread condemnation from Democrats, Trump said he understood why the killing had sparked nationwide protests about police violence against African Americans.

But he added that they should not be allowed to turn to "lawless anarchy."

"The looters should not be allowed to drown out the voices of so many peaceful protesters," he said at the White House. "I understand the hurt, I understand the pain."

Trump said he had expressed his sorrow to the family of George Floyd.

Trump has a history of inflaming racial tensions. He blamed "both sides" for violence between white supremacists and left-wing counter protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017 and has called some immigrants crossing the US-Mexico border rapists.

His early Friday tweet suggested that security forces would open fire on looters to curtail unrest over Floyd's death.

Trump said in his tweet: "These THUGS are dishonoring the memory of George Floyd, and I won't let that happen. Just spoke to Governor Tim Walz and told him that the Military is with him all the way. Any difficulty and we will assume control but, when the looting starts, the shooting starts. Thank you!"



A protestor gestures in front of a burning shop during a demonstration against the death in Minneapolis police custody of African-American man George Floyd, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, early yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

KILLING OF AFRO-AMERICAN MAN IN US

Unrest flares in US cities

Cop charged with murder; curfew imposed in Minneapolis

AFP, Minneapolis

The Minneapolis police officer accused of killing a handcuffed African-American man was charged with murder Friday, but the move failed to quell surging anger as tense protests erupted in cities across the nation.

Demonstrations raged from New York to Los Angeles, and from Atlanta where police cruisers were set ablaze, to Washington where protesters faced off with Secret Service agents outside the White House.

In Minneapolis, Derek Chauvin, the white officer filmed kneeling on the neck of a handcuffed and unarmed George Floyd for nearly nine minutes, was charged with one count of third-degree murder -- unintentionally causing a death -- and one count of negligent manslaughter.

But the charges failed to calm a shaken nation whose deep wounds over racial inequality have been torn

open anew.

Authorities imposed a curfew Friday in Minneapolis after three nights of violent protests left parts of the city in flames. But protesters defiantly remained on the streets, sometimes dodging tear gas canisters fired into crowds by police.

Protester Naema Jakes said she needed to be on the streets so she could verbally confront officers.

"I need you to look in my eyes and feel me," Jakes said. "This is pain, this is hurt."

The 46-year-old Floyd's relatives -- who spoke Friday with President Donald Trump -- welcomed news of the arrest as a "step on the road to justice," but said they hoped for tougher charges and action against the other 3 officers involved in Floyd's detention and death.

All four were fired from the police department Tuesday after video surfaced of Monday's arrest.

The announcement of charges came hours after hundreds of troops were deployed to the streets of Minneapolis and St. Paul to try to prevent a fourth night of violent protests.

Scores of buildings have been burned and looted across the so-called Twin Cities, including a police station associated with the four officers.

Mayor Jacob Frey declared a night-long curfew Friday and Saturday as protesters appeared on the streets in Minneapolis again Friday.

Some chanted "I can't breathe" -- Floyd's words as Chauvin's knee pressed on his neck.

Former president Barack Obama said in a statement that he shared the "anguish" of millions of Americans over Floyd's death. Former vice president Joe Biden, who is challenging Trump for the White House in November's election, also spoke to Floyd's family.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Is 'herd immunity' closer than previously thought?

AFP, Paris

Study suggests between 40 and 60pc of the population could be immunized without being exposed to virus

Another study suggests infection in 10-20 percent of population is enough to achieve 'herd immunity'

Could exposure to the coronaviruses that cause the common cold help protect against COVID-19? Is herd immunity closer than previously thought?

As nations lift lockdowns and experts worry about a potential second peak in cases, our ability to ward off infection is one of the hottest topics of scientific debate.

Ever since it became apparent that children were less vulnerable to COVID-19 early in the pandemic, scientists have speculated that the regular spread of benign viruses in places like schools could have bolstered their immune response to the latest coronavirus.

Now the idea of "cross immunity" among the broader population is gaining some ground.

In a recent post on Twitter, Francois Balloux of University College London noted an "intriguing" lack of an immediate resurgence in COVID-19 cases following the easing of lockdowns in several countries. Among the possible explanations, he noted, were seasonality and enduring social distancing practices.

But he posited a "wilder" hypothesis as well -- that a "proportion of the population might have pre-existing immunity to #SARSCoV2, potentially due to prior exposure to 'common cold' coronaviruses".

Balloux said that might explain issues like cases where there is no transmission between spouses.

Earlier this month, an American study in the journal Cell suggested between 40 and 60 percent of the population could be immunized against COVID-19 without ever being exposed to it.

Researchers put this down to the action of protective cells, known as T lymphocytes, that had been activated by other coronaviruses responsible for colds.

But authors Alessandro Sette and Shane Crotty, of La Jolla Institute for Immunology, cautioned that the research did not suggest the epidemic was running out of steam.

"Our study suggests that preexisting immunity might be one of the factors to be considered; but at this point is simply a hypothesis that needs to be addressed with further experiments," they told AFP by email.

The World Health Organization has also expressed caution over the issue saying lack

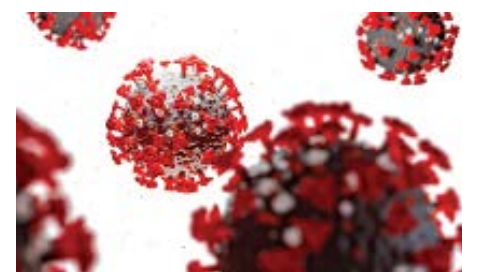
of empirical studies.

WHO's Michael Ryan at a press conference this week said: "There is certainly some evidence with regard to T cells, that if you have a previous coronavirus infection you may be able to mount a more rapid response to COVID-19".

Another uncertainty is whether everyone is equally vulnerable to catching COVID-19. A growing number of scientists think maybe not, raising questions over assumptions for what is known as herd immunity.

In theory this could explain why early estimates of the proportion of individuals who have been infected by the new coronavirus have been lower than expected -- at around 5 to 10 percent of the total population in several countries.

It could also mean a lower threshold for herd immunity -- when a sufficient part of the population has caught the virus, starving it of new hosts to spread to and thereby stopping the epidemic. This threshold, commonly accepted as around 60 to 70 percent of



the population infected, is what Sweden hoped to achieve by deciding against a strict lockdown.

Gabriela Gomes, a researcher at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, said that mathematical models on herd immunity often "ignore individual variation". According to a study she co-authored, which has not yet been peer reviewed, the threshold might be reached when just 10 to 20 percent of the population has been infected.

At the Pitie-Salpetriere hospital in Paris, professor of emergency medicine Yonathan Freund has noticed a sharp drop in the number of infections among doctors compared with the start of the epidemic.

"This is pure speculation but it could mean that people have natural or acquired immunity," he told AFP.

With infections staying low three weeks after France lifted its strict lockdown measures, he thinks that could mean "the second wave is not coming and probably will not happen" in the country.

SHARING TOOLS TO BATTLE COVID-19

WHO, 37 countries launch alliance

REUTERS, Zurich

Thirty-seven countries and the World Health Organization (WHO) appealed on Friday for common ownership of vaccines, medicines and diagnostic tools to tackle the global coronavirus pandemic, taking aim at patent laws they fear could become a barrier to sharing crucial supplies.

While the push by mostly developing nations, called the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool, won praise from groups including Doctors Without Borders, a drug industry alliance questioned if the effort to pool intellectual property would really broaden access to medicines.

Developing and some small nations fear rich countries pumping resources into finding vaccines - more than 100 are in development - will muscle their way to the front of the queue, once a candidate succeeds.

"Vaccines, tests, diagnostics, treatments and other key tools in the coronavirus response must be made universally available as global public goods," said Costa Rica President Carlos Alvarado.

The effort, originally proposed in March, aims to provide a one-stop shop for scientific knowledge, data and intellectual property.

"WHO recognises the important role that patents play in fuelling innovation but this is a time when people must take priority," WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told an online news briefing.

Anna Marriott, health policy manager for anti-poverty group Oxfam, said the divide over how to handle patents illustrated how some regions could wind up losers.

"The pharmaceutical industry's attempt to rubbish the World Health Organisation's initiative suggests they care more for profits than people's health," she said.



A pro-China activist holds an effigy of US President Donald Trump during a protest outside the US consulate in Hong Kong yesterday after US said it would strip several of Hong Kong's special privileges.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel police kill Palestinian they thought was armed

Israeli police in annexed east Jerusalem yesterday shot dead a Palestinian with special needs they mistakenly thought was armed with a pistol, Israeli and Palestinian sources said. The incident happened in the alleys of the walled Old City near Lions' Gate, an access point mainly used by Palestinians. The Palestinians' official news agency Wafa identified the dead man as Eyad Hallak, a resident of the Wadi Joz neighbourhood of east Jerusalem with special needs. There has been an uptick in violence in east Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank in recent days, although it has yet to reach the levels of 2015-2016 when Israeli security forces struggled to stop a wave of so-called lone wolf attacks unconnected to any established militant group.

