

SOCIAL BUSINESS DAY CONFCE

Global changemakers to discuss post-Covid world

Prof Yunus to join it thru’ virtual platform; the 3-day confce in Munich to continue till tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, along with changemakers from across the globe, will hold discussions on post-coronavirus world during the three-day Social Business Day conference that will continue till tomorrow.

Yunus Centre and Grameen Creative Lab jointly organised the conference in Munich, Germany this year, read a press statement of Yunus Centre.

Titled “Summer of Purpose”, the 10th installment of the conference will connect the globe through virtual platform, the press statement read.

Global change makers in the fields of politics, business, science, sports and culture are scheduled to gather to find out new business ideas, raise tough questions and make promises to build an even better, sustainable and developed post-coronavirus world.

This year, a large part of the conference will take place virtually,

read the release.

According to the release, Prof Yunus was scheduled to deliver a speech on the topic “No Going Back” on the first day of the conference.

Today, Prof Yunus would take part in a session titled “Stand, Speak, Rise Up!” along with Maria Teresa, Grand Duchess of Luxembourg.

He will feature alongside 2024 Summer Olympics host and Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo and UEFA Euro 2024 organiser and former captain of Germany football team Philipp Lahm in a session which will shed light on re-engaging global sports fans with different games.

Tomorrow, Prof Yunus will take part in a brief live session with International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach.

Later, Prof Yunus, his colleagues and nation builders from across the globe will be honoured during a session.

June 28 also marks Prof Yunus’ birthday.

Trump admin asks US Supreme Court to end Obamacare

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump’s administration asked the Supreme Court Thursday to strike down Obamacare, which has provided health insurance to tens of millions of Americans.

The third challenge to the landmark law, formally known as the Affordable Care Act, comes as the United States records some of its highest coronavirus infection rates since the contagion hit

the country.

Under Obamacare, millions of Americans are required to buy health insurance or face a tax penalty.

But in 2017 Congress eliminated the fine for people who failed to sign up -- known as the individual mandate -- removing a key part of former president Barack Obama’s policy.

The Department of Justice (DoJ) argues “the individual mandate is not severable from the rest of the Act.”

2 coronavirus cases detected

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The infection rate among the tested samples was 20.91 percent.

Analysing the DGHS’s daily data, it was found that the situation has not changed much in the last few weeks.

On June 10, 3,190 patients were detected with Covid-19 while the number of deaths was 37. The infection rate among the tested patients was 19.98 percent that day.

On June 15, there were 3,099 new cases and 38 dead. The infection rate among the tested patients was 20.61 percent that day.

Experts said while the numbers may appear to have stabilised, they could rocket upwards any time and if more tests are done, more cases will be identified.

They said more people should be tested to identify all possible cases to contain the spread.

“It seems the infection rate is static, but to me the concern is that the number of mild cases may be more than 10 times larger than the identified ones,” Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) Consultant and

epidemiologist Mushtuq Husain told The Daily Star.

He said, “As the mild cases are not identified, it may cause a sudden spike in any part of the country, especially in crowded cities at any time. So, we have to remain cautious about it.”

On June 20, a total of 3,240 people tested Covid-19 positive while 37 died. The infection rate among tested patients was 23.09 percent on that day.

ASM Alamgir, principal scientific officer at the IEDCR, said the data showed that the number of detected cases was on an upward trend, but in the last few days the rate is decreasing.

“It is not conclusive, but it will not rise suddenly or fall abruptly,” he told The Daily Star.

The first cases were identified in the country on March 8 but testing facilities were limited initially. From May, the number of tests increased.

Bangladesh remains the 17th-worst affected country in the world in terms of the number of cases -- one place higher than South Africa and just below France, according to worldometer.info.

Four Rohingya robbers killed

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Teknaf OC Pradip Kumar Das said they had been conducting drives in different hills of the upazila for several months to nab the members of “Hakim Bahini” as they created panic among the local people by carrying out kidnapping and killing.

Around 1:00pm yesterday, a police team conducted a drive in the hilly areas of Cheptakhali forest near Monkhami of Ukhiya upazila on information that Hakim Dakat and some of his associates were staying there.

Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, the criminals opened fire at the police team. The cops fired retaliatory shots, triggering the “gunfight”, said the OC.

After the gunfight was over, police recovered the bullet-hit bodies of Bashir, Hamid, Rafique and Royingya. They claimed to have recovered four

shotguns, 20 bullets and 40,000 yaba pills from the spot.

