

Passing of an AL stalwart

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“We tried our best to bring back the function of his heart, but failed,” Dr Raziul Haque, a doctor at the BSH, told this correspondent.

Survived by his wife, three sons, a host of relatives and well-wishers to mourn his death, Nasim was admitted to the hospital on June 1 as he fell ill.

He was later tested coronavirus positive. He suffered a stroke in the early hours of June 5 and had a successful brain surgery.

But he had been on life support since then as his condition started fluctuating.

Meanwhile, he was tested coronavirus negative in the second and third tests.

The Presidium Member was got involved in politics during his student days. He became active in politics after the killing of his father.

After completing his bachelor degree in political science from Jagannath College (now Jagannath University), he became a popular leader in his constituency-Sirajganj-1 from where he was elected six times, according to information of Bangladesh Parliament Secretariat.

One of the doyens in country's politics, however, he could not participate in the 2008 elections due to a case filed by the then military-backed 1/11 government.

He was subjected to oppression during the autocratic rule of HM Ershad, BNP-Jamaat-led government and the military-backed 1/11 government.

After the 1/11 changeover, Nasim was arrested and spent a long time in jail. He became seriously ill after coming out of jail.

Nasim joined national politics at the AL council in 1981.

At that conference, he was elected the youth secretary of Awami League for the first time.

Later, he was nominated as the party's publicity secretary in 1987.

Mohammad Nasim was made the party's organisational secretary in 1992 and 1997.

Later, at the party conferences in 2002 and 2008, he was made the number one member of the party's executive committee.

In 2012, Nasim was included as a member of the party's presidium, the highest policy-making body of AL.

He held the position for three

consecutive terms.

Until his death, Nasim was the spokesperson for Awami League-led 14-party alliance, a platform that had played a vital role to snatch victory at the national election in 1996.

During 1996-2001, he served at the ministries of Home Affairs, Housing and Public Works, and Posts and Telecommunications.

During the 2014-18 tenure of AL government, Nasim served as the health minister. According to different quarters, Nasim couldn't be successful in developing the health sector as required and corruption in the sector was reported in different media.

After the 2018 national election, like other senior AL leaders, Nasim was not included in the cabinet.

Rather, he was made the chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on food.

Besides politics, Mohammad Nasim was involved in various social welfare and philanthropic activities. He set up several educational institutions in Dhaka and Sirajganj.

The veteran politician will be laid to rest at the Banani graveyard today where his mother was also laid to rest, AL presidium member Jahangir Kabir Nanok, told reporters yesterday.

UN warns of looming crisis as virus strands ship crews at sea

AFP, United Nations

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called Friday for countries to relieve ship crews stranded at sea for long periods due to lockdowns imposed to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

“The Secretary-General calls on all countries to formally designate seafarers and other marine personnel as ‘key workers’ and ensure crew changeovers can safely take place,” a statement issued by the United Nations said.

Guterres is “concerned about the growing humanitarian and safety crisis facing seafarers around the world.”

1,000 garment factories, many of which work under sub-contract basis, have remained closed.

Out of the total 40 lakh garment workers across the country, at least six lakhs have lost their jobs amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Ruhul claimed.

Bangladesh Garment Shramik Sanghati President Taslima Akhter said many garment factory owners “actually do not do what they tell the government and workers leaders during meetings.”

Referring to industrial police data, Rezwam Selim, director of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said 121 factories, which are members of the association, remained closed until yesterday in Gazipur.

On the other hand, 709 factories under the BGMEA remained operational, he said.

Earlier in the third week of last month, Rezwam had said around three lakh workers were left without work since their factories remained closed.

He said those factories went out of operation since buyers cancelled work orders.

“Although the three lakh workers don't have work, they will get basic salaries on a regular basis. That's why we can't say that those three lakh workers have lost their jobs,” he said.

He hoped those people would be able to join work soon after the resumption of the factory operations.

Replying to a query, Rezwam had said different garment factories in Gazipur area fired around 5,000 workers following the outbreak of Covid-19 in March.

Contacted, Rezaul Haque, additional secretary of the labour and employment ministry, said the ministry instructed the inspector general of DIFE to enquire whether any factory declared lay-offs and terminated workers.

He said 23 crisis management committees were working across the country in this regard. “In case of any such allegations, the committee will investigate them and take legal actions against the respective factory authorities,” he said.

DIFE Inspector General Shib Nath Roy told The Daily Star that they were working to prepare a list of workers in different sectors, including the RMG.

“We are trying to provide financial or other kinds of assistance to the workers who have lost their jobs with funds from International Labour Organisation,” he said.

Replying to a query, Fazlul Haque Montu, a joint coordinator of Shramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad, a platform of workers and employees, said the data of BGMEA, industrial police and the labour ministry on the number of factories closed and workers sacked varied.