Afghanistan says ready for dialogue with Taliban

A top Afghan official appointed to lead the much-awaited peace talks with the Taliban yesterday said his team was ready to start dialogue with the insurgents "at any moment". Abdullah Abdullah said an ongoing lull in violence triggered by a surprise ceasefire offered by the insurgents had set the tone for launching discussions. Peace talks between the government and Taliban were scheduled to begin before March 10. US President Donald Trump's administration has made it a priority to end America's longest war, and US officials have pushed the Taliban and government leaders to hold peace talks in a bid to pull out foreign forces.

Merkel a 'no' for Trump's in-person G7 summit



German Chancellor Angela Merkel will not attend an in-person summit of G7 leaders that US President Donald Trump has suggested he will host despite concerns over the coronavirus pandemic, the Politico website quoted her spokesman as saying Friday. Leaders from the Group of Seven, which the United States heads this year, had been scheduled to meet by videoconference in late June after COVID-19 scuttled plans to gather in-person at Camp David, the US presidential retreat in the state of Maryland. Trump last week, however, indicated that he could hold the huge gathering after all. Merkel, a scientist by training, has declined. "As of today, considering the overall pandemic situation, she cannot agree to her personal participation, to a journey to Washington," German government spokesman Steffen Seibert told Politico. "The federal chancellor thanks President Trump for his invitation to the G7 summit," he said.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF BJP-LED GOVT'S SECOND TERM IN INDIA

CAA a major achievement

Says Modi; opposition asks govt not to lose touch with ground realities

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The controversial amendment to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which sparked prolonged street protests across India, was yesterday cited by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as one of the major achievements of his government.

In an open letter written by Modi to India's citizens on the first anniversary of his second term as prime minister, he said the amended law was an "expression of India's compassion and spirit of inclusiveness".

Modi also mentioned abrogation of Article 370 of Indian constitution, which gave Jammu and Kashmir a special Constitutional status, settlement of the Ram Temple issue and criminalisation of instant triple talaq among other key achievements during this time.

CAA, passed by both Houses of parliament in December last year, seeks to grant citizenship to non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan on the ground of religious persecution. However, critics

alleged that the amended CAA was "discriminatory."

The CAA and the National Register of Citizens, which aim at keeping out "illegal" immigrants from Bangladesh, had caused concerns in Bangladesh.

He said in 2019 general elections the



people of India voted not merely for continuity but also with the dream of taking India to new heights and making it a global leader.

The decisions taken in the last one year are directed at fulfilling this dream, he said.

"Article 370 (abrogation) furthered the spirit of national unity and

integration," he said Jammu and Kashmir bifurcation.

Referring to the Supreme Court's unanimous judgement on the Ram temple in Ayodhya, Modi said it brought an amicable end to a debate persisting for centuries.

However, several opposition leaders attacked the government.

The government should not lose touch with ground realities, former Uttar Pradesh chief minister and BSP chief Mayawati said.

The Congress in a statement titled "Helpless People, Heartless Government" said that India saw a "year of disappointment, disastrous management and diabolical pain".

"2 Crore Jobs vs. 27% unemployment: Modi came to power promising 2 crore jobs a year. But India witnessed the Highest Unemployment Rate in the last 45 years reached in 2017-18 (6.1% overall - 7.8% in Urban India and 5.3% in Rural India). Post Covid, India's unemployment rate has soared to an unprecedented 27.1% (CMIE)," the statement added.

India eases lockdown despite record cases

AGENCIES

India yesterday announced a major relaxation of the world's biggest coronavirus lockdown from early June, except for so-called "containment zones" with high numbers of infections.

The announcement came after the country reported a record daily jump of 7,964 new COVID-19 infections yesterday.

A home ministry order said that places of religious worship, hotels, restaurants and shopping malls "will be allowed" to operate from June 8, while educational establishments will be opened "after consultations" with Indian state authorities.

Earlier yesterday, in an open letter marking one year into his second term, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to the country's population of 1.3 billion to follow all lockdown rules to stop the spread of the pandemic.

The prime minister said there was a "long battle" ahead against the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

"Our country (is) besieged with problems amidst a vast population and limited resources," Modi said, adding that labourers and migrant workers had "undergone tremendous suffering" due to restrictions.

India has recorded a total of 173,763 COVID-19 cases and 4,971 deaths, making it the ninth most-affected country globally, Reuters data showed.

While fatality rates in India have been lower than in worse-hit countries, experts warned that its peak has not been reached due to mounting cases of new infections.

Officials are also nervous about the pandemic spreading through villages as millions of jobless migrant workers return home from cities.

Over 100 migrant workers have died either in accidents or due to starvation as they desperately tried to head back to their villages, the home ministry official said.

Govt's Boro procurement policy needs a change

Buying paddy directly from farmers will ensure fair price for them

A research conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) found that Boro farmers can get a fair price for their produce, if the government buys paddy directly from the growers instead of rice from millers. The study commissioned by the agriculture ministry also suggests that the step will increase the market price of Boro paddy during the harvest season. By analysing last year's Boro procurement data, the researchers found that the market price of Boro paddy could have increased by 45 percent, had the government purchased only paddy from farmers for its rice stock.

While 81.1 percent of total government's rice procurement was from the millers last year, only 18.9 percent of rice in the form of paddy was procured from the farmers. And only 1.34 percent of all Boro farmers could sell their produce to the government.

Every year, despite having a bumper Boro harvest, the majority of our farmers have to count losses while the rice millers make huge profits. This is a well-known fact and the study has just found out the details of the ground realities. The IFPRI has also made some commendable suggestions as to how to protect farmers' interests through the government's procurement programmes. In order to ensure fair prices for farmers, the government should fix the prices of paddies with different moisture content, buy paddy from farmers at the local supply depots and get those husked at rice mills, set a maximum selling limit for farmers so that small farmers and sharecroppers can participate in the procurement process, etc. Moreover, only the government-designated rice millers should transport the paddy from the depots to the mills.

These steps, if taken, will not only increase the market price of paddy during the harvest season which will benefit farmers, but will also lower the retail price of rice in the market which will benefit the low-income people, particularly the urban poor. We request the government to consider the suggestions made by the study and help protect farmers' interests.

This is not the time to hike bus fares

People are already suffering enough!

THE Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association has demanded that bus fares be doubled if they are to maintain safety protocols and social distancing in the vehicles, as the lockdown on public transport is lifted on Monday. At a time when lower and middle classes are already struggling to weather the economic hardships brought about by Covid-19, this demand is inconsiderate, to say the least. Passengers, an overwhelming majority of whom are likely to be hard-strapped for disposable income in this crisis, will find it difficult, if not impossible, to bear this additional expense. Moreover, we would like to remind both the bus owners and the government that this is a temporary arrangement, but prices, once increased, are likely to be permanent, even when we return to normalcy.

We urge the government to be mindful of the immense financial burdens of people in lower income brackets as the economy braces for a recession, and to take every possible step to ease their daily sufferings. According to a recent study by the Power and Participation Research Centre and Brac Institute of Governance and Development, incomes of the ultra-poor, moderately poor and vulnerable non-poor in Bangladesh have fallen by 70 percent due to the coronavirus outbreak. The lower middle and middle income households have also seen a drastic reduction in their incomes, with thousands unemployed or suffering losses in their small businesses. Under the circumstances, rather than pass on the buck to commuters, bus owners should step up and take on the additional burden. Let this be their contribution to the economy—and to the people—during this unprecedented economic crisis. Additionally, with oil prices having drastically fallen in the international market, we see no reason why bus owners should not be allowed to reap its benefits and save operational costs.

We also worry that bus owners will use this excuse of maintaining social distance to hike costs but will continue to fill the buses to their full capacity. The transport sector, unfortunately, has not been held to account for its many misdeeds over the years, but this lack of accountability and monitoring must end if we are to ensure any semblance of safety for passengers, many of whom are likely to belong to groups who are at higher risk of contracting the virus.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Maintain safety at all costs

Amid the ongoing crisis, the government has decided to discontinue the nationwide general holidays keeping the livelihoods of the people in mind. Starting from June 1, everything will slowly start to operate like before, or so we hope. But I cannot help think that even with the restrictions in place, the carelessness of people far surpassed our expectations, then how will they behave once the lockdown has been discontinued?

Therefore, ensuring that everybody abides by the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Health while travelling to work is of utmost importance. Once at work, everyone should strictly maintain social distancing and proper hygiene. Without supervision, I think the consequences may turn out to be disastrous. I know it is not possible for the government alone to control the pandemic and we as a people must thus step forward and be responsible ourselves. I hope this step to restart our economy proves successful given we all proceed in a progressive and planned manner.

