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The caravan of broken dreams

Unable to withstand the pandemic fallout, more and more middle and low-income families leave the capital

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MUNTAKIM SAAD

Amanullah Ershad used to make enough to keep his two sons in primary school and pay the rent for his small flat in the capital's Banasree.

But everything fell apart after his business of buying and selling rejected products from garment factories came to a grinding halt due to the fallout from pandemic. His due rents were piling up and the landlord assaulted him, threatening him with eviction.

With his business showing no signs of recovery, the 44-year-old man packed up his belongings and left the Dhaka with his family on July 1 for his ancestral home in Dohar.

"We couldn't survive this. We had to go back to the village where we may have no earnings, but at least the rent is not piling up," he said.

Like this family, many have seen their income fall drastically due to the impact of Covid-19 outbreak and started leaving the capital, abandoning their dreams of making a better life.

During the shutdown of the economy in May, the average household income in urban areas registered a 79 percent drop, found a Brac survey conducted between May 9 and 13.

The economic fallout of the pandemic has slightly been less severe outside the cities, said the survey conducted among 2,317 people across the country. Twenty-eight percent of them said they became economically inactive.

The migration of people from the city has also hit the people in the business of renting out properties.

To-let signs and posters are now ubiquitous on walls and online. Rent in many places has been reduced considerably. Still, many homeowners claimed that they were struggling to find tenants.

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To-let signs and posters on the gate of a neighbourhood in the capital's Dakkhin Mugda resembles a poorly arranged classified advertisement section of a newspaper. As people who lost their income due to the fallout of Covid-19 are leaving the city, those in the business of renting out their properties are struggling to find tenants. Rent in many places has been reduced considerably. Several landlords of the gated community told The Daily Star that they use the gate for hanging signs so that potential tenants could easily get information about vacant flats and houses. They said the number of signs tripled since the shutdown began to slow the spread of the virus.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Returnees can overwhelm rural economy

Experts warn about impact of people moving back to villages

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh's rural economy is going to be under pressure as a significant number of people from urban areas are returning to their respective villages losing their sources of income due to Covid-19 fallout, says an expert.

"The rural economy is unlikely to be able to absorb the pressure," former caretaker government finance adviser AB Mirza Azizul Islam told UNB.

He said the agricultural sector, the driving force of the rural economy, is going to be overburdened with the returnees though it contributes 15 percent to the GDP and provides 40 percent jobs.

Mirza Aziz said mechanised tools are being used for increasing productivity in the agricultural sector and their

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BANGLADESH UPDATE

2,686 New cases in 24hrs

1,81,129 Total cases

2,305 Deaths

88,034 Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

565,260 Deaths

12,744,887 Total cases

Testing on the decline

2,686 reported infected; 30 die

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of Covid-19 tests has been declining in the country for the last few days.

A total of 13,480 samples were tested on Friday, 15,632 on Thursday, and 15,672 on Wednesday.

At a time when inadequate testing facilities kept many cases out of radar, such a decline in the number of tests would accelerate the risk of transmission, said experts.

Prof Nazrul Islam, member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC), yesterday told The Daily Star, "It [decreasing number of tests] is our bad luck. Maybe the situation is deteriorating but it is tough to assume the reality due to inadequate testing."

The tests do not represent the reality in our country, he said, adding, "Let's see what happens after Eid-ul-Azha."

Coming down heavily on the top officials of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) and the health ministry, the noted virologist said, "We [NTAC] have been recommending many things; but who cares?"

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10 MINUTE SCHOOL

Hounded by threats, trolls

ZYMA ISLAM

During a time period that has seen an unprecedented rise in cases filed under the infamous Digital Security Act, the digital sphere is more unsafe than ever before.

The most noticeable content of the week gone by has been the litany of threats, abuses and trolling hurled at online educational platform 10 Minute School by a section of fundamentalists.

10 Minute School, or as the proper brand name goes Robi 10 Minute School, is an educational website that uses the internet to impart education to students of all ages, from first graders to Bangladesh Civil Service examinees.

The internet mockery by digital natives transcended beyond basic criticism to something more sinister: death threats, and comments intending to do physical harm.

"When your mother comes over to show you that people on YouTube are threatening to murder her son, how would you feel?" asked Ayman Sadiq, founder and CEO of 10 Minute School in a YouTube video uploaded six days ago. "There's a message going around to send this 'murtad' to 'jahannam' the minute anybody sees me, and it is being shared by not hundreds, but thousands of people."

Anyone familiar with the history of terrorism and the murders of free-thinkers in this country knows that online threats are only the first step. While most of the people levelling out these threats will hide behind their screens, there is always the risk that some might organise and respond to the call for blood.

This makes these acts violations of Section 27 of Digital Security Act 2018 which pertains to cyberterrorism, but there have been no arrests, even though these forces have been at work for at least a week.

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1,000 listed as human traffickers

Cops mark 24 districts as trafficking zones

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Investigators are working to track down local human traffickers who along with different transnational syndicates send people abroad alluring them with promises of a better future.

Majority of those people end up in torture cells run by the syndicate members. The criminals then extort their families back in Bangladesh by sending them audio and video clips of the torture.

Law enforcers have already prepared a list of human traffickers to destroy their network, a top official at the Police Headquarters (PHQ) told The Daily Star.

The development came after 26 Bangladeshis were killed by traffickers in Libya on May 28.

Contacted, Mainul Hasan, deputy inspector general of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), said they have collected a list of human traffickers from the ministries of home and foreign affairs.

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ONLINE EDUCATION AT VARSITIES

Ensure digital devices for all

Experts at Star Forum webinar call for narrowing the divide first before starting remote learning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A holistic plan, proper infrastructural capacities, all students' access to digital devices and low cost internet connections are must to ensure fully-fledged online education at universities in the country.

Academics and students attending a Star Forum, a webinar series organised by The Daily Star, yesterday also said no student should fail to avail online education for not having digital devices.

The programme, titled "Online Classes: Increasing the Education Divide?", was organised as the Covid-19 pandemic has created great uncertainties in the country's education sector, said the organisers.

Speaking on the matter, Prof Muhammed Alamgir, a member of the University Grants Commission (UGC), said the education ministry should take steps to formulate the National Online Education Policy.

"We have made our recommendations on the formulation of the policy. Based on the policy, we will be able to address all the issues."

He also said the UGC and the education ministry were working to find out how they could provide assistance to students to get digital devices like smartphones or laptops and free or low cost internet.

"I think in this Covid-19 crisis there is no alternative to online classes. All universities need to start online courses with whatever capacities they have," Alamgir added.

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BUSINESS



'Most patriotic entrepreneur'

Business leaders yesterday paid rich tributes to Latifur Rahman, founder, chairman and chief executive of Transcom Group, hailing him as the most patriotic entrepreneur and an icon for ethical business. Latifur, who was best known for his ethical business practices at home and abroad, breathed his last on July 1. M Anis Ud Dowla, a former president of MCCI, said one has to be fortunate to get a friend like Latifur Rahman. "Latifur Rahman was a symbol of determination," said Mahbubur Rahman, president of ICC-B, at an online event.

STORY ON B1



A health official showing residents of the capital's Mirpur-2 the larvae of Aedes mosquitoes in the water collected from inside a discarded tyre, inset. DNCC officials visited neighbourhoods yesterday to make people aware of dengue and Aedes mosquitoes.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Adopt aggressive virus measures

WHO chief urges countries as flare-ups spark new closures

AGENCIES

The World Health Organization has urged countries grappling with coronavirus to step up control measures, saying it is still possible to rein it in, as some nations clamp fresh restrictions on citizens.

With case numbers worldwide more than doubling in the past six weeks, Uzbekistan on Friday returned to lockdown and Hong Kong said schools would close from tomorrow after the city recorded "exponential growth" in locally transmitted infections.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called on countries to adopt an aggressive approach, highlighting Italy, Spain, South Korea and India's biggest slum to show it was possible to stop the spread, no matter how bad the outbreak.

The health agency's comments came as US President Donald Trump was forced to cancel an election rally in New Hampshire, citing an approaching storm.

Trump has pushed to hold large gatherings against health advice as epidemiologists warn of the dangers posed by the virus moving through the air in crowded and confined spaces.

On a visit to Florida on Friday, Trump hit out at Beijing over the pandemic. "(The) relationship with China has been severely damaged. They could have stopped the plague.... They didn't stop it," he told reporters.

The virus has killed over 560,000 people worldwide since it emerged in China last December. More than 12.5 million cases have been registered in 196 countries and territories, triggering massive economic damage.