The bodies were sent to Cox’s Bazar District Hospital morgue last night for autopsies.

According to police, members of “Hakim Bahini” have been staying in the hills around the Rohingya refugee camps in Teknaf and Ukhiya for the last few years. The gang often kidnap local people and collect ransom money from their relatives.

The gang kidnapped seven Bangladeshis in the last two months. Three of them were killed and the rest freed after ransoms were paid to the kidnappers, police added.

On August 25 last year, Abdul Hakim’s wife Rubi Akhter, 25, and his two other younger brothers -- Kabir Ahmed and Nazir Ahmed -- were killed in another “gunfight” with police.

Drug admin rebuffs it

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Asked for comment, GR Rapid Dot Blot Project Coordinator Mohib Ullah Khondoker said it was sad that the drug administration has not accepted the recommendations made by the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

The BSMMU, which trialled the kit for over a month and sent the report and recommendations to the DGDA on June 17, suggested that the kit be used for assessing what part of a community has been infected by the coronavirus.

The kit is effective in 11-40 percent of the cases when tested in the first or second week of the infection, says the BSMMU report and recommended against using it to detect an infection.

However, the BSMMU recommended that the kit be used in the cases where RT-PCR tests are not available.

Mohib Ullah said the FDA guidelines referenced by the DGDA were not considered by the BSMMU during its trial. The BSMMU is the highest medical academic institution in the country and its recommendations should not be ignored, he added.

“We will soon sit with the BSMMU over the issue,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

In late April, Gonoshasthaya sought DGDA approval for its rapid test kit. The DGDA asked Gonoshasthaya to go through a contract research organisation, but Gonoshasthaya said the drug administration itself should do it, considering the nature of the emergency.

On April 30, the drug administration allowed Gonoshasthaya to get the kit trialled by the BSMMU or icddr,b. Gonoshasthaya Kendra decided to get the trial done at the BSMMU.



Members of Quantum Foundation head towards Bhaban-2 of Dhaka Medical College Hospital to collect the body of a Covid-19 patient yesterday. The organisation has completed funerals of 828 such patients for free across the country in the last one and a half months.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

ACC warnings go unheeded

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He said if steps were taken in line with their recommendations, corruption at the sector could have been checked to some extent.

“The commission has adopted a zero tolerance policy against graft in the health sector. Our enquiry will be unbiased and complete,” he said in the statement.

In early April when alleged anomalies in the procurement of masks came to the fore, the health directorate faced a barrage of criticism for providing substandard respirators, an essential safety gear to fight the deadly virus, to frontline doctors and other medical staff.

Later, a government probe was launched into an allegation that regular masks were supplied to different hospitals after labeling them as N-95 ones. The probe committee recommended action against the supplier, but no action has so far been taken.

On June 18, the ACC had formed a committee to probe the allegation.

It then issued a letter to the ministry on June 21, seeking detailed information about the projects undertaken to procure masks, PPEs, sanitisers, ICU equipment, ventilators, PCR machine and test kits to combat Covid-19.

The commission sought information from the health ministry, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) and Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD) about the purchase of N-95 masks and PPEs and told them to submit the information by June 30.

As a part of the enquiry, the anti-graft watchdog also sought information from the ministry about the doctors who have been transferred from their workplace on various grounds since late March.

The move came after several doctors were transferred after they raised questions over the standard of masks, gloves and PPE suits supplied to the hospitals.

On December 12 last year, the ACC hand a letter to the health ministry asking it to blacklist 14 medical equipment suppliers, who were found involved in misappropriation of public money worth about Tk 108 crore in several graft cases.

The organisations are: Rahman Trade International, Anik Traders, Ahmed Enterprise, Manila Medicine, SK Traders, MH Pharma, Ovi Drugs, Albira Pharmacy, SM Traders, Mercantile Trade International, Bengal Scientific and Surgical, Universal Trade Corporation, ASL and Blair Aviation.

Ironically, it took the DGHS over six months to blacklist them.

Only on Wednesday, the directorate issued a circular blacklisting the 14 contractors.

“To ensure proper utilisation of public money, bring transparency in procurement and prevent corruption and fraudulence, the Anti-Corruption Commission sent a letter with a list of cases against the 14 firms and their proprietors and opined that the 14 contractors be blacklisted,” reads the circular, signed by DGHS Deputy Director Hasan Mahmud.

“In this circumstance, it is requested to take necessary steps against the proprietors of the contractors,” it said.