Nazia Amin, Dhaka

Post-Corona "New Normal" in Schools

15 percent of national budget must go to education recovery



MANZOOR AHMED

WE have to talk about the post-corona time, even though Bangladesh has not reached the peak in infection and deaths caused by the pandemic. It will come to an end or at least limp

to a decline in the near future. Meanwhile, we have to design a smart national response and a recovery plan. Protecting the fragile progress in children's education must be a part of the smart national recovery.

Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) undertook a rapid survey of the field situation on Covid-19 education impact. The aim of the online survey carried out between mid-April and mid-May was to gauge the perception of these education stakeholders on the situation and its impact and implications.

Responses were received from 115 NGOs engaged in education activities and 11 teachers' organisations. The findings of the survey and recommendations based on it were shared in a webinar on May 18.

The survey revealed serious concerns about the risk of reversal of the progress made in recent years in education and setting back the efforts on the quality, equity and inclusion objectives. The findings pointed to long-standing weaknesses in the education system which have been aggravated now by the crisis.

Dropout of children from school would rise according to 85 percent of respondents. Child labour will increase hampering education of children, thought 71 percent respondents. Eighty percent felt absenteeism and irregular school attendance would rise. Seventy percent respondents found teachers of non-government schools, the vast majority at

School closure is likely to continue until September, if not longer, wiping out much of the school year. The economic, health and psychological effects on students, teachers and families are such that it cannot be a matter of going back to the old routine when the pandemic subsides. A three year education recovery plan is needed to protect the recent progress and prevent setting back children's education due to the

been semester and school exams in many school districts and universities in USA.

If public examinations must be held, they need not be for all the subjects in the curriculum. They can be on fewer key subjects such as Bangla and math for PECE and Bangla, English, math and science for JSC; on a 100-marks paper for each subject, completing the total examination in a short time.

A similar approach can be followed for

The non-formal education programmes for the dropout and those never enrolled in school need to be strengthened.

Tapan Kumar Ghosh, Director General, Bureau of Non-Formal Education said that 100,000 out-of-school students in a "second chance" programme are not able to continue their study at present and the start for a new cohort of 250,000 students is delayed due to the crisis

It was recommended that at least 15



A three year education recovery plan is needed to protect the recent progress and prevent setting back children's education due to the pandemic's impact.

PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

The recovery has to take us to a "new normal" that mitigates the pre-existing weaknesses now exposed, rather than take us back to business-as-usual that left many children poorly served.

the secondary level and at least a third at the primary level, are in deep anxiety about not receiving salaries or even losing their job.

Analysing the respondents' perception of problems and priorities, the study team recommended measures for protection and recovery of the education system. Two main areas of actions proposed are about a medium term recovery plan and the necessary budgetary support for this plan.

pandemic's impact.

The fragilities of the system laid bare by the closure of schools and the difficulties of reaching and supporting students should be reflected in the recovery strategy. The recovery has to take us to a "new normal" that mitigates the pre-existing weaknesses now exposed, rather than take us back to business-as-usual that left many children poorly served.

The post-pandemic recovery plan should emphasise teaching and learning, including extra classes (offering support to schools and incentives to teachers for this purpose). The disruption of academic calendar, completing lessons, adjusting exams and adjusting vacations should focus on recouping the loss of learning time, and ensuring student's return to school and participation in learning—not just going back to the old routine.

The focus must shift away from public examinations and testing (such as PECE at the end of grade 5 and JSC at the end of grade 8) and many formal periodic examinations in the school. The next round of these may be cancelled or held in an abridged form. It should be remembered that the school's primary job is to support students to learn; testing is secondary and must not distract students and teachers from learning. Secondary level public examinations (GCE) has been cancelled this year in UK as have

SSC and HSC exams and considered as a strategy for examination reform. An expert committee appointed by the Ministry of Education made recommendations in 2018 along this line, but these have not received due consideration.

Expanding scope of school meal, stipends, health check and mentoring of students were recommended. Md Fashiullah, Director General, Directorate of Primary Education, noted that the amount of monthly stipends for primary education students is to be raised by about 50 percent.

Investments should be made on making online and ICT-based learning a regular feature in schools. ICT infrastructure, connectivity, broad-band access, availability of devices such as tablets, ed-tech support and ed-tech training for teachers are necessary for this purpose. Asif Saleh, Executive Director of Brac, speaking at the webinar, mentioned plans for multiple shifts and a blended approach (mixing on-line and face-to-face instruction) for schools Brac runs.

Plans should be made for all education institutions to become free wi-fi hotspots for students and teachers. A collaboration among the telecommunication regulatory agency (BTRC), mobile phone providers, A2I project of the Ministry of Science and Technology and the education authorities is urgently needed to this end.

percent of the new national budget for 2020-21 should be allocated to education to support the education recovery plan, particularly for the elements noted above. Khondaker Golam Moazzem, Reseach Director at Center for Policy Dialogue, supported the recommendation and urged increase both in development and recurring budgets for education. He said this was not the time to cut back the education budget as "lesser priority" or "non-essential" expenditure.

It has been suggested that the success of the recovery plan and proper use of extra funds lie in proper implementation of the proposed steps. Effective implementation would require decentralised planning and management of total primary and secondary education in each upazila involving local administration and close collaboration with non-government and civil society organisations.

Policy support for a "new normal" that serves students better than in the past would be a silver lining in the darkness. Ms Aroma Datta, MP urged at the webinar that the findings and recommendations of the survey be brought to the attention of the prime minister and discussed with the Minister of Education, Dr Dipu Moni.

Dr Manzoor Ahmed is professor emeritus at Brac University and Vice-chair of CAMPE.

On the Front Line of Providing Healthcare

The role of the family doctor

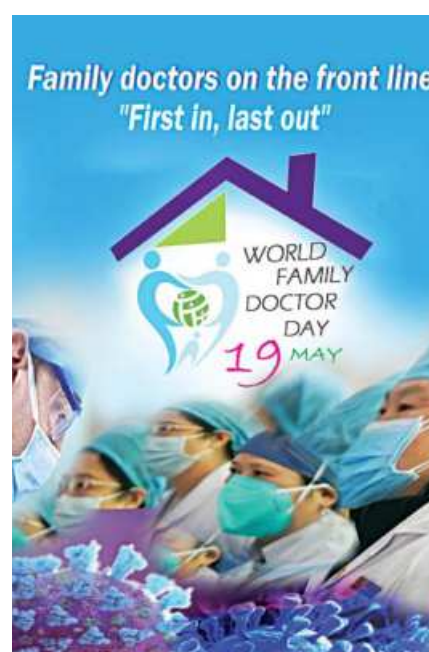
MD KABIR AHMED KHAN

THE world is experiencing an unprecedented health challenge as the global coronavirus pandemic continues to spread. To date, it has spread rapidly in almost all countries in the world, causing the number of cases and deaths to increase exponentially.

While Bangladesh saw the first confirmed case on March 8, 2020 and the rate of infection stayed relatively low through March, we have recently begun to experience an increasing number of new cases and deaths. This pattern matches the experiences of other countries, where a slow start soon turns into uncontrollable upsurge. As we've seen in other countries, this can quickly overwhelm the local health system.

We are facing a significant challenge in combating COVID-19 with lack of access to quality healthcare. Due to insufficient resources and lack of coordination in health sectors, patients are struggling to get healthcare—both to manage COVID-19 but also for other chronic health conditions.

In general, in our country, almost 80 percent of the population still seek their first line of care from informal healthcare providers such as traditional healers or pharmacy owners. For that reason, during a pandemic situation, general people are facing tremendous suffering to get proper and adequate medical support due to a lack of strong primary healthcare delivery



1978, when WHO began its "Health for All" programme, it recognised that strong "primary healthcare" is the key to attain that. A family physician or a family doctor acts as a leader in the front-line of healthcare workers, who provide services to patients of all age groups, and genders. To highlight the role and contribution of family doctors, WONCA (World Organization of Family Doctors), first declared May 19 as World Family Doctors Day (WFDD) in 2010, which has been celebrated all over the world every year. This year WFDD's theme is: "Family doctors on the front line—First in, Last out".

A family doctor is a specialist physician, who is educated and trained in the discipline of family medicine. Worldwide, family medicine is also recognised as a distinct academic discipline which is imparted through structured residency training, concerned with the total healthcare of the

individual and the family.

The need of the hour is to understand and incorporate in our healthcare system well-trained family doctors who may form the backbone of our healthcare system. As "Gate Keepers" at primary care facilities, they can improve the cost-effectiveness of healthcare delivery, during this pandemic situation and beyond. This COVID-19 pandemic health challenge has already shown in every country of the world—more in third world countries such as ours—that a well-planned strong primary healthcare delivery system with efficient family doctors working in the grass root level can effectively minimise the devastating health hazards of any outbreak.

So, in the present pandemic situation, the roles and responsibilities of family doctors as primary care physicians are manifold. They can easily maintain the triage at the front line by disease screening, providing telemedicine consultations, training the auxiliary healthcare providers, educating community people, guiding community leaders and assisting the public health authorities. They can act as a family friend and a healthcare advocate in this crisis situation, and can address mental health issues as well. They also can prevent unnecessary burden on hospitals in this resource constraint country of ours.