The United States, the country worst hit by the illness, SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Ensure digital devices for all

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Prof Kamal Ahamed, president of Bangladesh Bishwabidyalay Parishad, a platform of vice-chancellors of public universities, said all universities should have assessments on the economic and the mental conditions of students.

He proposed all universities look into various problems of students and teachers like whether they need laptops or smartphones and internet access.

"All public universities are getting ready for online education, they are trying to overcome their lacking... budgetary allocation is immediately needed to address these matters", said Kamal, VC of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University.

North South University VC Prof Atiqul Islam said private universities should not pressurise students over tuition fees and enrolment in new semesters. Rather, they should assist them as much as they can.

"We can help students have access to smartphones and internet," he said.

He also pointed out that without student enrolment, only 10 out of 105 private universities would be able to survive the pandemic. He proposed merging of universities to tackle the situation.

Brac University Distinguished Professor M Kaykobad said all universities should ensure online classes. "We have seen that whenever we begin using any technology, some sort of discrimination appears. But the gap narrows with time," he said.

He also said, "If students stay at home and have nothing to do,

they will face more problems. Such students must be given all the assistance they need."

UGC Professor Dr Fakrul Alam proposed taking up a holistic plan before introducing online classes. "If we hurriedly start the online education, it will increase the digital divide," he said.

For the sake of smooth education in future, he also proposed "blending" online education with in-person classes after the country would get back on track from the pandemic.

University Teachers' Network organiser and Dhaka University's Associate Professor Samina Luthfa said all students' access to online education must be ensured. "Otherwise, there will be discrimination and students will be deprived of their rights to education."

She also said online classes should first be introduced for postgraduate students and then for the undergraduate students.

Jahangirnagar University student Aaica Zulfikar proposed formation of a platform for counselling students on mental health as they have been living indoors for months amid the pandemic.

Shahjalal University of Science and Technology student Tanvir Akanda said research-based planning was needed before introducing online education to all students. "The authorities should talk to students about their needs for the planning."

Shuprova Tasneem and Mohiuddin Alamgir from The Daily Star moderated the webinar.



Passersby on Zia Sarani in the capital's Shanir Akhra help a rickshaw-puller retrieve his vehicle after it fell into Kutubkhali canal. A portion of the culvert over the canal collapsed about eight months ago, narrowing it to such an extent that two vehicles can hardly pass at a time. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

The caravan of broken dreams

FROM PAGE 1

Economists said the rapid emergence of the new-poor due to job loss and salary cuts will further deepen the crisis unless the social safety net programmes are taken to support them.

Another survey on 5,471 people found that 77 percent of the formerly non-poor group had slid below the poverty line.

This study was conducted by the Power and Participation Research Centre and BRAC Institute of Governance and Development in April.

MANY STORIES OF PAIN
Abdur Rahman used to run a small factory, making hats at a tin-roof building in Uttara Sector-9. He used to pay Tk 25,000 as rent for the space.

He lived with his wife and two daughters at a Tk-15,000-a-month flat.

He had 75 workers in his factory. After the government enforced the shutdown in late March, the orders were cancelled and he had to let go of all his employees.

"The machines alone cost about Tk 20 lakh. The workers are waiting for their arrears while the landowner is asking for rent," said a hapless

Rahman.

He recently sent his wife and two daughters to his village home in Barishal's Bakerganj. He now lives in a small room in Turag area, paying Tk 4,200 a month.

"I too will leave Dhaka next month," Rahman said.

The economic hurdle also pushed many university students to leave their accommodations in the city due to the sharp fall of demand for private tutors.

EXPAND SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Social safety net programmes in Bangladesh are mainly focused on the rural poor, said Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC).

"The number of poor people in the urban areas has increased due to the pandemic. Programmes should have been launched earlier keeping in mind the urban people who slipped into poverty during the shutdown," he said.

Noted economist Prof Anu Muhammad of Jahangirnagar University said the government should have introduced food and cash

assistance in March. Many countries took such initiatives.

"But our government has failed to do that... The number of poor people has doubled now. The government should start food and cash assistance to the new poor immediately," he said.

PROPERTY OWNERS ALSO COUNT LOSS

Afzal Hossain and his family own a business of renting homes in Tejgaon Industrial Area. They have 200 residential units, of which 25 have been vacant since April.

"We reduced the room rent from Tk 7,000 to Tk 5,000 and flat rent from Tk 25,000 to Tk 20,000. We still can't find any tenants," said Afzal.

He added that his family constructed the buildings taking loans and now the lenders are asking for payment of instalments.

"Besides, some tenants have not been able to pay the rent for three months while others went to their village, leaving their belongings and did not return," he said.

The picture is similar in Savar, Gazipur and Narayanganj which are hubs for low-wage working people.

Hounded by threats, trolls

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This raises the question: Who does this Digital Security Act protect if not the ordinary citizens?

On the other hand, the 14-year-old son of a farmer has been arrested for criticising the government move to increase tax on mobile call rates, two university teachers are still languishing in jail for criticising a former health minister, and at least 37 journalists have been arrested since the beginning of the pandemic mostly for reporting on the lockdown.

The deputy commissioner of the Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police told several media outlets that they are scanning the hate content and trying to identify those behind it.

It must be noted, however, that the actors are hardly difficult to identify -- many of these actors have full social media presences complete with details about who they are, where they live and who their friends are. Some are popular YouTube vloggers with thousands of subscribers.

Their social media reach goes far beyond that of the arrested ninth-grade student from some village in Horibarani union of Mymensingh's Bhaluka upazila, whose name most people don't even know. He was arrested the same day a case was filed.

As the Sampadak Parishad noted in a statement last week, "Statistics show that more journalists, teachers, and intellectuals have been arrested under the DSA than cyber criminals, especially in the last six months."

This tide of hate speech spewed around a couple of issues. There was an innocuous comment made by one of the educators appreciating a post on LGBTQ rights at the University of

Oxford. There was a video where an educator taught about the importance of consent in romantic exchanges, and there was another on menstruation. In addition, there was a video where educators encouraged parents to allow their children to interact with people from the opposite gender, and a video asking youngsters to celebrate love on Valentine's Day.

These videos had been on the internet for a while, and nobody seemed to have noticed them all this time -- it was only last week that all hell broke loose in what can objectively be called a concerted witch-hunt.

It is telling that while YouTube is filled to the brim with "religious tutorials" by "religious scholars" on how men may objectify women for their pleasure, a video teaching mutual respect and consent drew flak from this digital community.

In the absence of physical protection, the educational platform took down the videos on menstruation and consent, social media users pointed out. At least one of the educators apologised for his "hurting religious sentiments", confessed to causing that offence, and stated that he is ashamed.

A considerable fan base was left disappointed, because when push came to shove, this youth organisation caved. After all, believing in the rights of women and vulnerable communities, is nothing to be "ashamed" of, or apologise for; freedom of belief and expression is a constitutional right guaranteed by the state.

But then again, it is also the state's responsibility to ensure, through the rule of law, that citizens can exercise those constitutional rights. Is that being done, is the question.

1,000 listed as human traffickers

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"We are now updating the list after checking it with police records. We also have come to know about more traffickers from local police stations and the relatives of those killed in Libya," he said.

Regarding the number of traffickers, DIG Mainul said, "We are still working on it. The combined list so far has names of over 1,000 people as human traffickers."

He, however, said the number may increase as local police stations at different districts and detective branches also have information on human traffickers.

Sources said the previous police list had 1,042 names.

TRAFFICKING ZONES

Analysing complaints on trafficking and intelligence reports, law enforcers have marked 24 districts as "human trafficking zones", said a top police official.

The districts are Cox's Bazar, Sunamganj, Habiganj, Kishoreganj, Pabna, Sirajganj, Narsingdi, Narayanganj, Gopalganj, Faridpur, Bandarban, Brahmanbaria, Shariatpur, Jashore, Satkhira, Chuadanga, Meherpur, Bagerhat, Jhenidah, Chandpur, Chattogram, Cumilla, Pirojpur and Bhola, said the official, requested anonymity.

The official further said Cox's Bazar is a "major trafficking zone" and 66 of the listed traffickers are based in the district alone.

MANY UNDER WATCH

According to PHQ database, at least 6,106 people were arrested between 2013 and 2018 across the country for their alleged involvement in human trafficking.

"We have already started our work to keep an eye on their current status. Many of them have come out of jail... The move is aimed at stopping them committing the crime again," DIG Shaikh Nazmul Alam of the CID told The Daily Star.

