

Lost a trusted colleague: Hasina

Condolences pour in for Nasim
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The death of veteran politician and Awami League presidium member Mohammed Nasim cast a pall of gloom in the country's political and socio-cultural arenas. Tributes and condolences have been pouring in from all quarters for the spokesperson of the ruling AL-led 14-party alliance. The passing of Nasim, son of captain Mansur Ali, one of the four national leaders, has created a void in the country's politics, said statements from different organisations.

Former home and health minister Nasim breathed his last at Bangladesh Specialized Hospital yesterday at the age of 72.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock at his death.

In a condolence message, the president said Nasim was a fearless fighter in all the democratic movements of the country. Nasim's death is an irreparable loss to the nation and his name will forever shine in the country's political history, Hamid said.

The prime minister, in her message, said, "Bangladesh has lost a patriot and a leader of the people... and I've lost a trusted comrade."

Like his father, Nasim worked for the welfare of the country and its people, following the ideals of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the PM said. "Defying all odds

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An elderly woman being given oxygen inside an ambulance while she waits for a token so that she can give her swab sample for Covid-19 testing. Every day, hundreds of people are thronging the specialised hospitals in Sylhet to get tested, and facing ordeals due to long queues. But their sufferings do not just end there, as they have to wait for days to get the results. This photo was taken in front of Shaheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital on Friday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

An agonising wait for Covid-19 test results

Over 4,500 swab samples remain piled up in Sylhet as two testing labs run at capacity

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Fifty-year-old man Abdus Salam had been suffering from chronic kidney disease and needed routine dialysis.

As he was not feeling well, the resident of Kanaighat upazila in Sylhet went to a hospital for dialysis but the health staff asked for his Covid-19 test report first.

A weary Salam, on June 1, visited the upazila health complex to give his swab sample. He left his sample there and waited for the result desperately. Three days passed by and his condition continued to deteriorate.

On June 4, Salam passed away at his home.

The result of his test sample took another three days to arrive. When it finally did on June 8, it showed Salam had coronavirus.

The authorities concerned within a day or two took samples of his family members as well. As of yesterday, they are still awaiting results.

Like theirs, hundreds of swab samples are piling up every day in Sylhet while people are waiting for results of their tests.

So far, 4,586 samples are yet to be processed till Friday in Sylhet division, which includes 2,254 in Sylhet, 999 in Habiganj, 684 in Moulvibazar and 649 in Sunamganj.

Two specialised laboratories for testing Covid-19 samples -- one at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital and other at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology -- have reached their maximum capacity.

Both laboratories, having one Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) machine each are capable of testing a maximum of 376 samples while the daily sample collection is more than 500 on an average, according to officials.

To clear this backlog, hundreds of samples are being sent to different laboratories in Dhaka, and it takes a while to get back those reports, civil

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General holidays only in 'red zones'

State minister says on lockdown measures

UNB, Dhaka

As Covid-19 cases and fatalities continue to rise alarmingly in Bangladesh, the government has taken all necessary preparations to bring some virus hotspots ('red zone') under lockdown and declaring general holidays there to prevent entry to and exit from those areas.

"The areas where infection rate is high will be declared as 'red zone' and general holiday will be announced in those areas, but countrywide general holidays will not be declared anymore," State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain told UNB.

"Offices will remain open as usual maintaining health guidelines even after June 15. Public transport movement will continue. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will give final approval and an order will be issued soon in this regard after her approval," he said.

The government issued a gazette notification allowing limited operation of public transport and offices from May 31 to June 15 amid the coronavirus outbreak.

But the number of cases and deaths started to rise soon after reopening of offices and resumption of public transport.

The worst-affected areas will be announced 'red zones' for 14 to 21 days, the minister said, adding that some faults were identified after bringing East Rajabazar area under experimental lockdown, and the experience will be applied for the next ones.

"Committees will be formed in locked-down areas to monitor the areas," he added. It is almost final which areas in Dhaka and other parts of the country to be declared 'red zone' and it will be announced soon, he added.