Dr Lt Colonel (Retd) Md Kabir Ahmed Khan, Consultant Family Medicine, Pravaa Health.

In the present pandemic situation, the roles and responsibilities of family doctors as primary care physicians are manifold.

Musings of a lawyer

Making sense of the concept of virtual court

BARRISTER REHAN HUSAIN

WE are already over two months into the extended holiday which is coming to an end soon. It feels as if we time travelled to a new reality after March 25, 2020 which I still cannot fathom. The greatest anxiety comes from the uncertainty. Shall we ever go back to where we left off in March? As a supreme court lawyer my usual day started with me travelling to my workplace early in the morning, arguing cases before the court, dealing with clients personally and further client dealings in the evenings and weekends.

The profession is very interpersonal and adversarial, at times, requiring relationship building, gaining clients' trust, making convincing arguments to the courts, among others. However, the past usual seems so unusual now! My wife is among the fortunate 10 percent who continues to work from home for a global non-profit organisation. I also wondered if digital engagement was a possibility for us. Meanwhile, England, many States in the US and India adopted the practice of virtual court as an emergency measure. At a time like this, the ordinance on the introduction of virtual courts caused a swirl in the stagnant pool.

Initiated by the supreme court, the decision on the "virtual court" was quickly approved by the Cabinet Division and later formalised through the promulgation of the "Adalat Kartrik Tathya Prajukti Byabohar Adhyadesh 2020". It is commendable how quickly the thought leaders in the supreme court, guided by the chief justice, responded to the pandemic and formulated the plan

for working remotely. Already many practice directions and circulars have been issued for both the divisions of the supreme court, which have been uploaded on the supreme court's website.

In summary, this is how a virtual court works: The interested lawyer emails his/her application with enclosures (soft copy) supported by a one-page justification on the urgency of the matter to be heard to a designated email address, probably of the bench officer of the concerned

issued so far, only require the signature of the lawyer and the concerned party dismissing the earlier requirement of authentication by court officials. These are clearly designed to hear "urgent" matters without physical presence. We have already seen the first writ petition in a virtual court, challenging the hunting of dolphins in the Halda river followed by several bail applications.

However, I can write volumes about the technical and practical challenges of operationalising and scaling this nature of court in our context; until recently,

lawyers in many tiers of judiciary. Also, the team is adjusting several formal procedures to adapt to the virtual courts, e.g. temporarily dispensing with the role of commissioner of affidavits, relying on lawyer's authentication, allowing payment of court fees at a later date, hearing based on only soft version of the pleading and enclosures. I would advise lawyers to visit the website regularly to see the new uploads on instructions and developments. I can see confusion and inhibition among many lawyers to take advantage of the facility due to digital inertia or a mental block. Similarly, the authorities should also become more innovative in reaching out to the lawyers across the spectrum to assist them to overcome the block, one example can be texting the links of the website or a mock YouTube video through mobile sms service.

Although temporary in nature, the virtual court and use of automation and technology have a huge potential for the next normal times. For example, routine work like "extension" of bail and other orders and "fixing" dates for hearing cases can be permanently brought under the purview of automation with a scope for raising objections by the other side. Moreover, arbitration of disputes can be easily conducted through this procedure, encouraging corporate and private persons to settle their differences more effectively. In hearing matters a provision for emailing "written arguments" to judges in advance can brief them about the bone of contention in a particular matter reducing the time of the main hearing. Post-pandemic this will also help address the backlog of cases freeing the time of judges for quick dispensation of

complex cases. COVID-19 has hastened the pace of digitalisation of work. This shift calls for substantial training in new skills, that too delivered using digital tools.

Until a vaccine is invented and its effectiveness proven, we must practice caution in our workplace. While a virtual court has its advantages, we might have to consider reopening the courts gradually when lockdown is lifted. The Open Court principle finds its origins in the much-revered MagnaCarta of 1215 which states that it is not only the right of litigants to have their cases resolved by court, but also the right of the public to attend legal proceedings.

Therefore, I am also urging the authorities to enforce strict rules on social distancing and cleanliness when they reopen the courts. What kind of a post-pandemic court premise do I envision? A premise that has automated safety checks using biometric tools such as automatic sensors checking people's body temperatures on entry, beeping systems to enforce six-foot separation system and installing disinfection chambers. Following the example of Bangladesh Secretariat, another easier way could be to streamline entry of people into court premises—each courtroom can be given a list of limited number of cases each day, allowing only the concerned lawyers to enter and the clients may enter only with prior written pass from the concerned authority. Are discipline and efficiency too much to ask? I am aware, compliance by fellow lawyers might also prove difficult but in the end, I am sure the choice for life would triumph.

Barrister Rehan Husain is a practicing lawyer at the Bangladesh Supreme Court.



court. The bench officer, in turn, prints out a hard copy of the application for record and forwards the soft copy to the concerned judge, who examines the urgency and approves the prayer if convinced by emailing the lawyer with information about the date/time and other details. It is also the responsibility of the court to inform the schedule to the opposing party. The matter is heard on the approved date through video conferencing in the presence of both sides before the order is passed and finally communicated via email. As an enabler, the practice directions,

every citizen of our country had the fundamental right to approach the court, but suddenly they have to cross the hurdle of "establishing urgency" to get their matters heard. On the other hand, as a member of the bar, I cannot entirely physically isolate myself from a client while preparing for the case. Nonetheless, my argument for this piece would be to keep an open mind and will to embrace something new with a lens on inclusion.

A panel is working hard to untangle the protocols or the modus operandi of participating in a virtual court by

Finding the fingerprint of creation



I started to write this on the night that is deemed the holiest night of the holiest month of the year by Muslims. My thoughts started to take shape just as the howling

winds started to quieten down at the break of dawn following the 27th night of Ramadan. Cyclone Amphan, had arrived and left, the vast majority of havoc it wreaked, once again, bravely breasted by the eastern parts of the Sundarbans. By the time I finish, we will have celebrated the end of the holy month. Some things will have moved, and some things will stay still, frozen in a paranoia stricken world.

In Sanskrit, the word Prakriti, referred to both Nature and the Goddess. The God in their masculine form was referred to as Purusha, while in their feminine form was referred to as Prakriti. Some traditions in Hinduism say that God himself, was in fact, born off the Goddess. While Purusha came into being, Prakriti merely existed with no beginning and no end. It is said that the temple which houses god represents the womb of the Mother of All-Prakriti. Nature, therefore, has been deified, worshipped either Gauri, in her tamed form, or Kali, in her wild, destructive form. We see this even in tiny localities like our very own Sundarbans, where the blessings of the Bonbibi are sought before one enters the forest. The same forest that lays itself bare on the path of hurricanes and typhoons and cyclones, and readily invites the rampage that would otherwise be unleashed on us.

In the Lakota tradition, Inyan (God) was the first of the powerful spirits. He existed before the beginning. He then created Makha and gave it the Earth spirit, who was a part of Inyan. After

Makha came into being, miniature versions of Makha were created. Those miniatures were humans. Inyan, then became sad and lonely. Creating us had rendered him powerless. So, he dissolved into his own creation. His blood became the blue waters and the sky. Now, his blood runs as water across the entire earth, connecting all that he had created, making us all part of a whole.

Water as a basis for things, I suppose, is also subtly emphasised in the Quran as well. For instance, in archaic Arabic, the word "Shari'a" i.e. the source of the Islamic Law, literally translates into "the path to the source of water"; water, that makes up two thirds of what we are and what the earth is. There is more explicit emphasis on nature in the Quran as well, where over 500 of the 6,000 verses of the Quran speak of natural phenomenon. Allah, the Almighty, repeatedly calls on mankind to reflect on His signs, which include all aspects of nature such as trees, mountains, seas, animals, birds, stars, the sun and the moon and our own hearts. Islamic jurisprudence even contains regulations concerning the conservation and allocation of scarce resources.

And if we were to move away from Islamic jurisprudence to more esoteric interpretations of the Quran, entire branches of study have been dedicated to the underlying relationship between cosmology and geometry that is manifested in Islamic patterns we see in mosques, where geometry acts as the vocabulary underpinning the pattern language. The golden mean and other forms of geometric proportions is reflected all across, either represented as micro or macro cosmos, in man, nature, and the universe. Not surprisingly, the study of geometric proportions has its roots in the study of nature and matter. Upon observing the snowflake crystals and honey cells with their hexagonal geometries, the flowers in nature displaying a variety of geometries, plants and other aspects of nature which exhibit the form of

spiralling geometry related to Fibonacci proportions based on the golden mean, some have concluded that the golden mean is the "fingerprint" of the Creation. What does this mean, then?