“We repeatedly requested factory authorities not to go for lay-offs, but the reality is many workers have lost their jobs,” he added.



The body of a male elephant lying on a stream in Fasiakhali area of Bandarban's Lama upazila yesterday. Officials said the mammal was aged below 15 and there was no injury mark on his body. Experts say the average life expectancy of an Asian elephant, which is declared an endangered species, is about 60. A day ago, another elephant died of electrocution in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Hope held out, caution called for



Dr. Hasan Ul Haider

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Based on this study, Prof Tareq Alam, head of the medicine department at Bangladesh Medical College and Hospital (BMCH), in mid-April administered ivermectin and doxycycline to one of his senior female colleagues with comorbidities for ten days. She was asymptomatic, but she tested positive for Covid-19.

The patient tested negative for the virus in seven days.

Later, the same medications were administered to 60 other Covid-19 patients -- mostly staffers of BMCH.

Four of them tested negative in the second test on the fourth day of taking the drug combination. The average duration for recovery of the patients was 11 days.

Of the 60 patients, three had fever of more than 103 degrees Fahrenheit for seven days with severe cough and lung infiltrates, three others had severe loose motion and one had uncontrolled diabetes.

Besides, 30 had mild symptoms of malaise, sore throat, and body ache, and the rest were asymptomatic.

Indian newspaper The Hindustan Times also ran a story on the effectiveness of ivermectin, quoting Prof Tareq and his co-researcher Prof Rubaiul Murshed.

“Within 72 hours of administering these drugs, majority of the patients’ condition started improving,” said Tareq, also a member of a health research organisation “Shomman Foundation”.

Tareq said they had to depend on the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research for testing. “For this reason, we could not test the samples from all the patients within four days. I think the majority of the patients would have tested negative within four days if they were tested on time.”

He, however, cautioned that ivermectin should not be administered to pregnant or breastfeeding women, children under five or weighing below 15 kg, and patients with liver diseases.

On April 22, physicians at the Central



Prof. Rubaiul Murshed

Police Hospital (CPH) in the capital's Rajarbagh also started administering the drug combination to the police personnel who were showing Covid-19-like symptoms.

At the CPH, ivermectin was given to around 2,500 patients, mostly aged between 30 and 56, till yesterday.

“Ivermectin is not a magic bullet, but we observed good results using it when the patients started showing the symptoms. We also used several other drugs, including doxycycline, favipiravir, and azithromycin in the treatment,” Hasan Ul Haider, director of CHP, told The Daily Star.

Around 7,800 police personnel tested positive for novel coronavirus across the country till Friday. Of them, 20 have died.

“For patients with severe conditions, ivermectin has no effects. As it works reducing replication of the novel coronavirus in the patient's body at the early stage, our physicians gave the drug to those police personnel who start showing symptoms even if they were not tested. The recovery time of the patients in our hospital is 10 days on average,” Hasan Ul Haider said.

Asked when the patients showed signs of improvement, he said almost 85 percent patients showed mild symptoms and they recovered within 10-12 days.

He said the recovery rate was 2.5 times higher among the CPH patients than those in general hospitals which was 21.13 percent yesterday.

Physicians at CPH and Prof Tareq are now sharing their experiences on the use of ivermectin.

Prof Rubaiul, also an honorary chief consultant at CPH, said their experiences encouraged them to go for a clinical trial. “We will soon submit a proposal to Bangladesh Medical and Research Council in this regard.”

Speaking to this newspaper, BMRC Director Dr Mahmood-uz-jahan said, “They have contacted us in this regard. We are thinking of permitting them for a clinical trial.”

He, however, cautioned that no drug should be recommended for



Prof. Tarek Alam

treating a Covid-19 patient without a scientific study of it and also without a doctor's prescription.

Prof Dr Md Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), echoed the views of Mahmood-uz-jahan.

“If they find any efficacy of the drug combination, then it can be tested in clinical trials. Otherwise, people will get a wrong message,” said Sayedur, also a member of National Research Ethics Committee at BMRC.

ICDDR,B STUDY

An icddr,b official said they [icddr,b] have a plan to run the efficacy trial in four Covid-19 hospitals in Dhaka soon. He, however, refused to give details on the trial.

Physicians said if the clinical trials were successful, it would pave the way for using the combination of drugs on a larger scale.

However, multiple trials should be conducted in different countries successfully before the drug combination get official approval of the governments across the world, they added.

Although there is a discussion on the efficacy of ivermectin, the FDA of the US, is yet to authorise emergency use for this WHO-listed essential drug to prevent or treat coronavirus or COVID-19.

No therapy to date has been shown to improve survival for patients infected with novel coronavirus. Hundreds of clinical studies are underway across the world to find effective drugs to treat Covid-19 patients.