Sources also said many of those arrestees walked out of jail on bail and

are now working as brokers of different transnational human trafficking gangs.

Another top police official said registrations of around 100 recruiting agencies, which send people abroad, were cancelled for their alleged links with trafficking. "We are working to confirm their involvement," the official said.

MASTERMIND UNDER SCANNER

So far, 26 cases have been filed against 300 people with different police stations following the killing of the 26 Bangladeshis in Libya.

Sixty-seven people have so far been arrested, and of them, 36, including an employee of the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, were arrested by the CID.

Of the arrestees, 20 have already given confessional statements in court, said sources.

Imtiaz Ahmed, DIG (organised crime) of the CID, told this newspaper that they were doing their best to arrest the masterminds, but many of the suspects were out of the country.

"Most of the traffickers went into hiding and are on alert after we launched a drive against traffickers. But we have already started updating their list and drives are underway to arrest them," he said, adding that they were trying to seek Interpol's support in this regard.

"The good news is recently we have been able to track down the location of a top mastermind of the trafficking syndicates. The mastermind is already under watch," he said.

CID officials also said the godfather of the syndicate has been trafficking young girls to different dance bars and hotels in Dubai since 2018. He owns some five hotels in Dubai.

The officials declined to share further information on the mastermind for the sake of investigation.

Besides, the CID has taken steps to seize properties of the criminals who are on the run.

"We have already completed an investigation against three traffickers. We will file cases against them soon," added DIG Imtiaz.

Returnees can overwhelm

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use is going up day by day, reducing the demand for farm workers.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the rural economy would obviously be under pressure. "This pressure will continue as long as the health risk, caused by the pandemic, is there. This is going to be a huge burden on the already slowed down rural economy."

He pointed out that the large number of manpower who used to go abroad every month for jobs are now stuck in rural areas due to the current situation. "More than six lakh people used to go abroad from Bangladesh every year. They are now there in rural areas. Given the current situation, it can be said the economy is under huge pressure."

Talking about the support to the rural economy to cope with the

pressure, Mirza Aziz, also a visiting professor at Brac University, said the government should help this section of people through its relief distribution measures.

He said the novel coronavirus would hopefully disappear or its intensity would reduce in the coming months. "And at that time, we will have to put in our all-out efforts to restore the production and supply chain."

Mirza Aziz put emphasis on guiding the SME sector by the government after the Covid-19 and quick restoration of production in big industries in full swing.

Mustafizur said the government should expand its social safety net programmes to include those going back to their villages. "The cash transfer scheme can be expanded from the existing Tk 50 lakh."

He stressed the importance of

spending money on renovation of rural roads and investing money in public works to engage a good number of returnees in those programmes.

"The stimulus package of Tk 5,000 crore which was allocated for agricultural loans should be implemented quickly so that people living in rural areas could start their economic activities which will be helpful to engage more people," he said.

Mustafiz said there would be a qualitative change in the economy, which would absorb some pressure, if the government could carry out these initiatives properly.

He, however, stressed the need for addressing the health issues at the moment. "And after that, the government should pay its attention to revamping the economy. Currently, nothing is going on for these two sectors. There is a question about the policy matters as well."

Adopt aggressive virus measures

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reported almost 64,000 new cases Friday and the death toll now stands at just under 134,000, according to Johns Hopkins University.

California, one of the hardest hit by the pandemic, will release up to 8,000 more prisoners to reduce the spread of the virus in its crowded jails, officials said.

Brazil, the second-hardest hit, surpassed 70,000 deaths and reported 45,000 new infections, the health ministry said.

In Uzbekistan, citizens were facing lockdown restrictions again from Friday that were originally imposed in March but lifted gradually over the past two months.

The Central Asian country's return to confinement followed a decision by Australia to lock down its second-biggest city Melbourne from Thursday.

A police officer manning a checkpoint on the outskirts of the former Soviet republic's capital said only drivers with "a good reason" to enter Tashkent -- such as delivering food or other vital supplies -- could pass.

Restaurants, gyms, swimming pools and non-food markets have all shut their doors until at least August 1.

Private transport within cities will be limited to morning and early evening journeys and essential purposes such as travelling to work and purchasing food or medicine.

Victoria, Australia's second most-populous state, reported one of its highest daily increases in infections yesterday and warned the numbers would get worse before they got better as its capital city began its first weekend of a six-week lockdown.

In Hong Kong, the spike marks a setback for the city after daily life

had largely returned to normal with restaurants and bars resuming regular business and cultural attractions reopening.

Despite being right next to mainland China where the virus first emerged, the city had managed to quash local transmission in recent months.

But new clusters have started to emerge since Tuesday, including at an elderly care home that reported at least 32 cases and a housing estate with 11, reports AFP.

India's health ministry yesterday reported another 519 deaths from the virus infection, taking the country's death toll 22,123.

'TURN THIS PANDEMIC AROUND'
"Across all walks of life, we are all being tested to the limit," the WHO's Tedros told a virtual news conference in Geneva.

"From countries where there is exponential growth, to places that are loosening restrictions and now starting to see cases rise.

"Only aggressive action combined with national unity and global solidarity can turn this pandemic around," he said.

Earlier Friday, an epidemiologist and an animal health specialist from the WHO left for China to try and identify the animal source of the new coronavirus pandemic.

The US welcomes the WHO's probe into the origins of coronavirus in China, its ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva said Friday.

Elsewhere, French officials warned of rising cases in metropolitan France as the death toll topped 30,000.

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu admitted a decision to allow businesses, including bars and event spaces, to reopen may have been

Russia, China veto Syria aid via Turkey for second time

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council failed to find a consensus on prolonging cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria on Friday after Russia and China vetoed an extension and members rejected a counter proposal by Moscow.

Without an agreement, authorization for the transport of aid to war-torn Syria, which has existed since 2014, expired Friday night.

Germany and Belgium were working on a final initiative to save the effort, with hopes of bringing it to a vote this weekend.

"We are ready to work round the clock, and call on others to think of the millions of people in Syria waiting for the Security Council to decide their fate," said German Ambassador Christoph Heusgen, who holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council this month.

After Moscow and Beijing wielded vetoes for a second time this week, only three countries joined Russia in backing its proposal to cut the number of aid transit points from two to one.

China supported Russia, but seven countries including the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Belgium voted against, with four abstentions.

An attempt by Russia to pass a similar resolution also failed earlier this week.

The NGO Oxfam had warned that stopping cross-border aid would be "a devastating blow to the millions of Syrian families who rely on this aid for clean water, food, health care and shelter."

Thirteen countries voted in favor of an earlier German-Belgian draft, but Moscow and Beijing opposed the extension because they favor a more limited proposal.

European countries and the US want to maintain two crossing points on the Turkish border -- at Bab al-Salam, which leads to the Aleppo region, and Bab al-Hawa, which serves the Idlib region.

The UN authorization allows the body to distribute aid to displaced Syrians without needing permission from Damascus.

Russia and China argue that the UN authorization violates Syria's sovereignty, and that aid can increasingly be channeled through Syrian authorities.

The latest proposal by Russia, which claims to want continued aid for the insurgent Idlib region, would have kept only the Bab al-Hawa access point open, and for one year.

Moscow claims that more than 85 percent of current aid goes through Bab al-Hawa and that the Bab al-Salam entry point can therefore be closed.

Western countries oppose it, with the US having described two entry points as "a red line."

In January, Moscow, Syria's closest ally, succeeded in having the crossing points reduced from four to two and in limiting the authorization to six months instead of a year.

According to Washington's ambassador to the UN, Kelly Craft, keeping only one border crossing open would cut off 1.3 million people living north of Aleppo from humanitarian aid.

Another diplomat noted that "if the authorization is renewed a few days late, it is not the absolute end of the world. It suspends the convoys for a few days, it does not put them in danger."

For the UN, keeping as many entry points open as possible is crucial, particularly given the risk of the coronavirus pandemic, which is spreading in the region.

Testing

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The officials who have been working hard to control Covid-19 outbreak will be disheartened due to the wrong deeds of the top health officials, he said.

In the last 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, a total of 11,193 samples were tested in 77 rt-PCR labs across the country.

Of them, 24 percent -- 2,686 people -- tested positive for the virus, according to DGHS.

Meanwhile, 30 people died of Covid-19 yesterday.

With the fatalities and new cases, the death toll now reached at 2,305 -- 1.27 percent of all confirmed cases, and the total number of confirmed cases rose to 929,465 -- 19.49 percent of all people tested.