If the announcement is not made at a

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'Confirm treatment for all at hospitals'

4 SC lawyers file petition with HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four Supreme Court lawyers have filed a writ petition with the High Court seeking its directives on the government to ensure that no government or private hospital refuses treatment to any patient -- infected with Covid-19 or not -- across the country.

AM Jamiul Hoque, MD Nazmul Huda, Md Mehdi Hassan and AKM Ehsanur Rahman collectively submitted the petition as a public interest litigation to the HC recently, seeking the court's directives upon the authorities concerned of the government to take necessary measures so that all patients get services at the hospital.

In the petition, they urged the HC to ask the authorities to ensure the enforcement of the directives issued by the directorate general of health services (DGHS) on May 11 so that no Covid-19 patients are not denied treatment at any hospital.

The petitioners said it has been noticed from different media reports that certain private hospitals and clinics have refused to treat patients without Covid-19 test results.

Citing the DGHD directives, the lawyers said all hospitals must have separate arrangements for treating suspected

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3 new mango varieties to tickle the taste buds

Bangladesh Agricultural University's Germplasm Centre continues to develop fruits



Prof Abdur Rahim proudly shows one of the three varieties of mango researchers at Bangladesh Agricultural University have developed.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Researchers at Bangladesh Agricultural University's (BAU) Germplasm Centre have developed three new varieties of mangoes this season.

The centre, one of the world's largest fruit repositories, is now enriched with 25 local and foreign mango varieties, said Prof Dr Abdur Rahim, project director of the centre.

The three mango varieties (BAU-23, BAU-24, BAU-25) were collected from Vietnam, Philippines and Thailand in 2012 and have been developed at the centre after around six-year long research, Dr Rahim said.

Along with these three new varieties, another 10 varieties are being developed. These new varieties are largely being developed at farmers' level. Some 200 saplings were distributed among 50 farmers to cultivate. The farmers were trained this season.

These new varieties are expected to see large scale cultivation within the next three years, said Dr Rahim.

A farmer can plant 150-200 saplings on 33-decimal land. Every plant is expected to bear 30-40 kg fruit within four years. Every kg is expected to sell at around Tk

200. Each mango is estimated to weigh 500-700 gm.

At the end of the summer, the season for mangoes, a fruit crisis prevails in the market. This is where these mango varieties will step in. Available from July to September, these mangoes will ensure that the fruit and its nutritious values will be available throughout the year, hoped Dr Rahim.

Shahjahan Ali Badsha, a fruit orchard owner from Pabna took 10 saplings after finishing his training. He has been raising the saplings ever since and said he is happy seeing his trees starting to bear fruit. If production is profitable this season, he will go for large-scale cultivation from next season, he said.

The country's soil is fit for cultivation of these mango varieties to ease pressure on imported fruits, said the director. The production of these fruits could be a catalyst to meet the local demand for nutrition and be a source of foreign exchange as well, the director went on.

The centre started with 74 fruit trees of 10 varieties on one acre of land in 1991. Today, it is on 32 acres of land, with some 11,528 fruit trees of 800

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Rent burden force many out of Dhaka

HELEMI ALAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Almas Bepari, a canteen staff of Bangladesh Bank was living in the capital's Chittagong road for the past decade, until the pandemic forced his family to shift to Cumilla earlier this month.

Almas and his son are still living in Dhaka, at a hostel in the same area. "I sent my family back to Daudkandi in Cumilla. Previously, my son and I made around Tk 35,000 per month, which was enough to pay the rent of Tk 7,000 for our two-room flat. But our income has significantly declined in recent days," Almas said. His son is a trader at a small shop in Abdullahpur, and the two of them are now paying Tk 2,500 for their room at the hostel.

"We could maintain the six-member family at the house in Chittagong road as the area was cheaper in comparison to the rest of the city," said Almas, "But our income has been halved because of the pandemic."

"I sent my family to the village because the living cost is lower

there," he explained.

Md Ratan (not his real name) lived in a flat at Kalshi of Mirpur. He said he had been paying Tk 15,000 rent for the past five years.

"I was earning around Tk 50,000 as a sales representative of an IT firm, but I have been struggling as it has been difficult to reach clients during this time," said Ratan, who shifted to the village in April along with his wife and children.