As we slowly move out of the inertia caused by a terrifying, mind-numbing, global pandemic, some of us who have the privilege of a roof over their heads, food on their tables, relief from the excruciating worry of an uncertain livelihood, freedom to avail the gift of time undistracted by constant online meetings, crying children, sick and/or hungry members of the household to take care of, can perhaps, choose to reflect. Monks and sages have voluntarily retreated into isolation for millennia. Angels have come to prophets in caves when they were in seclusion. In the Amazon, intentional isolation continues today in an ascetic practice known as a *dieta*. As part of an ancient shamanic practice, an initiate goes into the forest for an extended period of time vowing abstinence from earthly delights including salt, sugar, oil, fats, bloody meats, alcohol, sex; any and all sensual stimulation is forsaken for meagre portions of bland food in order to "hollow out the vessel" of the neophyte. Similar to what we are expected to do in a day of fasting during Ramadan. Much like the Hindu and Lakota traditions, the base of these practices lies in the perspective that plants, animals, and even landscapes possess a spirit. Retreat and reflection have been practised as part of spiritual processes across traditions all over the world to bring us to a single realisation.

That we are as interconnected as our stories and our faiths. While the crippling coronavirus has rudely awakened mankind to its own powerlessness, it is perhaps meant to force upon us a different kind of a reckoning. The virus serves as a reminder of our interrelation; a golden example of the butterfly effect—a bat has effectively collapsed the entire world economy. And if we are to

prevent future pandemics and reduce the "virus spillover risk" from wildlife to people, which rises as contact increases between them, we have to be cognisant of the outcomes of mindless land use, agriculture, deforestation and wildlife hunting. Because, the fact remains that almost half of the new diseases, including SARS, Ebola, West Nile, Lyme, MERS, can be traced to humans venturing irresponsibly into spaces that

when it is claimed the Final Message was revealed, I was contemplating on the following: Maybe, the message is an ongoing one, that we receive from the "natural messengers" of the world. The viruses, bacteria, animals, insects, and plants, each with its own grand purpose intertwined with our own, are natural messengers. Maybe receiving the message starts with entering into an experiential relationship with non-



Maybe receiving the message starts with entering into an experiential relationship with non-human beings with as much intent and care as we do with the holy books we read.

PHOTO: STAR

are not ours. The virus is a reminder of our part in the web of relationship responsibility to other beings.

In most urban spaces, we have largely lost touch with the subtle sensibility needed to recognise the natural "messengers" of the world. Throughout the month of Ramadan, we spent nights stooped over the Word of God reading translations, working our way through words and meanings to grasp at the message. On the 27th night,

human beings with as much intent and care as we do with the holy books we read.

The question is, how many of us are listening? I wonder as industrial activities in Rampal, Mongla, Taltoli and Kalapara continue at the expense of Nature.

Shagufta Hossain is the founder of Leaping Boundaries, an organization that aims to raise visibility of female madrasah students, and a Dalai Lama Fellow.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

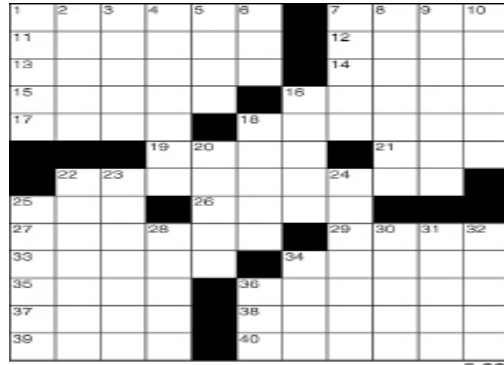


ADOLF EICHMANN EXECUTED
May 31, 1962

On this day in 1962, the State of Israel hanged German official Adolf Eichmann, who had escaped from a prison camp in 1946 and spent some 14 years in hiding, for his part in the Nazi extermination of Jews during World War II.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Trendy male hairstyle
 - 7 Hawaiian port
 - 11 Relaxed
 - 12 Shortly
 - 13 Flung
 - 14 Shoebox number
 - 15 Door sign
 - 16 In the cards
 - 17 Take it easy
 - 18 G, for one
 - 19 Watered down
 - 21 Historic time
 - 22 Tennessee city
 - 25 Writer Rita – Brown
 - 26 Llama's land
 - 27 "Need
- anything?" reply**
- 29 One of the Mamas
 - 33 Bridges
 - 34 Trattoria sauce
 - 35 Toppers
 - 36 Spot for commuter cocktails
 - 37 Out of the wind
 - 38 Disregard
 - 39 Days gone by
 - 40 Vacillate
- DOWN**
- 1 Alma –
 - 2 Be penitent
 - 3 High homes
 - 4 Binary system
 - 5 Manual reader
 - 6 Homer's neighbor
 - 7 Fights
 - 8 Monogram unit
 - 9 Cough drop
 - 10 Nervous
 - 16 Muslim ascetic
 - 18 Gushed
 - 20 Trade shows
 - 22 Capital of Uganda
 - 23 Voids
 - 24 Swiss lake
 - 25 Accident
 - 28 Beginning
 - 30 Fancy neckwear
 - 31 Intent look
 - 32 More tender
 - 34 Book unit
 - 36 Smidgen



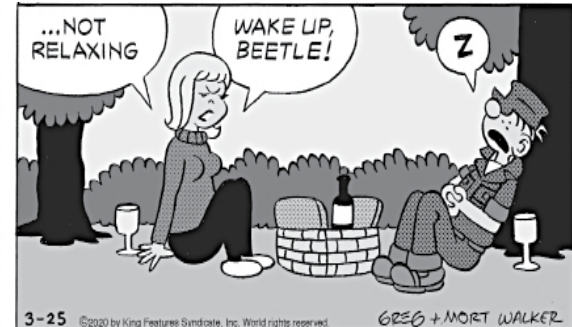
YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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

The future of novel Coronavirus pandemic

MD MIZANUR RAHMAN

A virus is a submicroscopic infectious agent that needs living cells like humans, animals, plants and even other microorganisms including bacteria for budding. Viruses are much smaller than bacteria which contain DNA or RNA genome.

The zoonotic coronavirus infects humans through the respiratory route – nasal cavity via pharynx to lung tissue. The viruses bind with epithelial cells, the outer cover of the respiratory tract membrane, like flu viruses causing fever, throat pain, sneezing and coughing etc. The viruses are so contagious that they can spread up exponentially from an infected person to the next. Mostly respiratory droplets of infected people spread the infection to others by inhalation or by touching the particles fallen on the surface of objects (mouth, nose and eyes).

It is undeniable that, if nature is oppressed, they do not delay to repress. Changing food habits especially avoiding uncooked and undercooked foods, eating wild animals, killing and destroying ecosystems are the crucial factors in inviting the deadly attack of viruses. Even though



antiviral drugs are available for specific viral infections, but they have been found less effective in the treatment of this novel coronavirus disease.

The pandemic of novel coronavirus has changed the entire world even in this modern age. Lifestyle, health hygiene, healthcare facilities and healthcare industries etc. are the cornerstones of the wellbeing of the world ahead. Information technology contributed

tremendously in contact tracing people in some countries like South Korea. Molecular diagnostic platforms and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technology laid its commendable footprint above all.

Medical scientists say, to eradicate the viral disease only effective vaccines can be the strongest of all weapons, and hence, the giant biotechnology companies of the world are working relentlessly. The entire

world is waiting for the light from the darkness of coronavirus. The question is, will they be able to meet the demand of the whole world? Probably not, as they will meet their own need first and there is nothing wrong here if so. But what are the lessons for the rest of the world and the developing countries like Bangladesh?

Now is the moment to make factual decisions by the government and private entities,

how they can start building a robust weapon to fight against this invisible enemy. Real-Time Reverse Transcriptase Polymerase Chain Reaction (rRT-PCR) has become widely popular these days due to its significant specificity and accuracy in the detection of this tiny organism. Apart from viral detection, there are many more diseases that need this PCR technology too. Establishment of molecular diagnostic laboratories, point of care DNA sequencing facilities and manufacturing of molecular diagnostic kits, etc. are pivotal factors for disease detection in the future. Genome sequencing of novel coronavirus on Bangladeshi population is highly desirable to know the pattern and pathogenicity of the virus.

One day this pandemic will end, but we cannot ascertain that another mighty one will not come. There are millions of bacteria and viruses that remain out of the research loop. Molecular diagnostic industries and biotechnology companies can contribute immensely against those diseases ahead of us to make the world ready to tackle them.

The writer is the CEO of NIPRO JMI Pharma Ltd. Email: mizan_ceo@niprojmi.com

DID YOU KNOW?

Social isolation linked to more severe COVID-19 outbreaks

Regions of Italy with higher family fragmentation and a high number of residential nursing homes experienced the highest rate of COVID-19 infections in people over age 80, according to a new study published recently in the open-access journal PLOS ONE.

Italy has been one of the countries most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers have speculated that this is due to Italy's age demographics as well as the connectedness of the older and younger generations and high rate of intergenerational contact. If true, this would suggest that regions with larger households would have more severe COVID-19 outbreaks in older adults.