Including yesterday's 1,628 patients, the total number of recovered patients rose to 88,034 -- 48.60 percent of all confirmed cases.

Among the yesterday's deceased, 25 were male and five were female. Of them, 13 were from Dhaka, 10 from Chattogram, three from Rajshahi, three from Khulna and one from Barishal divisions.

Three were aged between 31 and 40, three between 41 and 50, eight between 51 and 60, 12 between 61 and 70, three between 71 and 80 and one was between 81 and 90 years.

A total of 853 people were put under isolation in the last 24 hours.

AFP, Rome

500 migrants reach Italy's Lampedusa in two days: IOM

More than 500 migrants have arrived on Lampedusa over the past two days, the UN's migration agency said Friday, as people take advantage of calm seas to attempt the perilous Mediterranean crossing to Europe.

Since the start of summer, the island has seen a sharp increase in the number of migrants landing there directly, even as others picked up from the Mediterranean by charity rescue boats have been brought in recent days in Sicily to the north.

Nine boats arrived Thursday from Tunisia, carrying a total of 116 people. A further 434 people arrived Friday, on seven boats from Tunisia and two larger vessels from Libya, according to the International Organization for Migration.



Bichanakandi, a popular tourist spot in Sylhet that used to be abuzz with people during rainy seasons, inset, now remains devoid of people as the pandemic has kept people indoors and forced their travel plans to be pushed back. The photo was taken on Friday. PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Tourism in Sylhet hit hard

Sector incurring daily losses of Tk 2-3cr since March due to Covid-19: SCCI

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Imagine small boats gliding through snaking waterways, canopied by lush foliage. Suddenly it starts raining over the freshwater swamp and nature embraces all with its serenity.

This is how monsoon is in Sylhet -- unpredictable yet stunning.

And to witness and appreciate such abundance of beauty in the form of waterfalls, swamps, lakes, tea gardens and countless other gifts of nature, thousands flock to Sylhet during this time of the season to relish the experience. The region's tourism sector also depends heavily on the season.

Like previous years, this year was supposed to be no different. But then the country was hit by Covid-19 pandemic.

As a result, when all the popular spots in Sylhet such as Ratargul, Lalakhal, Bichanakandi, Sreemangal and many others were supposed to be teeming with people, and it would have been almost impossible to manage rooms at hotels without prior booking, an eerie silence now hangs over the locations.

According to an estimation of Sylhet Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), the tourism

sector has been incurring a loss of Tk 2.5 to Tk 3 crore daily since March 26, after the nationwide shutdown came into effect due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The sector includes hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, transportations, boatmen, tourist guides, tour agencies and many



others. All are at a loss and in dire need of government support to overcome the situation," said SCCI president ATM Shoeb.

On June 21, after a meeting with SCCI, Sylhet Hotel and Guest House Owners Group declared

extended closure of all hotels and guest houses till the situation improves.

"It's impossible to continue businesses maintaining limited access and health protocol. The administration did not provide any detailed instruction on how we should do this," said the group's



president Sumat Nuri Juwel.

He said though the government declared stimulus packages, they were not being benefited as all the banks have set their own perimeters to sanction loans with special interest rates.

Nazim Kamran Chowdhury, owner of Nazimgarh Resorts in Sylhet, said, "Both my resorts have been closed since March and we are struggling to maintain and pay our staff. Getting the government stimulus is proving to be tough due to the non-cooperation of banks."

"Even if we do get a loan, how will we repay them soon? It's time the government consider subsidy for all involved in the sector."

Even though the restriction has been eased, people are still not visiting the spots like they used to due to the virus, and it will take time before things become normal, said business and hotel owners.

Quoting Airbnb (an online company that offers arrangement for lodging, primarily homestays, or tourism experiences) CEO Brian Chesky's latest interview with CNBC, Hasan Murshed, an independent tourism consultant, said, "It took 12 years to build Airbnb and now they lost almost everything in six weeks. We are also facing a similar situation in Sylhet."

"Even after the pandemic is over, people will be reluctant to travel. It will be hard for businesses to survive as everything is uncertain. We don't know what future awaits

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

ECONOMIC ZONE IN MIRSARAI OF CTG

BEZA eyes arable land despite PM's directive

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Ctg

To boost food safety, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been advocating for preserving arable land for a long time.

No exception was there when she inaugurated "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Shilpa Nagar" in Chattogram in 2018 with a clear instruction of not acquiring any such land for the zone.

Despite the PM's instructions, the economic zone which is being built along the Bay of Bengal at Mirsarai upazila of Chattogram, led by Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority (BEZA), now wants additional 700 acres of arable land adjacent to it.

The premier inaugurated the economic zone on January 24 in 2018 through a video conference, where she specifically asked the officials not to take any arable land. When former minister Eng Mosharraf Hossain of Mirsarai constituency informed her that people in the area may want to give their land willingly for the zone, the premier repeatedly told the officials not to acquire land which plays a vital role in

safeguarding the nation's food security.

Despite such instructions, the economic zone has already acquired 30,000 acres of coastal forest and felled around five million trees in the process, as mentioned in the documents of the forest department and BEZA masterplan.

Meanwhile, the Land Acquisition branch of Chattogram District Administration on behalf of BEZA issued a letter asking farmers of Mogadia area -- adjacent to the economic zone -- to offer their land, which yields crops thrice a year, for the project.

The letter was issued on May 31, amid the Covid-19 pandemic. It also triggered protests among villagers of Mogadia, Mayani and Saherkhali where around 10,000 people are in risk of eviction due to the proposed land acquisition.

The Daily Star has footage of the video conference, copy of land acquisition letter, copies of documents of forest department about the tree felling and BEZA masterplan.

On June 30, around 10,000 people rallied in the area protesting the decision.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Sahara Khatun laid to rest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former home minister and trusted aide of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Sahara Khatun was laid to final rest at Banani graveyard in the capital yesterday, in the presence of Awami League leaders, activists, well-wishers and relatives.

Sahara Khatun, a presidium member of Awami League who was loyal to the party through thick and thin, was buried at 12pm yesterday.

Earlier, her first namaz-e-janaza was held at Baitul Sharif mosque near her residence in Agargaon at around 10am while the second one was held at Banani mosque.

Many AL leaders and activists including Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, Railway Minister Nurul Islam Sujon,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

'Punish culprits who dug up baby's grave'

Demands Nirmul Committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee yesterday condemned the removal of the body of a baby belonging to Ahmadiyya community from a grave in Brahmanbaria, and demanded punishment of the culprits behind the incident.

In a press statement, the committee leaders urged the prime minister to take action against administrative failure and negligence to protect the Ahmadiyya and the country's other religious minority groups, and ensure that their due rights guaranteed by the constitution.

It further called upon the National Human Rights Commission to take a proactive role over in this regard.

In the statement, the committee's President Shahrir Kabir and its advisory council President Justice Mohammad Golam Rabbani said news reports on the Brahmanbaria incident made them "hurt, worried and agitated".

They said fundamentalists close to Jamaat-e-Islami were behind the incident. Instead of nabbing the perpetrators, local administration tried to hide the incident through arbitration, which was against the rule of law and in serious violation of human rights, it added.

On Thursday, some locals in Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila's Chatura village allegedly removed the baby's body from grave, and left it on the roadside. The baby's family alleged some locals did this since the family belongs to the Ahmadiyya community.

KILLED IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

Murder case filed against Cumilla ward councillor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A murder case was filed over Friday's lynching of Akter Hossain in Cumilla, accusing 10 people including the city's ward-23 councillor Alamgir Hossain and his five brothers.

Rekha Begum, wife of the victim, filed the case with Cumilla Sadar South Police Station that night.

Komol Chandra Paul, investigation officer of the case, said, "We arrested Amir, Jahangir and Billal -- three brothers of Alamgir -- on Friday. The councillor is absconding. Police have been deployed to keep situation in the area under control."

Akter, a local businessmen, was killed outside Changini Dakkhin para mosque after Juma prayers.

The victim's younger brother, and local Jubo League leader Alal Hossain said, "Cumilla city unit Jubo League joint convener and ward councillor Alamgir and his gang members attacked following

an altercation centring a kite flying festival, that was scheduled to be inaugurate by convener of Jubo League of Cumilla city unit. When Akter came to my help, he was attacked with sticks and rods."

Alal added, "Though Alamgir managed to confirm a top post at Jubo league city unit, he was not involved in local politics. He comes from a locally influential family."