ACC in its investigation carried out at different times found that a group of dishonest officials and staffers of the directorate of health and its other organisations procured unnecessary MSR, heavy machinery and services several times at prices higher than the market prices.

“There have also been instances of taking money without supplying the goods,” according to the ACC’s December 12 letter to the health ministry.

In such cases, the contractors create a syndicate that takes part in the tender process, the letter said.

“Because of these syndicates, goods are procured at prices several times higher than usual, which creates scope of misuse as well as misappropriation of public money,” it added.

The letter said, “To ensure proper use of public money, to bring transparency in procurement and prevent ongoing corruption, forgery and conspiracy, ACC thinks the listed firms need to be blacklisted.”

Asked about the ACC chairman’s statement, Health Minister Zahid Maleque, in a text message last night, said, “Our ministry has been very busy handling the coronavirus and dengue situations for quite some time. We tried to follow advices from all important agencies to the best of our ability. Any misappropriation shall not go unchecked.”

Workers abroad get little help

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addressing the plight of migrant workers, who are the country’s one of three major economic pillars, alongside the farmers and garment workers.

Contacted, Ahmed Munir Saleheen, secretary to the expatriates’ welfare and overseas employment ministry, said they were giving priority to support the migrant workers who were forced to return after losing jobs and now facing hardship due to the pandemic.

“Because, we hope, those who preferred to stay abroad will be able to pull through.”

Talking to this newspaper on June 16, he said the ministry provided immediate support of about Tk 11 crore to overseas workers via different Bangladesh missions and will continue to do so.

Asked whether they have plans to support overseas workers for long-term survival amid the current economic crisis, Wage Earners’ Welfare Board (WEWB) Director General Hamidur Rahman said they were considering such a step as a secondary option.

Foreign employers and the governments of the respective countries have their duties and responsibilities for the migrant workers. And no worker can be fired arbitrarily or left starving because of the pandemic, he told this newspaper over the phone.

The official stressed the need for stronger diplomatic effort to protect the migrant workers abroad.

According to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, more than 13 million Bangladeshis, including less-skilled, semi-skilled and skilled migrant workers and professionals went abroad, for overseas employment since 1976 till May this year.

After the pandemic began in the country, the government announced a bailout package of Tk 500 crore while the expatriates’ welfare ministry announced a separate Tk 200 crore loan scheme for the migrant workers.

However, both the packages are likely to be disbursed as loans only for economic reintegration of the returnees. The workers struggling

abroad to survive the pandemic are not getting anything from it.

Officials said the Tk 200 crore loan will come from the WEWB fund, which is created with the money of migrant workers.

According to a BSS report, the Tk 500 crore package was announced by the prime minister on May 14 for the expatriates who became jobless during the coronavirus pandemic. The money will be given to Probashi Kalyan Bank so that the returnees “can do something here by taking loan from the bank.”

Talking to this newspaper over phone, Prof Tasneem Siddiqui, chair of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), said migrant workers have contributed to the country’s revenue generation through sending remittance.

However, there is little reflection for them in the proposed national budget of 2020-2021, she said.

“The state needs to show its commitment [towards migrant workers].”

IT’S THEIR OWN MONEY

Over the years, funds from the WEWB have been allocated for the welfare of migrant workers and their family members, said migrant rights activists and officials.

WEWB DG Hamidur Rahman said the fund did not see expected rise during the pandemic because of a stalemate in the labour recruitment process, since the money is collected from workers’ registration.

For the past several years, Tk 3,500 has been collected from each worker during the registration.

WEWB spends nearly Tk 3.5 lakh from the fund against each regular migrant worker who dies abroad, he added.

According to an official there, WEWB has a fund of over Tk 1,000 crore at present.

Wishing anonymity, he said during the Covid-19 outbreak, about Tk 9.44 crore was approved from the welfare fund to support migrant workers abroad.

Besides, about Tk 2.96 crore was distributed among the returnees for their transportation cost (Tk 5,000 to each worker) during the shutdown till

May 30.

Also, about Tk 9.79 crore has been given from WEWB as part of premium for workers’ mandatory insurance, he added.

This total amount was given alongside the announced Tk 200 crore loan.

RMMRU Chair Prof Tasneem, referring to the loan scheme, said this is from workers’ money. “It should have come from the government’s revenue budget.”

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said using workers’ money from their fund in such a way during the pandemic could jeopardise the regular welfare activities and put their future in uncertainty.

There is no separate allocation for overseas migrant workers from the government’s coffers although there is an initiative to give fund for other sectors, he added.