Across Italian regions, the COVID-19 incidence rate ranged from 0.27% to 4.09% of the population being affected. The mean number of household members ranged from 2.02 to 2.58; the percentage of one member households ranged from 28.5 to 40.9; and percentage of COVID-19 cases that occurred in people over age 80 ranged from 4.3 to 23.6.

A model that reflected the percent of the population over age 80, days since 50 cases were registered, percentage of nursing home beds in the total population, and mean number of household members was best able to predict the COVID-19 incidence among older people in each region, with an adjusted R-squared value of 0.695 (p<0.001). A lower mean number of household members and higher number of nursing home beds was associated with more COVID-19 cases in older adults.

The study was limited by the fact that age-specific infection rates were not available and the number of COVID-19 tests varied enormously by regions.

HEALTH bulletin



Increasing number of lost pregnancies linked to higher risk of developing diabetes

New research published in Diabetologia (the journal of the European Association for the Study of Diabetes [EASD]) shows that the higher the number of pregnancy losses a woman has, the higher her risk of developing type 2 diabetes (T2D).

The study identified 24,774 women with T2D and selected 247,740 controls without diabetes. Women who had experienced 1, 2 or 3 pregnancy losses had an 18%, 38% and 71% higher risk, respectively, of developing T2D as compared to ever-pregnant women with no pregnancy losses. Women who had never been pregnant had a 56% increased risk of developing T2D compared to women who had been pregnant with any number of losses from zero upwards. Similar results were found after adjustment for obesity and gestational diabetes.

The authors suggest that women with three or more pregnancy losses could have their blood sugar profile more frequently monitored so that lifestyle advice can be offered to lower their risk and interventions can be applied early if diabetes develops.

Novel coronavirus mutation and genome sequencing

DR JAGODISH CHANDRA GHOSH

The recent pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has caused the death of about 365,000 people throughout the world so far. The novel coronavirus responsible for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has much genomic similarity (about 80%) with severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) and Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) that spread throughout the world in 2002-2003 and 2012 respectively.

The novel coronavirus is an RNA virus that has undergone multiple mutations including mutation in the genomic (gene) protein. One of the characteristics of an RNA virus is its high potential for mutation and adaptability to environmental changes.

Mutation of a virus can bring changes in their character including their infectivity, virulence and pathogenesis. Knowledge about mutations helps plan the management in general including the selection of the tests for its identification, treatment procedure and invention/production of vaccines.

In the regional planning strategy for the overall management of COVID-19, mutation related information of the virus should be taken into account along with the guideline provided by the World Health Organisation. For example, one particular group of drugs may not be similarly effective on a particular strain of the virus. For

innovation of the most effective vaccine, it is essential to take the different strains into account.

Mutation related changes can be determined by genomic sequencing and by comparing with a standard. Genome sequencing had been performed by many countries. Recently genome sequencing of the novel coronavirus had been done in Bangladesh for the first time. It is now important to perform genomic sequencing with much more patient samples and with particular attention by taking samples from hot spot areas for COVID-19 in the country.

Recent research detected some hotspots of mutation in the SARS-CoV-2 virus genome. Researchers found that the Asian, European, American and Russian strains coexist regarding the attack in any particular region or country. It is also observed that the mutation in one country or

region is different from that of other countries and regions. Researcher Esteban Domingo mentioned in an article that too frequent and rapid mutation of the virus might decrease or extinct the infectivity of the virus. If such a situation occurs it may obviate human beings from this present dangerous situation.

Many aspects of COVID-19 are still unknown and research is ongoing. Production of vaccines is in the trial phase but quite a long time may be needed for its commercial use. COVID-19 exposes the poor health service status of many countries. Regions, countries and researchers need to be even more proactive for research on COVID-19 and other emerging and re-emerging diseases that have ceased millions of lives throughout the world in the past decades.

The writer is a Professor of Orthopaedics. E-mail: drghoshjc@gmail.com



Mental health of medical personnel working with COVID-19 patients

Medical personnel treating coronavirus cases in China have higher rates of anxiety and other mental health symptoms than the general population, according to a new study published recently in the open-access journal PLOS ONE.

The healthcare providers surveyed scored higher on scales of somatisation (experiencing physical symptoms of psychiatric conditions), obsessive-compulsive symptoms, anxiety, phobic anxiety and psychoticism compared to a national average (p<0.05). They also scored lower on a scale of interpersonal sensitivity (p<0.01).

The researchers identified several factors that predicted mental health status (p<0.05), including whether a clinician had worked in Hubei province, their level of concern that they had been infected, and their age. However, the study is limited in that it did not directly compare doctors working with COVID-19 patients to doctors not working with COVID-19 patients.

The authors add: "The overall mental health status of medical personnel responding to new coronavirus pneumonia is generally higher than that of the norm group in China. The results of this study should contribute to measures to alleviate the psychological pressures on medical personnel dealing with the new coronavirus epidemic in China."



HOW TO HOME QUARANTINE

The home quarantined person should:



Stay in a well-ventilated single-room preferably with an attached toilet



Needs to stay away from elderly people, pregnant women, children



Restrict his/her movement within the house



Under no circumstances attend any social/religious gathering



Wash hand frequently with soap and water or with alcohol-based sanitizer



Avoid sharing household items like dishes, glasses, cups, utensils, towels, bedding



Wear a surgical mask at all time. The mask should be changed every 8-8 hours

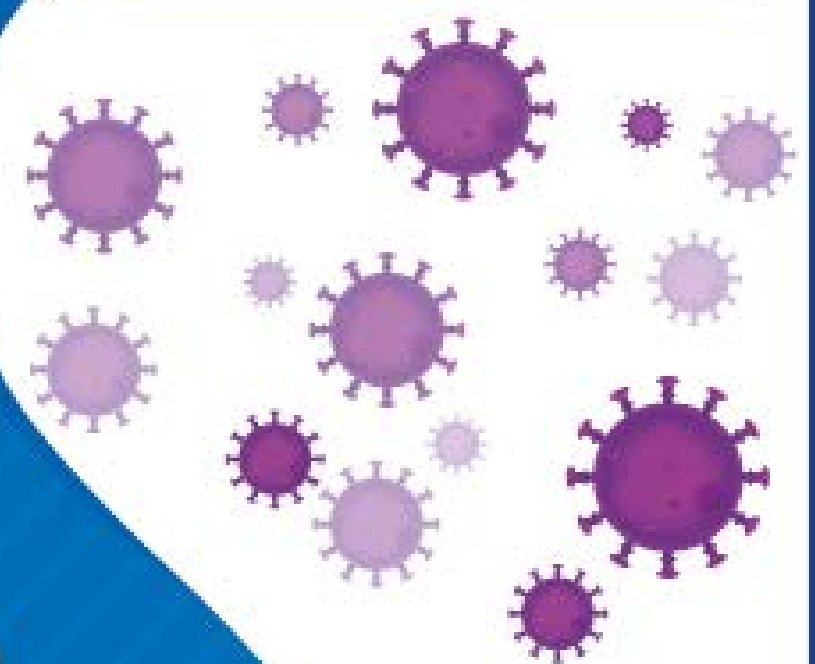


Dispose off used mask in a closed bin and bin should also be handled responsibly



If symptoms appear, he/she should immediately inform the nearest health centre

COVID-19 OUTBREAK



In Search of Excellence

সলিড নন ফ্যাট টেস্ট
মিল্ক, প্রোটিন টেস্ট ও মাইক্রোবায়োলজিক্যাল
টেস্টসহ বারবার নানা পরীক্ষায়
নিকিত স্বস্তি প্রক্রিয়াক্রান্ত হয়
আড়ং ডেইরি পণ্য

যশে গঙ্গা
ডালি বাসা

Ashik's second life

Mazhar Uddin

From being detected as the first Covid-19 positive case in Bangladesh cricket on May 9 to successfully recovering from coronavirus and leaving the hospital on May 29 – the three weeks were perhaps the toughest journey in entire life for Ashikur Rahman.

Now a development coach of Bangladesh Cricket Board, Ashik had started his career as a promising fast-bowler and had featured in Bangladesh U-19 World Cup side in 2002. He later became an assistant coach of Bangladesh women's team. But to Ashik, all those accomplishments and identities have assumed little significance since his life-altering fight against the deadly virus.

Ashik was distributing relief materials among coronavirus-affected people, organised by the Ramkrishna Mission in his neighbourhood Gopibagh when he first realised something was wrong with his health.

"I didn't understand at first. I thought I had a swollen tonsil. I had sore throat at first; then slowly came the fever and then I started to have chest pain. I got myself tested and at the same time, I informed BCB's chief physician



Debashish Chowdhury and Saber Hossain Chowdhury, the member of parliament from my area. I was shocked when the result of the test came positive. I couldn't believe this had happened to me," recalled Ashik.

Ashik's cricketing identity helped him get tested quickly, yet he was facing trouble in securing a cabin at the Mugda General Hospital after getting admitted there on May 11.