Talking to this correspondent, several people in the area raised allegations of land-grabbing and extortion against Alamgir and his family members.

Neither the absconding councillor nor any of his family members could be reached for comments.

Contacted, Abdullah Al Mahmud, convener of city unit Jubo League, said the incident was not necessarily political. Asked if any action will be taken against Alamgir, he said, "It is not in my jurisdiction. The central committee [of Jubo League] will decide that."

FAMILY PLANNING REPORTING

Star journo among six awarded by DGFP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six journalists were awarded yesterday for their work highlighting issues related to family planning by the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP).

Nilima Jahan, a reporter of The Daily Star, was among the winners -- for reporting on family planning, maternal and child health, and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) issues -- which was announced at the "World Population Day 2020" virtual celebration programme.

The other winners are Sajida Islam Parul of The Daily Samakal, Sharful Alam of ATN Bangla, Hasan Sohel of The Daily Inqilab, Razu Ahmed of GIV, and Synthia Kainath Nur of Bangladesh Post.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque congratulated the winners at the programme. Each winner will receive a certificate, crest and prize money of Tk 50,000.

In a separate category, four top employees and six organisations were selected for the award for their special

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Seven held with stolen motorbikes in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police arrested seven members of a motorbike theft gang in Chattogram yesterday, in possession with four stolen motorcycles.

The arrestees were identified as Nayon (22), Samir (28), Samrat (25), Badsha (22), Anik (21), Babu (45), and Assaduzzaman (30).

Police said they are professional thieves and involved in various crimes like mugging and robbery.

Noble Chakma, assistant commissioner (Kotwali zone) of Chattogram Metropolitan Police, said the seven were arrested from Kotwali area of the city and Jorarganj in Mirsarai upazila following tip-offs.

"They used to steal motorbikes from the city and later sell those villages in different upazilas," said the AC.

Inspector (investigation) Md Kamruzzaman of Kotwali Police Station told The Daily Star, "To steal motorbikes, they used master key or broke the locks. Then, they would sell those in remote areas with forged documents."

"We first arrested Nayon with a master key. Based on his information, we captured the others in Sitakunda and Mirsarai upazila and recovered the stolen bikes from Badsha's house," he added.

"Samrat is an accused in four cases filed with different police stations on various charges," he further said.

BYLC holds virtual entrepreneurship bootcamp

CITY DESK

Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC), under its BYLC Ventures programme, organised a three-day-long virtual bootcamp that ended yesterday.

Around 50 teams participated in the long-training programme, the first-ever virtual bootcamp by BYLC. Participants were selected from over 400 applications for Cohort Two of BYLC's six-month long accelerator programme.

The bootcamp educated participants on various entrepreneurship-related topics in sessions hosted by various luminaries, said a press release.

In the opening speech, BYLC chairperson Akhter Matin Chaudhury said, "Hard work brings with it its own luck. If you work hard, things will come to you."

During his session, Ken Wilcox, emeritus chairman of Silicon Valley Bank, said, "As a leader, you must be the person that you want others to be," according to the press release.

While sharing insights on perseverance and grit, Kamal Quadir, CEO of bKash, said, "Startup founders need to have perseverance to follow through on their idea. Success in a startup is 1% idea and 99% execution."

The bootcamp also served as an assessment for the accelerator programme. From the 50 participants, a jury board will select 25 teams for the final selection round, where an investment committee will select the top 10, who will each receive USD 10,000 seed funding and join the accelerator programme, added the press release.

The bootcamp was supported by IKEA Foundation and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Other partners included BetterStories Limited, LightCastle Partners, and Hatch Global.



Wearing an outfit as red as the Krishnachura bloom in her hand, a girl walks beside the lake at capital's Chandrima Udyan yesterday. Strolling barefoot in the pouring rain with freshly-picked flowers in her hand, the scene could be straight out of a movie, but the mask on her face is a reminder of the reality we live in. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

JP ex-presidium member Khaled Akhtar dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Maj (retd) Khaled Akhtar, chairman of HM Ershad Trust and former



presidium member of Jatiya Party, passed away yesterday after a battle with Covid-19. "He died at around 6am at Dhaka CMH while undergoing treatment," Khandaker Deloar Jalali, JP chairman's deputy press secretary, told the media.

Khaled, also former personal secretary of JP founder HM Ershad, had been on life support for the last few days. He was diagnosed with dengue over a month back and then tested positive for coronavirus.

Khaled, also a nephew of Ershad, left behind his wife, three sons and a daughter to mourn his death. He joined JP after retiring from army in 1986. He had worked as Ershad's personal secretary first. Later, he was made JP treasurer and then its

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Don't harass journos, migrants

21 civil society orgs call on Malaysian govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-one civil society organisations working on migration and development yesterday expressed deep concern over the Malaysian government's recent "harassment of journalists and migrant workers".

The incident of harassment took place following the broadcast of an investigative documentary by Al Jazeera about mistreatment of migrant workers in Malaysia, the organisations said in a joint statement.

They said summoning the journalists and the reported manhunt for a Bangladeshi migrant worker interviewed by Al Jazeera for the documentary "is a blatant attempt to muzzle the freedom of press and human rights abuse" by the Malaysian authorities.

"We call on the Malaysian government not to harass the journalists and expatriates, and instead investigate and take action against those who have been treating the migrants unjustly," read the statement.

The CSOs urged the Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia, the ministries of foreign affairs and expatriates welfare and overseas employment and international organisations in Dhaka to take necessary actions in this regard.

The investigative documentary titled "Locked Up in Malaysia's Lockdown" was

broadcast on July 3 as part of Al Jazeera's "101 East" documentary strand.

It shows that the Malaysian government is discriminating migrants during the Movement Control Order enforced due to coronavirus pandemic, read the statement.

"We note with deep concern that six media workers of Al Jazeera were called to Malaysia Central Police Headquarters on July 10 for questioning. They are also being investigated for alleged defamation and sedition by Malaysian police. We stand by various international journalists' organisations who have also condemned this incident," the CSOs said.

Besides, Malaysian Immigration Department has issued a search warrant for young Bangladeshi migrant who was interviewed in the documentary, they added.

The CSOs that issued the statement are Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, WARBE Development Foundation, Brac, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Program, Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendro, IID Migration Policy Unit, Human Rights Support Society, Bangladeshi Ovivashi Mohila Sramik Association, BASUG, INAFI Bangladesh, Karmojibi Nari, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, Devcom, IMA, Awaj Foundation, Rights Jashore, BILS, Bastob, Film for Peace Foundation, and Migration News.



Dhaka Electric Supply Company (Desco) has chosen an inopportune time to dig up this road in Mirpur-1 for work on underground cable lines, as rainy weather may not just slow the work down but also pose hassles to commuters. Locals said the road was renovated just a year ago and was in perfectly good shape until the excavation. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Low-Quality Sanitiser Mobile court fines trader, seals off factory

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chattogram District Administration yesterday fined a factory owner Tk 20,000 and sealed off another factory for producing and selling substandard hand-sanitisers in Chattogram city without approval of the drug administration department.

Omar Faruque, executive magistrate of Chattogram District Administration, told the Daily Star, "Factory owner Manik Ghosh ran an illegal business under the name of 'Manik Enterprise' during the pandemic."

"Manik had been cooperating with one Mansur Ali, owner of 'Jamjam Chemicals', to produce sanitisers using substandard chemicals," the magistrate said.

"Being informed by Manik, we rushed Jamjam Chemicals' factory, but found it closed," he said. "For their offenses, we have fined Manik Tk 20,000 and sealed off Mansur Ali's factory."

Historian Prof ABM Hossain no more

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi



Internationally acclaimed historian Prof Abul Bashar Mosarrar Hossain of Rajshahi University passed away at Bangladesh Specialised Hospital in Dhaka yesterday.

He breathed his last at 2am, said Prof Fazul Haque, dean of Faculty of Arts at RU. He was 86.

He was the first professor emeritus of RU, where he served for 60 years, said Prof Haque.

Prof ABM Hossain was an expert on the Middle Eastern history and authored at least 11 books including Arab Shapotyia, Muslim Shilpakolar Eithas and Moddhyaprachher Eithas, he said.

Norwegian parliament selected him as a member of the Nobel Peace Prize awarding body of The Norwegian Nobel Committee in 1977, said Prof Haque citing his profile.

Prof Hossain was also a member of the committee that drafted the Rajshahi University Act, 1973.

Born on September 1 in 1934 in Cumilla's Debidwar, ABM Hossain studied at Debidar High School, Cumilla Victoria College and Dhaka University.

