

Distribute vaccines

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of Romania, Finland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Croatia, Poland, Moldova, Albania, Bulgaria, Mexico, Ireland, Ecuador, Latvia, Montenegro, Serbia, Belgium, Hungary, Malaysia, Kyrgyzstan, Andorra and Georgia.

Notable artists signing the statement include Shabana Azmi, Andrea Bocelli, Bono, George Clooney, Matt Damon, Sharon Stone, Jimmy Wales, Forest Whitaker and others.

Business leaders who expressed solidarity include the founder of Virgin Group Sir Richard Branson, former CEO of Unilever Ltd Paul Polman, co-founder of Infosys Narayana Murthy, former chairman of Tata Sons and Tata Group Ratan Tata, Sudanese-British billionaire Mo Ibrahim. Other noteworthy signatories include chairman of King Faisal Foundation HRH Prince Turki bin Faisal, former astronaut Ron Garan, president of Robert F Kennedy Human Rights Kerry Kennedy, founder of Khan Academy Salman Khan, former vice presidents of the World Bank Justin Yifu Lin and Mats Karlsson, human rights activist Marina Mahathir, mayor of Paris Ann Hidalgo, former secretary general of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Ekmeleddin, and others.

The effectiveness of the upcoming vaccination campaign will depend

on its universality. Governments, foundations, international financial organisations like the World Bank and the regional development banks should work out details of how to make the vaccines available free of cost, read the appeal.

They said results of vaccine research done by the private sector should be in the public domain, making it available to any production facility that pledges to operate under strict international regulatory supervision and only to such facilities.

They urged the World Health Organization to design a World Action Plan for the Covid-19 vaccine.

"We appeal to them to set up an international committee responsible for monitoring the vaccine research and to assure equal access to the vaccine for all countries and all people within a publicly announced predetermined time frame."

The signatories are pleading to all world leaders, including the secretary-general of the United Nations, director general of the World Health Organization, religious leaders, social and moral leaders, leaders of research laboratories and pharmaceutical companies, and the media to join hands and ensure that in the case of a Covid-19 vaccine, everyone shares a the consensus that it must be deployed as a global common good.

No chance of reinfection

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debate, when researchers from Chongqing Medical University tested 37 individuals previously infected with Sars-Cov-2, and found that there was a significant reduction in the IgG antibody levels of a majority of the participants.

IgG antibodies, also called Immunoglobulin (G), is an antibody created by white blood cells called lymphocytes as a delayed response to a pathogen. It is also longer lasting than other antibodies created during the early stages of infection.

On the other hand, SARS-CoV-1, the virus that caused the SARS outbreak between 2002 and 2004, produced antibodies that could last up to two years, researchers from China's Institute for Viral Disease Control and Prevention found in 2007.

"Three types of antibodies are created -- first, IgA, then IgM, and lastly IgG. For certain viruses of the coronavirus family, the IgA stays in the body for 50 days. IgM stays for between 5 to 6 months, and the IgG stays for about 2 years. A Covid-19 infected body should create either two or all the three of these antibodies," said Dr Bijon.

The eminent immunologist was instrumental in developing testing kit for SARS while working at a Singapore lab back in 2003.

"Covid-19 has 82 percent similarity with that of SARS. So, in a way, novel coronavirus is not exactly new to me," he said.

"And, from my experience and research, I'm almost certain that reinfection is not possible."

He, however, added that more research is needed into how infection is happening in Bangladesh. "There has not been any specific research into reinfection in the country."

US reopening plans halted

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Across the Atlantic, the EU on Saturday pushed back a decision on a list of "safe countries" from which travellers can visit Europe -- a list which could exclude the US.

In India, densely populated cities have been particularly hard hit. The country set a daily record Saturday with 18,500 new cases and 385 deaths. Total infections are at 509,000, with more than 15,600 deaths.

In the Middle East, the governor of Bethlehem announced that the Palestinian city would temporarily close due to rising infections.

Iran, which has struggled to curb its outbreak even as it gradually lifted restrictions from April, has launched a mask-wearing campaign.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had warned Saturday that Iran's economic problems would worsen if the coronavirus spreads unchecked.

The disease also continues to rampage through Latin America, with Peru topping 9,000 deaths Saturday. Brazil -- the second hardest-hit country after the US -- recorded 990 deaths on Saturday, the highest toll in the world that day, while Mexico recorded the second highest at 719. 'EXPLOSION' IN FLORIDA

In the US state of Florida, Republican Governor Ron DeSantis has conceded there has been an "explosion" in new cases.

On Saturday the "Sunshine State" notched 9,585 cases in 24 hours, a new daily record.

The average age of people infected has dropped sharply -- to 33 from 65 two months ago. Young people frustrated by months of confinement have poured back to the state's

beaches, boardwalks and bars, often without masks and seemingly unconcerned about social distancing.

Miami announced beaches will close over the July 4 holiday weekend and bars are also shutting their doors.

With Trump struggling to lift his re-election bid off the ground ahead of November, the campaign confirmed that events featuring Vice President Mike Pence in Arizona and Florida next week have been postponed "out of an abundance of caution."

Trump had faced a backlash after insisting on a rally in Oklahoma a week ago despite virus concerns.

In California, Governor Gavin Newsom ordered some areas to reinstate stay-at-home orders, while San Francisco announced a "pause" in its reopening.

Texas -- among the first US states to reopen -- also shut down its bars. Australia's Victoria state will implement mandatory coronavirus tests for returning travellers after a sharp spike in infections over the past two weeks, the state's premier said yesterday.

The country's second-most populous state had 49 new cases yesterday, its highest in more than two months and the 12th consecutive day of double-digit rises. The rest of Australia has seen almost no infections, reports Reuters.

"Much like a bushfire, putting this out is challenging," Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews told a press conference, alluding to wildfires at the end of last year that burnt through vast swaths of the country.

The virus has also thrown world sports into turmoil. Pakistan's cricket board announced it would leave 10 players off its tour of England after they tested positive.



55-year-old Trinath Sarkar sitting on the steps of Mugda General Hospital while waiting to be tested for coronavirus around noon yesterday. He has had fever for the last week and came to the hospital around 7:00am with his daughter and was barely able to stand after waiting for five hours. He has lost his father a few days ago. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Team up to stop forced deportation

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returned home. Experts estimate several lakhs of them may return over the next few months. On the other hand, new overseas jobs could drastically decline.

Prof Tasneem Siddiqui, chair of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), said a survey by them on 50 returnee migrants found they suffered quite a lot over the last few months due to job loss, shortage of food, and abuse in the jails overseas.

Also, 74 percent of the returnees claimed they had dues in salaries and benefits and the amounts ranged from Tk 5 lakh to Tk 7.5 lakh, she said.

Prof Tasneem suggested the government keep an account of the migrants returning so that they can back up their claims when a mechanism for justice is created.

Expatriates' Welfare Ministry Joint Secretary Nasreen Jahan said that the government has allocated Tk 700

crore for reintegration of the returnee migrants. The Expatriates Welfare Bank will provide between Tk 1 lakh and Tk 5 lakh in soft loans to the returnees. Besides, Tk 11 crore has been used for cash and food assistance for those in need in the destination countries.

The government is also working with development partners including Swiss Development Cooperation, Asian Development Bank, World Bank, ILO and IOM for repatriation and reintegration.

"Each of the families of the migrants who died due to Covid-19 will get Tk 3 lakh," she said.

Nasreen Jahan also said the migrants and their families will come under the social safety net programme run by the relief ministry.

"We are also planning on how to create new overseas job opportunities."

Syed Saiful Haque, chairman of WARBE Development Foundation, said migrants, especially the undocumented

ones, are vulnerable during this pandemic. Primarily, it is the host government's responsibility to protect migrants during a crisis, but not all of them are doing it.

Therefore, Bangladesh embassies abroad need to reach out to them. He said the Tk 11 crore spent on cash and food support to migrants was not enough.

A global fund should be created for compensating the migrants who became unemployed. For those returning, Saiful suggested creating a returning center which will assist the migrants in becoming entrepreneurs.

IOM Head in Bangladesh, Gorge Gigauri, said return and reintegration of migrants is a complicated issue that's taking over health challenges. IOM is working with the government in tackling the crisis.

The discussion was moderated by Sushmita Preetha, assistant editor at editorial and op-ed of The Daily Star.

State-run to be jute mills shut

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rely on the government's assurance that we will get all the due wages and benefits in due course," adds Rahman.

Md Imran Khan, another labour leader and a worker of Crescent Jute Mills Company Limited, says, "We have been demanding for long that the authorities modernise the factories..."

"We recently submitted an 11-point demand to revive the industry. But instead of implementing those, the government has decided to sack us amid pandemic. It's really heartbreaking. We don't know where to go now."

While many private jute mills are making considerable profits, all the 22 state-run jute mills have been incurring heavy losses and are unable to pay workers wages and financial benefits.

In the wake of workers' protests and strike, the government on November 26 last year allocated Tk 100 crore to the BJMC for paying due wages and financial benefits of the workers.

Several conditions were attached to it. One of those was that the BJMC would not use the fund for any other purpose than disbursement of outstanding wages and financial benefits of the workers.

However, according to BJMC officials, the fund was too small to pay all the dues and it asked for more funds.

JP leader Noman expelled from party

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party insiders said.

In the last national election, Awami League had left the Laxmipur-2 seat to its electoral ally JP and the party had nominated Mohammad Noman.

Noman was elected as MP in the 2014 parliamentary election in the constituency.

According to Article 20/1 (1) of

the party's charter, the party chairman can take decision of any member's expulsion or incorporation at any moment, the press release read.

Meanwhile, Laxmipur-2 MP Shahid Islam Papul, who allegedly gave a huge amount of money to JP's Noman for the post, has been accused of money laundering, human trafficking, visa trading and bribery in Kuwait.

He was also sent to jail for 21 days in the central prison, said Arab Times on June 25.

Earlier, Kuwait public prosecution approached the Central Bank to freeze the bank accounts of MP Shahid and his company.

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Kuwait detained Shahid on June 6.

However, with the declaration of factory closure and lay-offs, thousands of workers all over the country have been protesting against the decision and demanding full financial benefits and reinstatement.

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With this, Bangladesh was the 17th worst affected country in the world.

During yesterday's briefing, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general of DGHS, said the death rate among the confirmed Covid-19 patients was 1.26 percent.

Out of the official number of deaths, at least 861 people died with Covid-19 symptoms, according to the Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) -- a project of the Center for Genocide Studies at Dhaka University.

Prof Ridwanur Rahman, a medicine and infectious disease specialist, told this newspaper, "We have no reason to be satisfied thinking the death rate is lower than others. In fact, many deaths are remaining unreported and counting all the cases is beyond our capacity."

More than 78.62 percent (around 1,366) of those who died of coronavirus were 51 years or above, though only 18 percent (24,801) of the total infected patients were from this age group, according to the

Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

"Deaths among the patients aged between 10 and 20, and 51 and 60 are higher than in many other countries," said Shafiq Shimul, an associate professor of health economics at DU who help the DGHS to make the projection on Covid-19 trend in the country.

Globally, 495,388 Covid-19 patients have so far died, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Of them, only 2.63 percent were aged between 51 and 60 whereas the death rate of this age group in Bangladesh is 3.30 percent.

Among yesterday's deceased, 31 were male while 12 were female.

Twenty-one of them were from Dhaka, 10 from Chattogram, two from Rajshahi, three from Khulna, one from Rangpur, three from Sylhet, two from Barisal and one from Mymensingh divisions.

Thirty of the deceased died at hospitals, 12 died at homes and one

was declared dead after being taken to the hospital.

Two of them were between 21 and 30 years, one was between 31 and 40, seven between 41 and 50, 13 between 51 and 60, 12 between 61 and 70, seven were 71 and 80 years old and one was between 81 and 90 years.

There are 5,985 beds for Covid-19 patients in the coronavirus hospitals under Dhaka division, Prof Nasima said, adding that the number of intensive care unit (ICU) beds in the division was 202.

A total of 18,099 samples were tested in 68 labs across the country yesterday.

Meanwhile, 1,409 Covid-19 patients have recovered in the last 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday and the recovery rate was 40.44 percent.

The total number of recoveries has risen to 55,727.

A total of 1717 people were put under isolation while 461 were released from isolation across the country in those 24 hours.

9 die in Cumilla showing Covid-19 symptoms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

Nine people died with Covid-19 symptoms over the last two days in Cumilla.

All of them were between 40 and 70 years old and admitted to Cumilla Medical College hospital with fever, chest pain and shortness of breath, CuMCH officials.

Dr Mukta Rani, assistant surgeon at the hospital said, "Six people died at the Covid-19 unit yesterday. Samples were collected from all six patients for Covid-19 tests and we are waiting for the results."

There are 103 patients (28 Covid-19 positive, and 75 suspected) at the unit and nine patients in the ICU, she added.

The dead are Rahela, 60, Mustafa Mia, 60, Nasima, 56, Farid Uddin, 70, Motaher Hossain, 48, and Moslem Mia, 72.

Earlier on Saturday, three more patients -- Alamgir, 60, Moslem Mia, 65, and Tanvir Mazumder, 40, -- died with Covid-19 symptoms in the hospital.

With these, a total 103 patients died showing coronavirus symptoms and 15 died after testing positive for Covid-19 at the hospital since April.

Govt to allow

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not for diagnosis, but to be used only to detect antibodies".

Following a guideline from the advisory committee, the DGDA has decided to allow production and import of rapid antibody testing kits for some specific uses.

Experts have also opined it is now time for antibody and antigen testing.

"We have been recommending the use of antibody and antigen tests for a long time and believe this is a good initiative," Dr Jahidur Rahman, virologist and assistant professor of Shahid Suhrawardy Medical College, told The Daily Star.

Such tests are not an alternative to PCR tests, but are rather meant to supplement the process and thus reduce burden on the PCR machines.

He also said it should not be used for diagnosing the disease but for epidemiological survey. "It will help in deciding the status of the disease in the country," Dr Jahidur added.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) has cautioned that there is no evidence showing serological tests can determine whether a person has immunity or is no longer at risk of re-infection.

The issue of antibody test kits received extra attention when Gonoshasthaya Kendra declared that they had developed a cost-effective and quick responding antibody test kit.

After a long trial at BSMMU, the DGDA sent an email to GK officials on Thursday, informing that their technical committee rejected the kit even after BSMMU recommendations.

Saudi 'forced' 3 Iranian boats to leave waters

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia said Saturday three Iranian boats were "forced to retreat" from its waters after warning shots were fired, according to state media.

"At 6.30pm (local time) on Thursday... the coastguard spotted three Iranian boats after they entered Saudi waters," the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

The ships "refused to respond" to repeated warnings, after which "warning shots were fired... forcing them to retreat", it added.

The report did not identify what kind of ships they were.

Saudi Arabia terminated diplomatic relations with Shia-dominated Iran following 2016 attacks by protesters on its missions in Iran after Riyadh executed revered Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.

Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, has been at odds with Iran since the Islamic revolution of 1979 ushered in a Shia theocracy and set the two countries on a collision course.

They today stand on opposing sides of conflicts in the Middle East, from Syria to Yemen.

Tensions have risen in the last year after a series of attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf and Saudi oil installations, incidents that roiled global energy markets last year.

Both the United States and Saudi Arabia have accused Iran of being behind those attacks, a charge denied by Tehran.