

Medical team from China to arrive June 8

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A team of Chinese medical experts, who have first-hand experience in containing coronavirus and treating patients, is expected to arrive in Bangladesh with medical equipment on June 8.

Organised by the National Health Commission of China, the team will consist of 10 respiratory physicians, who will visit designated hospitals, quarantine centres, and testing centres, the Chinese embassy said in a statement.

They will hold discussions with their Bangladeshi counterparts and make calibrated propositions for containment and treatment during their two-week stay in Bangladesh, it said.

The visit is a reflection of Chinese President Xi Jinping's phone conversation with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on May 20, it added.

"We need to fight Covid-19 together and grow together," Hualong Yan, deputy chief of mission of the Chinese embassy in Bangladesh, told The Daily Star yesterday.



A boatload of vegetables makes their way through the mucky waters of Buriganga to reach the capital. On World Environment Day today, let us all remember that no matter how far we advance economically and technologically, we must still depend on mother nature for our food and sustenance. Especially in the context of Bangladesh, the meshwork of rivers plays a massive role in our lives directly or indirectly, and we continue to pollute them only at our own peril.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

HC upholds govt decision to hike bus fare by 60pc

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday upheld the government decision to increase bus fares by 60 percent.

The court passed "no order" on a writ petition that challenged legality of the gazette notification issued by the government hiking bus fares.

The bench of Justice JBM Hassan made the decision after hearing on the petition through video conference.

The "no order" means that the government notification will remain in force, Deputy Attorney General Samarendranath Biswas told The Daily Star.

During hearing, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam vehemently opposed the writ petition, saying buses have to carry passengers half their capacity due to coronavirus.

Besides, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority has been empowered to decide on increasing bus fares as per the Road Transport Act, 2108, and therefore, there was no illegality in issuing such a gazette notification.

Barrister Humayun Kabir Pallob appeared for the writ petitioner. Law and Life Foundation, a rights organisation, on June 1 filed the writ petition with the HC challenging the government's decision to increase bus fares.

Citing the petition, Barrister Humayun Kabir Pallob, chairman of Law and Life Foundation, told The Daily Star that the middle class and low middle class people mostly use bus and minibus for transport. They cannot bear the earlier scheduled bus fares properly, let alone the increased ones, he said, adding that they are facing serious financial crisis due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Barrister Pallob said the government decision to increase bus fares is contradictory to the fundamental rights of the people and also illegal.

The government on May 31 issued a gazette notification increasing fares of all buses, including inter-district ones, by 60 percent as the vehicles are allowed to carry half passengers of the total seats to maintain physical distance.

The notification said fares for long routes will be increased by 60 percent on the existing rate (Tk 1.42 per km).

'720 have died with Covid-19 symptoms'

Reports DU's Centre for Genocide Studies, citing media reports

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 720 people have died with Covid-19-like symptoms in the country since the first three confirmed cases reported on March 8, said a report of Dhaka University's Centre for Genocide Studies.

These 720 people had similar symptoms to the disease, but they were not confirmed to have been Covid-19 positive.

The report has found a downtrend in such deaths in last three weeks, showing a 13 percent decline in week-12 (May 24-30) from the previous week.

On weeks 10, 11, and 12, there were 67, 62, and 54 deaths respectively.

The report, however, said the deaths may not have been related to Covid-19.

CGS shared outcomes of the report styled "Covid-19 Graphics" with media on Wednesday. It was the eighth edition of a series of such reports prepared by Bangladesh Peace Observatory, an initiative of CGS.

Each edition was prepared based on news reports published or aired by 25 media outlets including national and local dailies, online news portals and television channels.

According to the report, 82 incidents of rumour spreading surrounding Covid-19 were recorded in the country, while 86 people, with highest 35 in Dhaka division, were arrested over the incidents.

Furthermore, 466 people were arrested and another 9,109 people were fined or penalised for various offences related to the outbreak, including relief embezzlement, violation of social distancing, arranging social gatherings, opening businesses, and fraudulent activity.

At least 576 people were reportedly detained, fined or penalised and 50 were arrested all over Bangladesh between May 17-30. Most fines and penalties occurred due to the violation of health and safety regulations amid the limited shopping window before Eid-ul-Fitr, it said.

The report said 125 protests took place, of which 61 were for unpaid salaries and 50 protests demanded relief, aid or food.

Seven protests incidents took place over shutdown rules, for accountability against lay-off, and for waiver of

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WFP to implement \$35m project for Rohingya refugees

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN World Food Programme will implement a \$35 million project to provide work opportunities and community services among the Rohingya population in Cox's Bazar.

This funding is part of the World Bank's \$165 million grant meant to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief. The WFP is partnering with the disaster management ministry to implement the project.

The US \$35 million grant will go toward providing work opportunities and community services to Rohingya. This includes food assistance support to 700,000 people as part of the Covid-19 humanitarian response in the camps, said a WFP statement issued yesterday.

Post Covid-19 restrictions, the project will scale up self-reliance opportunities for extremely vulnerable families in the camps and target young people with volunteering opportunities to promote social cohesion, it said.

The self-reliance programmes aim to improve the economic and social resilience of 60,000 Displaced Rohingya Population households.

"This is done through working days centred around short-term community services, volunteer services, and training courses," WFP said.

It also includes skills development and self-reliance activities for the vulnerable households. For extremely vulnerable households and individuals it includes transfers in return for their engagement in volunteer networks, it said.