He went to London University on a scholarship and obtained honours and PhD in History and Islamic Archaeology in 1958 and 1960. In 1960, he joined Rajshahi University as a teacher, and became a professor in 12 years.

He left behind two sons, a daughter and a host of relatives and friends. Prof Hossain was buried at the Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard in the capital following a namaz-e-janaza held near his Dhaka residence in Kalabagan.

Transport leader stabbed dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The general secretary of Sylhet district unit of Tank Lorry Workers Union died at hospital an hour after being stabbed by a group of miscreants at Babna point area of Dakshin Surma in Sylhet on Friday night.

The transport leader Iqbal Hossain Ripon, 40, is son of Abul Hossain of Khojarkhola area of Dakshin Surma.

Another transport leader Babla Ahmed Talukder was also injured and undergoing treatment at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Khairul Fazal, officer-in-charge of Dakshin Surma Police Station, said, "The transport leaders and some others were in front of Sitara Hotel when miscreants attacked them at around 10pm."

"Critically injured, they were rescued and taken to Osmani Medical College Hospital where Ripon died", he said.

Following the incident, tank lorry workers staged demo at Babna Point area for hours that night and yesterday (Saturday) morning after blocking Dhaka-Sylhet highway.

Ripon's wife Farzana Akther filed a case with Dakshin Surma Police Station accusing 13 persons and following a drive yesterday (Saturday) morning, Police arrested two accused in connection of the murder, the OC said.

Dhaka-Barishal flights resume

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Regular flight operations between Dhaka and Barishal will resume today, ensuring health guidelines.

Earlier, the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) permitted flight operations to Sylhet, Chattogram, Saidpur and Jashore airport to resume.

CAAB yesterday allowed resumption of commercial flight operations between Dhaka and Barishal as the district civil surgeon office arranged physicians and health workers at the airport there to monitor the health guidelines regarding hygiene and social distancing.

Country's two private air operator -- US-Bangla Airlines and Novoair -- have taken preparation to resume their operation on Dhaka-Barishal-Dhaka route from today after nearly three-and-a-half-months of flight suspension on this destination.

Both the airlines have decided to operate one flight daily on the route.

Novoair flight will depart at 3:15pm and US-Bangla airlines flight at 4:15pm from Dhaka to Barishal every day of the week, the two airlines said in separate releases.

The government on June 1 primarily resumed flight operation on the three domestic routes -- Chattogram, Sylhet and Saidpur -- out of its seven domestic routes after more two months suspension following Covid-19 pandemic. Flight operations on the Jashore route resumed on June 11.

The CAAB is yet to give permission to operate domestic flights to the rest of two other domestic routes -- Cox's Bazar and Rajshahi.

BEZA eyes

FROM PAGE 3

They said they have nothing except this land on which they yield crops to support their family, graze their livestock and catch fish to meet the demand of protein.

They said despite the PM's instruction, the economic zone had already acquired 30,000 acres of forest land, damaging a large source of their livelihood.

Mainul Ahsan Rukon, a resident of Purbo Mogadia under Mirsarai upazila, said they grow crops such as paddy, vegetable and beans on the land. "Our lives are intertwined with this land we reside on. It provides us with food...", he said.

The villagers sought the PM's intervention to save their land. Contacted, Paban Chowdhury, executive chairman of BEZA, said the land they were acquiring was minimal comparing to the size of the economic zone.

"We have to accommodate a large population there including educational institutions. Apart from this, there is also an 'Indian Zone' for which we need land. That's why we are acquiring more land," he said.

He said they are also building an embankment along the Bay of Bengal and will reclaim land from the sea. But in comparison to the volume of investment, they need more land.

"At least \$15 billion have been proposed for the economic zone and we expect to employ 15 lakh people. We will pay the land owners triple the amount of the actual value," he said.

Asked about the PM's direction of not using arable land for the economic zone, he evaded the question.

Contacted, Md Abu Hasan Siddique, additional deputy commissioner of land acquisition in Chattogram, said he joined the department around two months ago. "The process for the economic zone started years ago and as far as I know, it has been done following due procedures."

The land acquisition is at the final stage, he informed The Daily Star yesterday.

Regarding the prime minister's direction, Siddique said he does not have a clear idea about the matter as the process has been completed long before he joined.

Tourism in

FROM PAGE 3
the sector."

Meanwhile with almost no tourist visiting, people involved in jobs such as guides, boatmen, photographers, vendors and souvenir sellers are bearing the brunt of the situation.

Arob Ali, a boatman of Ratargul Swamp Forest area, said, "The area was closed days before the nationwide shutdown and we have been struggling since March."

Like Ali, many others said they did not receive any support yet.

Contacted, Javed Ahmed, chief executive officer of Bangladesh Tourism Board, said, "Tourism sector was the first to collapse and unfortunately will be the last one to recover. But we've already prepared a recovery plan which has been approved by the [tourism] ministry. We've also prepared a standard operating procedure (SOP), which is awaiting approval."

"Our response to sustain the sector, however, is limited and we are solely dependent on the government's initiatives. The government offered stimulus; but we need banks to be more cordial in sanctioning them to all stakeholders of the sector," he said.

The CEO continued, "People like boatmen, guides and locals who used to depend on the sector are in distress. We've urged local administrations to bring them under the safety net programme and provide them with help till we revive the sector."

He further added, "This year has been lost to us... we won't be able to recover the losses by December. We need to survive the pandemic together and need everyone's support to sustain."

Asked, Jakaria, additional divisional commissioner (general) of Sylhet, said, "We don't have any special plan to support people involved with the tourism sector. The government is providing monthly cash support and many from the sector are included in the list."

"Additionally, the administration is continuing to provide relief to those in need," he added.



A group of current and former students of Government Barishal College form a human chain on Sadar Road yesterday, demanding cancellation of a proposal to change the name of the institution to Ashwini Kumar Dutta College. Local cultural organisations submitted the proposal to the deputy commissioner last year to rename the college, which used to be the residence of the eminent educationist and political leader.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Sahara Khatun

FROM PAGE 3

Awami League presidium members Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Abdur Rahman, two mayors of Dhaka North and Dhaka South city corporation, and AL joint general secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim attended the second namaz-e-janaza maintaining physical distance.

Floral wreaths were placed at her coffin on behalf of President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and on behalf of the party.

Later her dead body was covered with national and Awami League party flags in honour of her contribution in upholding the country's independence and sovereignty and establishing democracy.

Earlier, a special flight of US-Bangla Airlines carrying her body landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport from Bangkok at around 1:40am yesterday.

Sahara Khatun was a lawmaker from Dhaka-18 constituency. She died at Bumrungrad International Hospital in Bangkok at 11:25pm (local time). She was 77.

She was taken to Bangkok on Monday by an air ambulance.

On June 2, the three-time MP was admitted to United Hospital with fever and complications associated with old age. She was later taken to the ICU of the hospital as her condition deteriorated.

Sahara Khatun was born in Dhaka's Kurmitola on March 1, 1943 to Abdul Aziz and Turjan Nesa.

Sahara was one of the forefront fighters as a lawyer in the legal battle to free Sheikh Hasina. She was also an activist.

In the 2008 national election, Sahara became an MP for the first time from Dhaka-18 constituency.

Sheikh Hasina included Sahara in her cabinet as minister for home affairs. In a cabinet reshuffle of 2012, she was made the minister of posts and telecommunications.

JP ex-presidium

FROM PAGE 3

presidium member. He was dropped from JP presidium after the party's ninth national council following the demise of Ershad.

Before his death, Ershad formed a trust and donated his assets to it. Later, Khaled was made its chairman.

JP Chairman GM Quader and Secretary General Moshirur Rahman Ranga condoled his death.

Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology

141-142, Love Road, Tejgaon I/A, Dhaka-1208
Phone: 8870422, Registrar: 8870416, Web: www.aust.edu

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR DIFFERENT ADMINISTRATIVE POSTS

Applications are invited from suitable eligible Bangladeshi candidates for the posts of

- 1) Registrar
- 2) Librarian
- 3) University Engineer
- 4) Contoller of Examinations
- 5) Medical Officer
- 6) Director/Deputy Director of Finance
- 7) Asstt. Contoller of Examinations

at Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology. The details regarding the Qualifications, Experience, and other information are available in the AUST website : www.aust.edu. The last date of application is 27 July 2020 and application should be sent together with all the supporting documents & two PP Photograph to regr@aust.edu with cc to vc@aust.edu and the hard copy to the Registrar, Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, 141-142 Love Road, Tejgaon Industrial Area, Dhaka 1208 within the last date.