"I knew I had to give it all to get out of that difficult situation,

so I looked for help wherever I could. I must thank BCB, CWAB (Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh) and Saber bhai, who arranged a cabin for me in the hospital. There were a lot of limitations regarding treatment and facilities, still the way the doctors and nurses took care of me was unforgettable," Ashik said.

Like most serious Covid-19 patients, Ashik felt breathing problem. A follower of Swami Vivekananda's teachings, Ashik worked on

energy from the body and gaining inner strength.

"After a couple of days at the hospital, I started to feel chest pain and I felt suffocated due to breathing problem. I tried one of Swami Vivekananda's practices, which was to work on my breathing. I used to take deep breaths and while breathing out, I used to say Ameen. It worked well for me and I felt better every day," recalled Ashik.

Ashik remained mentally strong and recovered from the disease, and was released from the hospital following two negative tests within 72 hours.

"It was the happiest moment of my life when I tested negative, not once but twice. I thanked the Almighty first. While leaving the hospital, I felt this was my second life and I would want to utilise this to the fullest. I must also thank my friend Mohammad Ashraf along with Mominul Haque, Imrul Kayes – all of whom were constantly in touch with me during my difficult time," he added.

Having found a new lease of life, Ashik wants to contribute to cricket even more, and this time he wants to help age-level cricketers gain inner strength, that strength which helped him walk back to life from a very precarious journey.

'Virus like walking up Kilimanjaro'

AFP, London



Leicester City manager Brendan Rodgers said Friday that being afflicted with the coronavirus was akin to climbing Mount Kilimanjaro.

The Northern Irish boss is the second Premier League manager to confirm he had suffered with COVID-19 after Arsenal's Mikel Arteta also tested positive in March.

"I could hardly walk and it reminded me of walking up Mount Kilimanjaro, as you climb higher you get more breathless," Rodgers told BBC Radio Leicester.

"Walking 10 yards felt very different. I went for a run, and I just couldn't do it.

"We had a week off when we were supposed to play Watford (on March 14) and then the week after that, I started to struggle."

The 47-year-old former Liverpool and Celtic manager added his wife had contracted the virus as well.

"For three weeks I had no smell or taste. I had no strength, and a week after, my wife was the same.

"We were tested and both of us were detected with the virus."

England's top-flight clubs have agreed a provisional restart date of June 17 after the season was postponed in March due to the outbreak, with Leicester currently third behind runaway leaders Liverpool and reigning champions Manchester City.



Football icon Helal no more

STAR SPORT DESK

Former national footballer Golam Rabbani Helal breathed his last at around 12:00 noon yesterday. He was 67.

Helal, who was on life support at the intensive care unit of Square Hospital following a brain haemorrhage at his Dhanmondi residence on Thursday, left behind his wife and two daughters.

Helal played for the national team from 1979 to 1985. At club level, he had been a permanent player for Abahani where he played from 1975 to 1988 except for a short spell at BJMC.

After retiring from football, Helal became director of Abahani and occupied different roles for the club. He was also an executive committee member of the BFF for five years.

Three namaz-e-janazas were held, including one at the BFF premises and one at the Abahani Club ground before his burial at the Azimpur graveyard.

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin, Abahani Club, Mohammedan Sporting Club and other clubs and officials from sporting community expressed their condolences at the passing away of the former national footballer.

Helal had been suffering from kidney disease and undergoing dialysis for the last year. He also underwent an open-heart surgery after cardiac arrest in April, 2017.

Red-hot Havertz fires Leverkusen

AFP, Berlin



Exciting youngster Kai Havertz broke another Bundesliga record on Friday after scoring the winner in a 1-0 victory at Freiburg which moved Bayer Leverkusen into third place.

Havertz, 20, became the first player in the history of the league to reach 35 goals before turning 21 years old eight minutes after the break, when he combined with Leon Bailey before squeezing home under intense pressure from Dominique Heintz.

The dynamic German was already the youngest player to reach 50 and 100 appearances in the German top flight and

became the youngest ever player to score a league goal for Leverkusen in 2017.

Havertz's goal was his fifth in his four appearances since the Bundesliga returned from its coronavirus-enforced break and puts Leverkusen a point ahead of fourth-placed RB Leipzig, who travel to Cologne on Monday night.

They are also three points ahead of Borussia Moenchengladbach in fifth ahead of their match with Union Berlin on Sunday.

Havertz's goal was the first shot on target in a largely drab encounter in which Freiburg could have snatched at least a point.

Lucas Hoeler missed a glaring opportunity for the hosts two minutes before the break, pushing wide when sent through one-on-one with Leverkusen stopper Lukas Hradecky.

And chasing an equaliser late on, Nils Petersen forced Hradecky to save the three points for Leverkusen with a fine first time strike that the goalkeeper did well to tip away.



Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Kai Havertz (R) made Bundesliga history on Friday, becoming the first player to score 35 goals in Germany's top flight before his 21st birthday, in a 1-0 win against Freiburg.

PHOTO: AFP

WHAT TO WATCH

BUNDESLIGA

Star Sports Select 2
Borussia M'gladbach v Union Berlin
Live from 7:30pm
Paderborn v Borussia Dortmund
Live from 10:30pm



Salzburg won the Austrian Cup with a ruthless 5-0 destruction of second-tier Austria Lustenau in the final at an empty Woerthersee Stadium as the season resumed following the coronavirus stoppage on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Coppa final before Serie A restart

REUTERS, Rome

The Italian football season will resume with the final stages of the Coppa Italia before Serie A gets under way on June 20, following a vote by the 20 top-tier clubs on Friday.

Serie A said in a statement that the "the sporting activity of the 2019/2020 season will resume firstly with the Coppa Italia" with the final to be played on June 17.

It did not give a date for the semifinal second leg matches between Napoli and Inter, and Juventus and AC Milan.

Federer tops sports' richlist

REUTERS

Roger Federer is the world's highest-paid athlete for 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic knocked soccer's Lionel Messi off top spot, according to the annual Forbes list released on Friday.

The Swiss tennis great, owner of a men's record 20 Grand Slam singles titles, earned \$106.3 million in the last 12 months, including \$100 million via endorsements, to move up four places and become the first player from his sport to top the list.

Soccer players Cristiano Ronaldo (\$105 million), Messi (\$104 million) and Neymar (\$95.5 million) and American basketball player LeBron James (\$88.2 million) rounded out the top five.

"The coronavirus pandemic



triggered salary cuts for soccer stars Messi and Ronaldo, clearing the way for a tennis player to rank as the world's highest-paid athlete for the first time," said Kurt Badenhausen, senior editor at Forbes.

"Roger Federer is the perfect pitchman for companies, resulting in an unparalleled endorsement portfolio of blue-chip brands worth \$100

million a year for the tennis great."

Japan's Naomi Osaka (\$37.4 million), who was ranked 29th on the list, surpassed fellow tennis player Serena Williams (\$36 million) as the world's highest-earning female athlete.

Osaka and Williams were the only women on the list.

Basketball players led all sports with 35 players among the top 100. American football occupied 31 spots, none higher than six-times Super Bowl champion Tom Brady (\$45 million) who was ranked 25th.

Soccer was the next most represented sport with 14 players, followed by tennis (six), boxing and mixed martial arts (five), golf (four), motor racing (three), and baseball and cricket with one each.

ECB wants coronavirus substitutes

REUTERS, London

The England and Wales Cricket Board is in talks with the ICC about allowing coronavirus substitutions in its upcoming Test series against West Indies and Pakistan.

ECB director of events Steve Elworthy was quoted saying he hoped an agreement would be reached in time for those matches.

The ICC currently only allows a player to be replaced during a match if they are thought to have suffered a concussion.

'Am I next?'

Gauff joins protests against killings of African-Americans

REUTERS

Teenage tennis phenomenon Coco Gauff released a video protesting killings of African-Americans in the United States on Friday, joining a chorus of outrage across the country that followed the death of an unarmed black man in Minneapolis.

Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was charged on Friday with murder in the death of 46-year-old George Floyd after cellphone footage of the white officer kneeling on Floyd's neck prompted a wave of protests.

Sixteen-year-old African-American Gauff said on Twitter this week she would "always use my platform to help make the world a better place," and on Friday called for action from

others in a TikTok video posted to her Twitter account.

"This is why I am using my voice to fight against racism," the caption reads, as the video cuts to images of Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed black man whose shooting in Brunswick, Georgia, was also captured on video. Three white men were charged in his death earlier this month.

Gauff's video also includes a photo of Trayvon Martin, a black teenager whose killing helped spark the "Black Lives Matter" movement.

The words, "Am I next?" appear on screen, as Gauff, wearing a black hoodie, faces the camera and raises her hands.

"I am using my voice," the caption

concludes, "Will you use yours?"

Gauff joins numerous other athletes, including basketball stars LeBron James and Lisa Leslie, who have spoken out following Floyd's death.