The World Health Organization and its partners have launched a “solidarity trial” to compare four treatment options against standard of care, to assess their relative effectiveness against Covid-19.

Until there is sufficient evidence, WHO cautioned against physicians and medical associations recommending or administering these unproven treatments to patients with Covid-19 or people self-medicating with them.

Bangladesh eyes

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“But we need to work on the ground. Our businessmen have to come forward. The government can only facilitate them,” he said.

Presently, some 3-4 lakh Bangladeshis are living in South Africa. They are basically asylum seekers there and are mostly doing businesses.

Some 50,000 Bangladeshis are in Libya, but the country is a major route for human trafficking to Europe via the Mediterranean amid a civil war that has been going on since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Some Bangladeshis work in other African countries, but the continent has never been a lucrative labour destination.

“We have been talking about exploring African labour markets for the last more than a decade, but we have not really worked on the ground. Now, after the pandemic, we are trying to seriously look into the issue,” said a foreign ministry official working in Africa desk.

There is not anything final yet, the official said, adding, “We are still in the initial stage.”

Sabbir Ahmad, Bangladesh ambassador to South Africa, Bangladesh has diplomatic representation only in 30 of the total 54 African countries.

“We need to develop relations with all the countries and find how we can improve business and labour relations,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Going beyond the call of duty

Doctor cuts maternity leave short to help Covid-19 patients

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Cg

A doctor of Chattogram Maa O Shishu Hospital has applied for cancellation of her maternity leave to serve Covid-19 patients at her hospital.

Dr Mahmud Sultana Afroza wants to rejoin her work almost one-and-a-half-month before her leave ends, leaving her 4-month-old son at home.

Talking to The Daily Star, she said, “On television and newspapers I see news of helpless people being deprived of proper treatment every day. I previously thought of cancelling the leave but my son was born prematurely and weighted only 1,200 grams.

“So, I forced myself to stay home for taking care of my baby. But the pandemic situation is worsening day by day. I can no longer keep myself at home.”

She said that a coronavirus unit has been launched at Chattogram Maa O Shishu Hospital on June 8.

“I have made this decision [to serve people at the coronavirus unit] after discussing with my family members. All of them, including my husband Mahbubur Rahman Shawon, have supported me.”

The doctor said she could not forget her professional oath and responsibilities. “So, I decided to return to work relying on God.”

Rezaul Karim Azad, treasurer of the hospital management committee, told The Daily Star, “Dr Afroza has applied for cancellation of leave to serve patients despite knowing that it is very risky. In the application, she also mentioned that she is interested in serving at the coronavirus unit.”

Sources said the hospital has started a coronavirus unit of 100 beds with central oxygen facility since June 8 and it would increase the number of beds to 400 including a 20-bed isolation ward in phases.

N Korea warns South to drop ‘nonsensical’ denuclearisation talk

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday issued another angry statement against Seoul, this time excoriating it for “nonsensical” statements on the stalled dialogue about Pyongyang's nuclear weapons.

South Korea has been the target of a wave of angry statements recently from the North, which has accused Seoul of allowing defectors to launch leaflets critical of leader Kim Jong Un into its territory.

The latest statement was in response to a South Korean foreign ministry official reportedly saying Seoul would continue “efforts for denuclearisation”, referring to the long-stalled nuclear talks between the United States and North Korea.

State minister

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wishers and friends, he said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expressed deep shock at his demise.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Education Minister Dipu Moni, Deputy Leader of Opposition GM Quader, among others, also expressed profound shock at the death.

Abdullah was born on September 8, 1945 in Kekania village on the bank of the Madhumati river in Gopalganj.

His father was late Sheikh Md Matiur Rahman and mother Mosammat Rabeya Khatun. He was second among his four brothers and three sisters.

Beginning his education at local Gaohardanga Hafezia Madrasa, he then studied at a Qawmi madrasa. He had his primary and secondary level education at Sultan Shahi Kekania Primary School and Sultan Shahi Kekania High School. Later, he obtained B.com (hons) from Azam Khan College in Khulna in 1963 and M.com from the University of Dhaka in 1972 and MA in Economics in 1974, according to the website of the religious affairs ministry.

He obtained his LLB degree from Dhaka Central Law College in 1977. After completion of his education, he started his career as the Headmaster of Sultan Shahi Kekania High School. Later, he started practicing law at Dhaka and Gopalganj judge courts and Bangladesh Supreme Court as an enlisted lawyer.

He got engaged in politics when he was a student. He was motivated by the ideologies of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

He was actively involved in the Mass Upsurge Movement of 1969. He joined the Liberation War in 1971.

Every time Sheikh Hasina was elected Member of Parliament from Gopalganj-03 (Tungipara-Kotalipara), Abdullah worked as her chief polls agent.

After the formation of the current government last year, he was made the state minister for the religious affairs ministry.