Star journo

FROM PAGE 3

contribution to family planning services and maternal and child health sectors.

A total of 40 media personnel from print, electronic and online portals, cartoonists, and artists were selected for the "Family Planning Media Fellowship-2020" in March. The names of the fellows were announced at the programme, each of whom will receive Tk 50,000 as an honorarium for the successful completion of the fellowship.

The Daily Star's Nilima was announced as one of the fellows for the programme as well.

Every year, DGFP marks the World Population Day with exuberant programmes. However, considering the

ongoing global pandemic, this year's celebrations had to be limited to the virtual space.

This year's theme for the day is "Putting the brakes on Covid19: How to safeguard the health and rights of women and girls now."

Health Minister Zahid Maleque was chief guest of the programme.

Health Services Division's Secretary Md Abdul Mannan, UNFPA Bangladesh representative Dr Asa Torkelsson, and Director General of DGFP Sahan Ara Banu spoke at the event, among others.

The programme was presided over by Md Ali Noor, the Health Education Secretary of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Hereby JSC ASE EC notifies you on holding the open tender for the right to enter into an agreement for the provision of freight forwarding services for the transportation of building materials and equipment for the construction of the Ruppur NPP. The documentation is published on the official procurement site of the nuclear industry http://zakupki.rosatom.ru, procurement No. 200619/0536/719.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Hereby JSC ASE EC notifies you on holding the open tender for the right to conclude the contract under lots No. 1, No. 2, 'supply of rolled metal steel reinforcement, metal rolling (periodic reinforcement) on the NPP "Ruppur". The documentation is published on the official procurement site of the nuclear industry http://zakupki.rosatom.ru, procurement No. 200618/0536/709.



Some ripe plums at Shawkat Ali's orchard in Mymensingh's Muktagachha upazila. PHOTO: COLLECTED

COVID-19 FALLOUT

Exotic fruit grower in hot water

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Shawkat Ali had been doing good business selling fresh plum, widely known as aloo Bukhara, grown in his nursery in Muktagachha upazila since 2013.

But this year, when people have been compelled to limit their movement due to the coronavirus pandemic, he is watching ripe plums in his orchard, consisting of 15 trees, falling off or getting spoiled.

Dried plum or prune, mostly imported, is popular among chefs, especially in Dhaka, who use it to prepare various sweet or savoury dishes including biriyani. But this home-grown fruit is going unsold since buyers from Dhaka had been unable to visit Shawkat's orchard amid the virus scare.

Owner of Banolata Nursery, Shawkat said while his expected total harvest of plums this year would be around 120 kilograms, he so far has sold only 11 kg of the fruit to local buyers, at Tk 400 per kg.

"If the fruits could be dried, each kg would've been sold for Tk 1,000 to 1,200. But I haven't been able to find out about the process of drying the fruit."

His lack of knowledge in fruit preservation techniques will cost him at least Tk 50 thousand in losses this year, he also speculated.

Shawkat said he was the one who first introduced cultivation of the exotic fruit to Mymensingh. He first collected a sapling from Germplasm Centre of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) in 2009 and in 2013 he started small-scale cultivation of plums in his nursery.

A plum tree usually starts bearing fruits from

May to July and demand for its saplings has been on the rise in recent years, he said, adding that interested buyers from different nurseries from various districts including Dhaka, Bogura, Jashore, Gazipur and Mymensingh used to contact him for saplings, but this year none of them contacted him.

He now has a stock of 100 saplings, with prices ranging from Tk 400 to Tk 500, and a few matured plants that he used to sell for Tk 4,000 to Tk 5,000.

BAU's Germplasm Centre Director Prof Dr Mohammad Abdur Rahim said the drying technique of plum is quite difficult and it would not be easy to introduce the process at farmers' level.

Plum is a nutritious fruit as it is rich in vitamins, potassium, magnesium, and iron. It is used to add taste in various gourmet recipes as well as in drinks such as burhani.

Farmers could easily have an additional source of income by growing plum trees around their houses and there is even export potential for the fruit, Prof Rahim also said.

After this correspondent reached Saidul Islam, agriculture officer in Muktagachha upazila, to draw his attention on plum grower Shawkat's predicament, he said under current circumstances, Shawkat or any other farmer should take advantage of the government's online marketplace at <https://foodformation.gov.bd>, where the farmers can sell their produce to buyers without any charge.

Though plum is a relatively unknown fruit in the country, his office would also try to find its buyers for Shawkat, he also said.

Bridge condition precarious as earth displaced from approach road

The bridge on the Dhaleswari river at Charabari of Tangail Sadar upazila needs permanent repair to evade collapse

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

The bridge on the Dhaleswari river at Charabari in Tangail Sadar upazila lies in a vulnerable condition as earth got displaced from one of its approach roads due to heavy rain for the last few days and increasing current on the river.

The bridge on Charabari-Torabganj road connects five unions of the char areas in the western part of the district.

Hundreds of vehicles, including heavy ones, and thousands of people of Katuli, Hugra, Kakua, Mahmudnagar unions in Sadar upazila and Bharra union in Nagarpur upazila move on the bridge every day.

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) constructed the bridge in 2006 for developing road communication between the district headquarters and the char area.

But the west side approach of the important bridge was damaged several times due to floods and heavy rain after its construction. Every time, the authorities did temporarily repair work by felling

sandbags.

As a large portion of the approach road was damaged last year, authorities set up a Bailey bridge in one side on it for continuation of vehicular movement there.

Sumon Dewan, former chairman of Katuli union parishad (UP), said the approach of the bridge was damaged as the river has changed its course due to filling of its west side with sand, which increased the pressure of current in the east side.

Locals alleged that a section of influential people having political clout continued illegal sand extraction from the river near the bridge during the dry season for the last few years, which is another reason behind the repeated damage.

Iqbal Hossain, chairman of Katuli UP, said over one lakh people of char areas take their crops, vegetables and other products to different places, including the district town, by different vehicles, including heavy trucks, through the road.

"If steps are not taken immediately, the bridge can see further damage, disrupting

communication with the char areas and causing sufferings to the people. The local lawmaker, upazila parishad chairman and upazila nirbahi officer were informed about the matter," he said.

Shahjahan Ansary, upazila parishad chairman in Tangail Sadar, said he has already informed the Water Development Board (WDB) and LGED of the matter and told them to take immediate steps to protect the bridge. He also emphasised taking permanent measures to repair the damaged portion and protect the bridge.

Md Sirajul Islam, executive engineer of WDB in Tangail, said LGED constructed the bridge and so, they will take measures in this regard.

AKM Hedayet Ullah, upazila LGED engineer in Tangail Sadar, said, the damaged deck of the Bailey bridge has been temporarily repaired for continuation of vehicular movement.

Necessary steps with the coordination of WDB will be taken for repairing the approach road when the river water recedes, he said.



One of the approach roads of the bridge on the Dhaleswari river at Charabari in Tangail Sadar upazila lies badly damaged after the heavy rain for the last several days.

PHOTO: STAR

Winning against colour discrimination

Once bullied and mistreated, dark-complexioned Rubina is now a successful entrepreneur

MD MIZANUR RAHMAN HIMADRI WITH BULBUL AHMED

Her only 'crime' was her dark complexion. It led to her divorce only 34 days after marriage and during that short period her in-laws even tried to kill her.

But Natore's Rubina Khatun did not allow these societal attitudes to put her future at stake. Through hard work, she has become a successful entrepreneur and an award winning farmer.

In 2018, she received the KIB (Krishibid Institute, Bangladesh) Agriculture Award from President Abdul Hamid. Besides, she received several other honours as a woman entrepreneur. Sharing snippets of her life, Rubina said she fell in love and married a Saudi expatriate in 2012, by exchanging vows over the phone.

Soon afterwards, his family members started to torture her physically and mentally for her dark complexion. Once her sister-in-law tried to drown her in the pond, Rubina recounted those traumatic days.

To avoid the torture the young woman returned to her father's house in Ekdala Chandpur village of Natore Sadar upazila only to receive a divorce letter from the Saudi

expatriate, later.

But Rubina did not let the adverse situation destroy her hope. She took over the responsibility of her four-member family including her mother and two younger siblings, as her father passed away before her marriage.

Rubina started tailoring work at home, determined to become self-reliant. After a few days, she opened a poultry farm on family land with Tk 50 thousand, borrowing the money from a local NGO. The venture earned her a profit of Tk 30,000.