The project will provide work opportunities for around 40,000 Rohingya households which is equivalent to reaching more than 20 percent of

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84-year-old takes on Covid-19... and wins

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

Amidst the global panic over coronavirus, it's easy for fear to overwhelm optimism. For every tragic death at the hands of the virus, one must remember there's also many stories of recuperation.

Rajshahi's Mansur Rahman's story of overcoming of Covid-19 is particularly inspiring. "Anyone would panic when they stand at the door of death. So did I, but I

A father of four, Mansur tested positive back on April 25. After 40 days of death anxiety, he was officially declared recovered, said upazila health officer Dr Ariful Kabir.

He is among 230 Covid-19 patients from eight districts of Rajshahi division who have recovered. Out of a total 917 patients, six have died so far, according to Directorate General of Health Services data.

Mansur started showing symptoms back in April 19, when he began suffering



Mansur Rahman receives a bouquet of flowers from doctors.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

found a group of caring doctors who helped me get back my spirit," said the 84-year-old, after he tested negative May 31.

Even at such an age, Mansur never gave up. "My family members were also there for me, and here I am, alive and well," said Mansur, a retired primary school teacher residing at Rajshahi's Mohonpur upazila. He said a caring group of doctors can help a patient fightback against death by keeping the spirit strong.

non-stop hiccup from the evening, his son Alamin Sarker said.

It continued even after he was taken to Mohonpur Upazila Health Complex. He was transferred to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital the same night. The hiccups stopped two days later. The hospital released Rahman and he duly returned home.

However, he began developing fever and cough after a few days, son Alamin said.

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'Our survival depends on Sundarbans'

TIB calls for protection of shield against natural calamities; World Environment Day today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Saying that Bangladesh will survive if the Sundarbans survives, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has called for effective implementation of constitutional and legal obligations, especially environmental laws, for the protection of this invaluable source of biodiversity.

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman came up with the call yesterday in a press release, marking World Environment Day, being observed worldwide today.

He expressed deep concern as according to the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2018, Bangladesh ranks 179th out of 180 countries.

"As biodiversity is declining due to lack of proper implementation of the existing legal framework for environmental protection in Bangladesh, environmental pollution is increasing alarmingly," he said.

Biodiversity in Bangladesh is at high risk and grabbing of forest and waterbodies have been increasing due to lack of good governance in environmental protection and management, existing institutional weakness, abuse of power, poor supervision, corruption in the institutions concerned and political influence, said TIB.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman said, "We must ensure proper implementation of environmental laws to protect the world heritage, the Sundarbans, and

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bKash hands over 50 ventilators from Alibaba and Jack Ma to PM's fund

CITY DESK

Mobile financial service company bKash yesterday handed over 50 ventilators and emergency health toolkits worth Tk 6.5 lakh to PM's relief fund. The medical supplies were donated by China's Alibaba Foundation and Jack Ma Foundation.

Beside the ventilators, the supplies include detection kits, electronic laser thermometers, masks, protective clothing, face shields, gloves etc.

Kamal Quadir, CEO of bKash, handed over the emergency supplies to Dr Ahmad Kaikaus, principal secretary to the Prime Minister at PM's office. Maj Gen (ret'd) Sheikh Md Monirul Islam, Chief External and Corporate Affairs Officer of bKash, was also present at the programme.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was present during the handover through video conferencing from Ganobhaban. She expressed her gratitude saying that these medical supplies will be of great help during this emergency.

Some 20,000 Covid-19 test kits, 60,000 KN95 masks, 300,000 face masks, 200,000 inspection gloves, 15,000 face shields, 15,000 protective clothing, 80 electronic laser thermometers, 20,000 nucleic acid isolations and 20,000 sample preservation solutions came with the consignment from China, along with the 50 ventilators.

It is expected that the ventilators in

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Holding a spray bottle in his hand, a bus helper looks on as the vehicle drives through Topkhana Road yesterday. He also has an assistant with him whose task is to collect fares from passengers while he sprays disinfectant on them before they board. With road transport services resuming in the country amid Covid-19 outbreak, it seems like such practices will have to become habits for transport workers, for their own safety as well as commuters'. This photo was taken near Jatiya Press Club in the afternoon.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

BLFCA adds Tk 9.5 crore to the battle against coronavirus

CITY DESK

A delegation of Bangladesh Leasing and Finance Companies Association (BLFCA) contributed Tk 9.5 crore to the Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund. Dr Ahmad Kaikaus, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister, accepted the cheque on behalf of the PM.

The Prime Minister joined the ceremony via video conference from Gono Bhaban and thanked the delegation for coming forward at such a time of need.

BLFCA's aid includes Tk 2.4 crore from IDLC Finance, Tk 2 crore from IPDC Finance, Tk 2 crore from LankaBangla Finance, and Tk 1.5 crore from Uttara Finance. Other institutions affiliated with BLFCA contributed another of Tk 1.6 crore, of which Tk 50 lakh came from Phoenix Finance.

The delegation called on Bangladesh Bank to help overcome the liquidity crisis of Non-Banking Financial Institutions and sought directions from the PM to set up a refinancing fund of Tk 10,000 crore.

Chairman of BLFCA and MD and CEO of IPDC Finance, Mominul Islam, said, "At this time of great peril, it is vital to stand by the disadvantaged and marginal population of the country."

On behalf of BLFCA, Md Abdul Karim, Chairman, IPDC Finance; Kazi M Aminul Islam, Founder Chairman of Meridian Finance and former Executive Chairman of BIDA; Arif Khan, Managing Director, IDLC Finance; and Shamsul Arefin, Managing Director, Uttara Finance, were present.