Secretary Saleheen of the expatriates’ welfare ministry affirmed that the wage earners’ welfare fund is created with the money of migrant workers.

“And there is no doubt that this fund will be spent for their welfare and for no other means,” he said.

Shamsul Alam, director general of Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, said if required, they can facilitate training of returnees for their economic reintegration.

According to WEWB’s annual report of 2017-18, Tk 359 crore was spent as “support, grants and expatriates welfare” in the fiscal year.

In 2016-17 and 2015-16, such expenditures were Tk 198 crore and Tk 181 crore respectively, said annual reports for those fiscal years.

The amounts were spent mainly as medical grants (for the physically disabled, ailing and injured), financial compensation, carrying dead bodies and funerals, scholarship, special allocation, and for smart cards, said the reports.

In 2017-18 and 2016-17, WEWB invested Tk 235 crore and Tk 50 crore to the Probashi Kalyan Bank. It also approved Tk 7,28,172 and Tk 11.38 lakh for missions abroad in those years.

These expenditures were included as that for “support, grant, and expatriates welfare”.

Knifeman kills two in Glasgow before being shot by police

REUTERS, Glasgow

An man stabbed two people to death in the Scottish city of Glasgow yesterday before being shot dead by police, British media reported, in an attack that left a police officer critically injured.

An eyewitness told Sky News she had seen several people covered in blood being treated by emergency services after the incident at a city centre hotel, and armed police on the scene, at around 1:15 p.m. (1215 GMT).

Police said six people, including the police officer, had been hospitalised. Authorities have yet to say what the motive for the attack was.

A government source told the BBC that a total of three people had died, including the attacker.

Police Scotland Assistant Chief Constable Steve Johnson said the incident had been contained and there was no wider risk to the public.

“The individual who was shot by armed police has died,” Police Scotland said in a statement, adding that they were not looking for anyone else in relation to the incident.

“We would urge the public not to speculate about this incident or share unconfirmed information on social media.”

One eyewitness in the hotel described the scene as “full of blood”.

“I was in my room and I heard loud screams from downstairs,” a man who gave his name as John told the BBC.

“I got worried and went to check what was going on. When I opened the lift it was all blood.”

Police Scotland said its injured officer was in a critical but stable condition.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he was “deeply saddened by the terrible incident in Glasgow”.

Last week, three people were killed in the southern English town of Reading when a man wielding a five-inch knife went on the rampage in a park. Police said they were treating that incident as terrorism.

World pledges \$1.8b for crisis-stricken Sudan

AFP, Berlin

The international community pledged \$1.8 billion at a conference to drum up support for Sudan on Thursday, in an effort to help the northeast African country battle economic woes after the ousting of long-time dictator Omar al-Bashir.

“This conference opened a new chapter in the cooperation between Sudan and the international community to rebuild the country,” German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said at the video conference co-organised by Germany with Sudan, the European Union and the United Nations.

Some 50 countries and international organisations pledged a total of more than \$1.8 billion, while the World Bank Group offered a grant of \$400 million.

“This conference marks the start of a process, which will be followed by subsequent engagement by the international community to take stock of the progress made by Sudan in implementing reforms and to allow its partners to adapt their support accordingly,” the conference’s concluding statement said.

Covid-19 vaccine

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died from Covid-19 since it emerged in China late last year and cases are expected to reach 10 million across the globe within the next week.

His statement came as WHO yesterday said that a global initiative to speed up the development and production of Covid-19 tests, vaccines and treatments will require more than \$30 billion over the next year.

Providing details of the so-called ACT accelerator, launched in April and aimed at pooling international resources to conquer the pandemic, WHO said “the costed plans presented today call for \$31.3 billion in funding.”

So far, \$3.4 billion of that had been pledged, it said, pointing out that an additional \$27.9 billion was needed over the next 12 months, including nearly \$14 billion to cover immediate needs.

The announcement came ahead of a major pledging event in Brussels in support of the ACT accelerator, set to take place today (Saturday).

“This is an investment worth making” Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a special envoy for the ACT accelerator, told a virtual briefing.

“If we don’t rally now, the human costs and the economic pain will deepen,” she said.

“Though these numbers sound big, they are not when we think of the alternative. If we spend billions now, we will be able to avoid spending trillions later.

“The time to act is now, and the way to act is together.”

The funds requested should make it possible to deliver 500 million tests and 245 million courses of treatment to low and middle-income countries by mid-2021.

They also aim to deliver two billion vaccine doses by the end of next year, of which half will go to low and middle-income nations.