James posted a photo of the police officer kneeling on Floyd next to one of Kaepernick in a similar position before an NFL game. "This ... Is Why," James wrote in a post to his 65m Instagram followers. "Do you understand NOW!!!!!!? Or is it still blurred to you?? #StayWoke". Kaepernick also shared a version of James's photo on Instagram, as did Formula One world champion Hamilton.

Lebron also posted a photo of Floyd and the caption: "We're hunted."



Liverpool players wished a happy birthday to club legend Steven Gerrard during a training session at Melwood yesterday. The runaway leaders of Premier League are gearing up for a scheduled restart on June 17.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

PADMA BRIDGE RAIL LINK PROJECT IS BEING BUILT WITH BSRM
COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT **BSRM** building a safer nation

GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS RECOGNIZES
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SHAH CEMENT

Take care of embankments

Locals of Khulna's Koyra urge after 80pc of the upazila flooded after Amphan

DIPANKAR ROY

With 70 villages under water now, repair of damaged embankments is the first priority for the people of Khulna's Koyra upazila.

The strong wind from the super cyclone Amphan on the night of May 20, accompanied by the tidal surges of rivers ravaged thousands of homes, educational institutions, farmlands and trees in the upazila.

About 40km out of the 121km embankments, which protect Koyra from water of major rivers such as the Kopotakkho and Shakbaria, broke down at least at 21 spots. Around 80 percent of the upazila got flooded as a result.

On Thursday noon, this correspondent visited the affected areas of the upazila, including the worst-hit Horinkhola, and saw 54 families of the Hindu community collecting whatever belongings they could salvage from the water and moving away to another place.

Debobroto Kumar Mondal, a resident of the Horinkhola, said they were moving because the Kopotakkho river flowing across the area still has high, threatening tides.

"We urge the government to repair the embankments as soon as possible. We do not want relief, we want the [repair of the] embankment," Debobroto pleaded.

Locals of Koyra on their own have started to repair the embankments damaged in the cyclone. Because of the flooding, they have to build dams

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Over 70 villages in the southern region of the country have been flooded as Cyclone Amphan broke 21 dams there. The photo of Modinaghat Launch Terminal area in Koyra upazila of Khulna was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: DIPANKAR ROY

Buried WWII plane found on English beach



CNN ONLINE

A British couple have found the wreckage of a crashed World War II fighter plane, believed to be a Bristol Beaufighter TFX aircraft, on a beach in northeastern England.

Debi Hartley, a 51-year-old warehouse supervisor and her partner, Graham Holden, a 54-year-old lorry driver, were walking their dog Bonnie on Monday on a beach in the town of Cleethorpes when they spotted the plane.

The couple did not initially realize what the wreckage was,

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Month-long wait for getting tested!

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

The authorities in Savar upazila of Dhaka started asking the city dwellers to wait for a few weeks to even a month before being tested for coronavirus after showing symptoms.

Ready-made garment worker Anisur Rahman, 22, is one of many who faced the crisis.

He went to Savar Upazila Health Complex on Thursday to give samples as he had multiple symptoms of Covid-19. The authorities there wrote his name and other information on a list and asked him to visit them again on June 30.

"I have fever and cough now... What will be the use of going for a test after a month?" Anisur said.

Frustrated, he returned home and consulted a local doctor who prescribed him medicines that physicians are using to treat Covid-19 patients, he said.

"I'm taking the medicine

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

Call for green revolution



Bangabandhu pays a surprise visit to Agricultural Development Corporation on 31 May, 1972.

May 31, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

BANGABANDHU'S SPECIAL INITIATIVES TO ATTAIN FOOD SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Bangabandhu has taken special initiatives to attain self-sufficiency in food within three years. A high-powered committee of experts has been formed in this regard who will draw up specific development plans for different agricultural zones of the country. The government will also work for promoting double cropping wherever possible. It will also provide shallow tube well, power pump, high-

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Food officer lands in jail for stealing govt's rice

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Three people, including a government official, landed in Bogura jail yesterday, a day after being detained by police over embezzling 15,000kg government rice.

The three are Gazi Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, 42, officer-in-charge of Local Supply Depot (LSD) in Sabekpara of Gabtali upazila, Sadequul Islam, 40, night guard of the LSD, and Amzad Hossain, 48, a rice miller.

Acting on information that some people were selling government rice, a team of Gabtali police seized a truck loaded with 300 sacks of rice (each sack containing 50 kg) and detained the three in front of the Sabekpara LSD on Friday morning. The team later contacted officials of Anti-Corruption Commission in Bogura.

Yesterday, the ACC filed

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Jamuna swells rapidly

Low-laying areas in Sirajganj under water; 20-metre embankment damaged

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, from Pubna

The Jamuna has been swelling rapidly over the last one week and has drowned low-laying areas in Sirajganj, threatening flash floods in the district.

Due to the water pressure, a portion of the flood protection embankment at the district's Simla area has been damaged.

According to the Water Development Board (WDB), the increased pressure of

water was due to the onslaught water from upstream as a post-Amphan effect. Officials however said the situation is likely to come under control within the next few days.

Jamuna was flowing about 12.25 meters at the hard point of Sirajganj yesterday morning, increasing the water level to 4.23 meters over one week after the cyclone. The water level is increasing rapidly now and the water level is just 1.10 meters below the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



PRAYER TIMING MAY 31

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
JAMAAT 4-40	1-15	5-15	6-43	8-05

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



CHILDHOOD CHIPPED AWAY

A teenager sorts out tobacco leaves on a field in Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat. Child labour is rampant and only increasing in the tobacco industry of the district. Some work there to assist their parents while some for wages. Today is World No-Tobacco Day.

PHOTO: DILIP ROY

Pandemic grips LatAm, US

Brazil's death toll tops that of Spain as India announces major easing of lockdown

AGENCIES

Latin American countries and US are bracing for difficult weeks ahead as the death toll from coronavirus spiked again, with Europe continuing to open up from lockdown yesterday after seeing its number of infections steadily fall.

The virus, which has killed more than 364,000 people and devastated the global economy, is progressing at different speeds across the globe.

India yesterday announced a major relaxation of the lockdown

from early June, except for so-called "containment zones" with high numbers of infections.

A home ministry order said that places of religious worship, hotels, restaurants and shopping malls "will be allowed" to operate from June 8, while educational establishments will be opened "after consultations" with Indian state authorities.

The announcement came even after the world's second-most populous country announced another record daily rise in infections, taking the total to more than 85,000 cases with

almost 5,000 deaths.

Countries in Latin America are bracing for difficult weeks ahead, especially Brazil, where the death toll shot up by 1,124 on Friday and there was a record number of new infections.

Nearly six million people have been confirmed to have contracted Covid-19 across the world, and a vaccine remains elusive.

As the disease spreads across South America, the poor have been hit hard in countries like Brazil, which now

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

গণবিজ্ঞপ্তি

যবের বাইরে মাস্ক পরা অত্যাৱশ্যক এবং জরুরী।

মাস্ক না পড়লে জরিমানা হতে পারে

- করোনার সারা বিশ্ব আজ বিপন্ন।
- মনে রাখবেন, অসাবধানতায় যে কেউ যে কোন সময় করোনা ভাইরাসে আক্রান্ত হতে পারে।
- সামাজিক দূরত্ব বজায় রাখুন, পরস্পরের মধ্যে কমপক্ষে তিন (৩) ফুট দূরত্ব বজায় রাখুন।
- স্বাস্থ্য অধিদপ্তর কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত সব স্বাস্থ্যবিধি অবশ্যই মেনে চলুন।
- বারবার সাবান পানি দিয়ে কমপক্ষে ২০ সেকেন্ড হাত ধোবেন। অপরিচ্ছন্ন হাত দিয়ে মুখ, নাক ও চোখ হোবেন না।
- নিয়মিত কুসুম পরম পানি, আদা চা এবং পরম স্যুপ পান করুন। লবণ মিশ্রিত কুসুম পরম পানি দিয়ে দিনে ৩-৪ বার গড়গড়া করুন, নাকে মুখে পরম পানির জাপ দিন।
- অন্ন, সর্দি, কাশি, গলা ব্যথা হলে বাড়িতেই আলাদা থেকে চিকিৎসা নিন।
- জ্বর কমানোর জন্য প্যারাসিটামল ও সর্দি-কাশির জন্য এন্টিহিস্টামিন (যেমন ফেনথেরামিন, ক্লোরফেনিরামিন ইত্যাদি) খেতে পারেন।

প্রয়োজনে করোনা বিষয়ক হটলাইনসেভে ফোন করুন: ১৬২৬৩; ৩৩৩; ১০৬৫৫; ০১৯৪৪৩৩৩২২ অথবা নিকটস্থ স্বাস্থ্যকর্মী বা হাসপাতালে যোগাযোগ করুন।

মনে রাখবেন আপনার সুরক্ষা আপনারই হাতে

স্বাস্থ্য অধিদপ্তর
স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়