"I had admitted my four and a half year old son in a reputed school to ensure a better future for him, but this pandemic has forced us out of the city, leaving all dreams of a better life behind," he said.

Like Almas and Ratan, many have become part of a coronavirus-induced exodus out of Dhaka. Thousands have lost their source of income, while others are earning only a fraction of their usual income. In such a state, it is impossible to survive in a city where cost of living is increasing every year.

Some tenants had to sell their

belongings to pay rent, while some others opted for leaving without a notice to house owners as they could not manage the money for rent. On the other hand, house owners are not being able to let out their spaces despite lowering the rent.

"I lost my job in May after I demanded my due salary. The employer was offering only half of my salary for the months of April-May," said Sagor Hossain Khan, an automobile technician at Selim Auto Mobile near FDC in Tejgaon, who left the city for Chandpur this month.

He said his family sold their furniture and some other valuables at a low price before leaving the city as it would be costly for them to carry those to Chandpur.

Md Bahrain Sultan Bahar, president of Bharatia Parishad demanded that the government make arrangements to exempt tenants from three months of rent and utility bills.

Bahar said many are leaving the city because they cannot afford

rent and bills.

State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid on Wednesday at a virtual press briefing said the time to pay delayed gas and electricity bills without surcharge will not be extended further after June 30.

On March 22, just before the start of the government-declared closure to curb the spread of coronavirus, the power, energy and mineral resources ministry announced that household consumers will not be charged extra for delayed payment of gas bills until June this year.

Separate circulars from the power division and the energy division were issued in this regard.

Upwards of millions have lost their livelihoods and have subsequently slid back into poverty. As many as 35 percent of the 160 million population are now under the poverty line, according to the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

LGRD Minister Tajul Islam last

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2 held over murder of Barishal trader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A timber trader was murdered in Barishal city on Friday night and two people were arrested in this connection hours later.

Police arrested Md Rabbi (32) from the city's Rupatoli on Friday night, while Rapid Action Battalion captured Jisan (25) in Jhalakathi early yesterday for allegedly killing Mamun Matabbar, said law enforcers.

Barishal Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Nurul Islam said Rabbi and Jisan demanded Tk 20,000 as extortion from Mamun several days ago, which he refused to pay. Afterwards, the duo and their accomplices stabbed Mamun with sharp weapons on the city's Dhangobesona Road on Friday night, said the OC. He was declared dead when locals rushed him to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital, he added.

Victim's father Shahidul Islam filed a murder case with the police station accusing several persons including the arrestees.

"Rabbi and Jisan had previous enmity with Mamun," the OC confirmed.

The arrestees usually peddle drugs in the neighbourhood and extort money from people, said locals and police.

Ensure allocation for coastal embankment

Speakers at seminar urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers during a virtual seminar yesterday urged the government to protect coastal people by providing budgetary allocation for embankment under the local government.

The participants demanded that the government allocates at least Tk 12,000 crore per year only for embankment construction.

Local government should be given mandate and budget for embankment construction and maintenance while Water Development Board has to provide design, monitoring and technical support, they said.

Army personnel should be deployed immediately to reconstruct the embankment in worst affected areas, especially after cyclone Amphan, they added.

NGO-based initiatives COAST Trust, and Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods jointly organised the seminar on "National Budget 2020-2021, Embankment and Protection of Coastal Population", said a press release.

Presenting a keynote paper, Arif Dewan of COAST said despite of the destruction by cyclone Amphan, the government hardly allocated incremental finance for embankment to save coastal people and their crops.

Chairing the seminar, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation Chairman Qazi Kholiuzzaman Ahmad called on the government to make priority of coastal embankment construction led by local government.

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A large number of professional "fish cutters", who were an indispensable part of the capital's Karwan Bazar fish market, have been going through months of hardships as the market has seen slow business since the pandemic hit the country. Now, even though sales are picking up, many customers prefer to take whole fishes home instead of having them pieced here. Some of them still arrive at the spot at the break of dawn, hoping to find some work. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN