



**'TRUMP UNFIT FOR OFFICE'**  
John says the US president sought help from China's Xi for reelection  
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EXPERT RECOMMENDATIONS

# Gone mostly UNHEEDED

WASIM BIN HABIB and MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

As Covid-19 cases kept going up in mid-April, the government formed a national technical advisory committee to find ways to prevent the spread of the deadly virus in the country.

The 17-member committee, led by Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council President Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, was also tasked with making recommendations for improving the quality of medical services at hospitals.

Since its formation on April 18, the committee sat nine times and came up with various suggestions and strategies for containing the novel coronavirus.

But most of their suggestions have fallen on deaf ears. In fact, the government appears to have not taken inputs from the technical experts while drawing up its Covid-19 strategy.

Take, for example, the committee's suggestion on lockdown made over a week ago.

The committee, at its ninth meeting on June 10, deemed it necessary to urgently impose a complete lockdown across larger areas based on the number of infected people and the risk of spread of the virus.

"A complete lockdown is necessary to contain the spread of the disease and to ensure social distancing," said a press release

issued by the committee.

But the government has so far put two areas in the capital -- East Rajabazar and Wari -- under lockdown since June 10 with severe restrictions.

The committee chief, Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, said the authorities have started implementing some of their recommendations while many remain unaddressed.

"We have made many valuable suggestions. The situation will improve if those are taken into account and implemented, or else the situation would be disastrous," he told The Daily Star.

There will be no respite from virus transmission if the country fails to take the advantage of the proposed zone-based lockdown this time, he noted.

Contacted, Prof Abul Kalam Azad, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said, "[There is] no point in asking me this... whatever announcement I make as the key person, I need to take permission beforehand from the government as per law."

On the lockdown, he said they will not impose lockdown on a larger scale.

"We do not think many areas will be put under lockdown at the same time," he said.

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A group of nurses, who tested Covid-19 positive, walks out of Bhaban-2 of Dhaka Medical College Hospital with prescriptions and medicines in their hands. They said at least 40 out of about 100 male and female nurses at the building tested positive. They have been asked to stay home. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

BANGLADESH UPDATE



3,803

New cases in 24hrs



1,02,292

Total cases



1,343

Deaths



40,164

Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE



452,575

Deaths



8,491,849

Total cases

## CASES RISE IN FASTER RATE

75,000 to 100,000 | 7 days

50,000 to 75,000 | 9 days

25,000 to 50,000 | 14 days

1 to 25,000 | 72 days

## CASES IN BANGLADESH



## COVID-19 DEATHS

FIRST MONTH  
(March 18 to Apr 18)  
84

SECOND MONTH  
(Apr 19 to May 18)  
265

THIRD MONTH  
(May 19 to June 18)  
994

TOTAL DEATHS IN 3 MONTHS  
1343

## Covid-19 cases surge past 1 lakh mark

DGHS chief says transmission may last 2-3 years; 3,803 new cases, 38 more die

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

As confirmed Covid-19 cases in the country passed the one lakh mark yesterday, the director general of health services said the virus might continue to spread during the next two to three years.

"The coronavirus situation will not end within one, two or three months. It will stay for two to three years or even longer," Prof Abul Kalam Azad told the daily briefing of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

There are now 102,292 confirmed cases, including the 3,803 reported yesterday. The DGHS also reported 38 deaths from Covid-19 in the 24 hours preceding 2:30pm yesterday. This takes the officially reported toll to 1,343.

Bangladesh is now the 17th country in terms of the number of confirmed cases, overtaking Canada, according to Johns Hopkins University which is tracking the virus globally.

Bangladesh had just over 50,000 confirmed cases on June 1 and over 75,000 on June 11.

Prof Azad yesterday announced that he had joined work recently after recovering from Covid-19 at a hospital.

He said the government was planning to make sure people could get tested at upazila hospitals.

Officials are now looking for alternative testing methods besides the current RT-PCR tests, he added.

The hidden cases and people with mild symptoms will be detected more when the number of tests increase, he said.

The spread cannot be contained unless people become careful while travelling and maintain the health rules because Bangladesh is densely populated and the coronavirus highly contagious.

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## ACC to probe anomalies in purchase of PPE, masks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday formed a probe committee to investigate the alleged anomalies in Covid-19 safety gears' procurement at Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD).

The committee is comprised of four members and headed by ACC Director Mir Md Zainul Abedin Shebly, said ACC's Public Relations Officer Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya.

The committee would submit its report to the commission for taking legal action, he added.

Other members of the committee are Deputy Director Nurul Huda, assistant directors Saiduzzaman Nandan and Ataur Rahman.

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## HEALTH SECTOR

# When critiquing courts danger

ZYMA ISLAM

Has asking questions about, commenting on, or critiquing the health sector, and the agents responsible for it, become tantamount to an activity for which one can be punished and even arrested?

This imperative question one must ask, as a second university teacher has been arrested in a span of a week. The arrest of Rajshahi University teacher Kazi Zahidur Rahman yesterday was for uploading something criticising the health sector on Facebook that neither named names nor said anything objectively untrue.

Two clear tactics to govern public discourse have been noticeable. One is of journalists being cut off from access to information, either by stonewalling or by assaults and arrests. The second is of civil servants being restricted from exercising their constitutional right to free speech. Failure to stay silent is being met with arrests, suspensions and transfers to the rubber room by being made "officer on special duty".

Data gleaned from Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), a project by Dhaka University's Centre for Genocide Studies, shows that 142 people, including journalists, have been arrested or detained since March for reporting, spreading "misinformation" news, or their social media activity. This project only takes into account the cases reported by the media, so the number of people persecuted in this way is higher -- prosecutions under the Digital Security Act, or penalisation within the workplace were not taken into account here.

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## DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

# RU teacher held over FB posts

Begum Rokeya Univ suspends lecturer

STAR REPORT

Police yesterday arrested a Rajshahi University teacher under the Digital Security Act for making "defamatory" comments about Awami League's deceased president member Mohammed Nasim.

Meanwhile, a lecturer of Begum Rokeya University (BRU) in Rangpur, who was also arrested under the DSA for making derogatory remarks about Nasim on Facebook, was suspended by the university authorities, said a BRU press release issued on Wednesday night.

Around 2:00am yesterday, Kazi Zahidur Rahman, assistant professor of the Department of Computer Science and

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## BUSINESS



## Bangladesh to post highest GDP growth in Asia in FY20

Bangladesh's economy is projected to slow to 4.5 per cent in fiscal 2019-20 because of the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic but the country would still post the highest GDP growth in Asia, the Asian Development Bank said yesterday.

The economy would bounce back from the wreckage of the pandemic to post 7.5 per cent GDP growth in the next fiscal year, helped by strong manufacturing, the Manila-based development lender said in its Asian Development Outlook Supplement (ADOS).

STORY ON B1



Asia Begum, a widow, walking a rickshaw van loaded with onion and potato sacks in the capital's Purana Paltan area yesterday. Every day, the day labourer collects such vegetables from old Dhaka's Shyambazar wholesale market and supplies them to traders in Shahjadpur area, where she lives with her teenage daughter. Asked whether she was worried about the deteriorating coronavirus situation, she said she must toil away to feed her family.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# 'Why did I even get tested, if no one would check?'

Malaysia returnee shares experience with Star

FAHIM FERDOUS

Ever since the Malaysian authorities imposed a stringent lockdown in the country in March, Asif Rahman had been counting down the days in his small Kuala Lumpur apartment till when he could reunite with his family in Bogura.

Asif, who first went to Malaysia as a student in 2014 and returned home last year, landed in the Malaysian capital on March 5 on a single-entry visa. He was looking to process a work permit there, having secured a job offer from the event management company where he had been working part time during his student days.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic rattled his plans, and his days of uncertainty began since the Malaysian government issued a 'Movement Control Order' (MCO) on March 17, days before his visa was about to expire and he could not process his work permit.

Asif sold his old furniture and car -- that he had bought there during his previous stay -- to keep his nose above the water, as he looked for the first exit out of the country.

Finally, that opportunity came, in the form of a special flight on June 12 operated by a private Bangladeshi airline.

"I, and others returning on the flight, had to get tested for Covid-19 and confirm that we did not have the virus, as well as obtain declaration documents from the embassy. After a hectic week of preparations, it was the day of the flight, and I arrived at the airport four hours before the flight, as per instructions," Asif told this newspaper over phone.

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