In 2015, she earned a prize of Tk 2 lakh prize by taking part in a competition by Fair & Lovely Foundation named "Tomar Shopno Koro Shotti" (Make Your Dreams Come True) in Dhaka. Since then she did not need to look back.

Afterwards, Rubina along with her younger brother started an agro-farm, after receiving training from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Natore.

Initially, she began the venture on 12-bighas of her family land but soon she had to lease another six bighas as her business grew.

Guava, litchi, dragon fruit, banana, plum,

mango, coconut and various vegetables were cultivated. She also started farming fish in their pond and dairy farming. Apart from this, she is now rearing around 200 pigeons and 100 ducks at her farm.

She now earns a profit of around Tk 30,000 from her project every month, said Rubina.

She also runs a organisation named IFMC, where she trains helpless women on cow, duck and poultry farming. Moreover, she has set up a sewing training centre for women, who fell victim to torture.

Like many other small businesses, the pandemic has affected Rubina's farm.

Income from her agro-project has reduced because of the thin presence of customers at the local haats where she would sell poultry and cattle. Yet, she refuses to give in to despair.

"Many people bullied me for my dark skin after I was divorced but the same people are now praising me seeing my success, which really gives me immense pleasure," said Rubina.

Ali Sufi Shantu, a local journalist, said "Many people, especially helpless women, are now following Rubina's footsteps. She is a farming hero in my eyes."




Rubina Khatun feeds her goats at the courtyard of her house in Natore Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: BULBUL AHMED


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Bangladesh

Corrigendum Notice

Following corrections have been made in the Tender Documents of the Invitation for Tender Ref. No. ER/PUR/IT-07-11/2020 dt. 31.05.2020.

Serial No.	Reference Number	Corrections
a)	ER/PUR/IT-07/2020 ERW Carbon Steel Pipe	Tender last selling date & time: 20 July 2020, 16:00 Hrs
b)	ER/PUR/IT-08/2020 Variable Area Flow Meter for ABP Unit	Tender closing date & time: 21 July 2020, 11:15 Hrs
c)	ER/PUR/IT-09/2020 Thermometer & Thermometer Gauge	Tender opening date & time: 21 July 2020, 11:30 Hrs
d)	ER/PUR/IT-10/2020 Heat Exchanger Tube	Tender last selling date & time: 27 July 2020, 16:00 Hrs
e)	ER/PUR/IT-11/2020 Aero Condenser Fin Tube for Storage Tank & SCP Unit	Tender closing date & time: 28 July 2020, 11:15 Hrs Tender opening date & time: 28 July 2020, 11:30 Hrs

All other terms and conditions of Invitation for Tenders shall remain unchanged.

Kazi Mahabubur Rahman
Manager (Purchase)
Eastern Refinery Limited, North Patenga
Chittagong-4204, Bangladesh

GD-1116

Russia battles wildfires amid record warm weather

Wildfires raging in Siberia in record summer temperatures have decreased considerably over the past week, Russia's forest service said yesterday, as it battles blazes by cloud seeding and explosives. Both the number and intensity of fires in Siberia and parts of Alaska have increased since mid-June, resulting in the highest carbon emissions for the month -- 59 million tonnes of CO₂ -- since records began in 2003, it said. Russia's Aerial Forest Protection Service said it was trying to suppress 136 fires over 43,000 hectares (430 square kilometres) as of yesterday. However most of the fires have been deemed too remote and expensive to handle, with over 333,000 hectares currently ablaze in areas where all firefighting efforts have stopped, it said.

US court orders Iran to pay \$879m over 1996 Saudi attack

A US judge has ordered Iran to pay another \$879.1 million over a 1996 bombing in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 US airmen, ruling again that Tehran bore responsibility. President Donald Trump's administration hailed the judgment, the latest over the attack against Iran, which denies involvement and refuses to pay. Saudi Hezbollah, a militant group from the conservative Sunni kingdom's Shia minority, allegedly carried out the attack by driving an explosives-laden truck into the eight-story Khobar Towers complex where Western and Saudi forces were staying. The same judge in 2018 had ordered Iran to pay \$104.7 million in a similar case over the Khobar Towers bombing. A separate court decision in 2013 ordered Iran to pay \$591 million to the family of one of the US airmen who died. Iran, which has no diplomatic relations with the United States, has hit back that Washington should pay for past wrongdoing including support for Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war.

Singapore ruling party's support slips in pandemic poll



Singapore's ruling party retained power yesterday but its support fell sharply, while the opposition made gains, in a general election held under the shadow of a coronavirus outbreak. The People's Action Party (PAP), which has ruled Singapore for six decades, was always assured of victory, and won 83 of 93 parliamentary seats up for grabs, and 61.2 percent of the popular vote. But that was pointedly down on the nearly 70 percent of the vote it won at the country's last election in 2015, while the opposition Workers' Party picked up 10 seats -- its best ever showing at an election. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, visibly disappointed, conceded the "percentage of the popular vote is not as high as I had hoped".

SOURCE: REUTERS, AFP

US president commutes long-time ally's prison sentence

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump commuted the sentence of his longtime friend and adviser Roger Stone on Friday, sparing him from prison after he was convicted of lying under oath to lawmakers investigating Russian interference in the 2016 US election.

Trump's decision to commute Stone's sentence days before he was due to report to prison marked the Republican president's most assertive intervention to protect an associate in a criminal case and his latest use of executive clemency to benefit an ally. Democrats condemned Trump's action as an assault on the rule of law.

"Roger Stone has already suffered greatly," the White House said in a statement. "He was treated



very unfairly, as were many others in this case. Roger Stone is now a free man!"

Stone, 67, was scheduled to report by Tuesday to a federal prison in Jesup, Georgia, to begin serving a sentence of three years and four months.

Trump, seeking re-election on Nov 3, opted to give Stone a commutation, which does not erase a criminal conviction, rather than a full pardon.

Stone was among several Trump associates charged with crimes in former Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation that documented Russian interference to boost Trump's 2016 candidacy.



People take part in the festival of water lanterns at the amusement park 'Dreamland' in Minsk, on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF SREBRENICA MASSACRE

Int'l courts 'more needed than ever'

AFP, The Hague

Twenty-five years after the Srebrenica massacre international courts like those which tried the perpetrators of the slaughter face an uncertain future but are needed more than ever, experts say.

The now-defunct war crimes tribunal that convicted Bosnian Serb leaders like Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic over the murder of 8,000 Muslim men and boys was hailed at the time as a new era of post-Cold War accountability.

Yet the numerous courts set up in its wake now face a litany of problems like low conviction rates, attacks by US President Donald Trump and antagonistic governments, and accusations of racism.

They also need to start giving justice to victims of a new generation of crimes such as the war in Syria, the repression of the Rohingya people in Myanmar and the persecution of the Uighurs in China, experts said.

The Srebrenica commemoration was a reminder that the need for such tribunals to tackle mass atrocities "has never been greater," said Nancy Combs, law professor at the William and Mary Law School in Virginia.

The Hague in the Netherlands -- dubbed the "city of peace and justice" -- plays host to many of these tribunals, the biggest of which is the International Criminal Court, set up in 2002 to try the world's worst crimes.

It is also home to a tribunal for Kosovo which recently handed down war crimes charges against President Hashim Thaci, and a tribunal for the



assassination of former Lebanese premier Rafiq Hariri in 2005.

But the ICC is now under attack by the Trump administration for probing alleged war crimes in Afghanistan, while the wheels of justice have turned slowly and expensively at both the Kosovo and Lebanon courts.

"Undoubtedly, these tribunals are experiencing considerable difficulties at present," said Combs.

"At this moment in history, the future of war crimes tribunals is uncertain."

The ICC was also "suffering from a crisis of confidence because its successes have been so meagre in the last decade," Combs told AFP.

The court had to drop a crimes against humanity case against Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta, while the acquittals of former Ivorian president Laurent

Gbagbo and Congolese politician Jean-Pierre Bemba came as severe blows.

Despite recent political changes in Sudan, the court's most wanted fugitive and former Khartoum strongman Omar al-Bashir remains out of reach.

Claims that the ICC was only prosecuting suspects from the African continent had also led to accusations of racism.

Things had seemed more hopeful when tribunals for the genocide in Rwanda and the wars in the former Yugoslavia were set up in the 1990s -- the first of their kind since the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals after World War II.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was the most successful. By the time it shut in 2017 it had tried 161 people including Karadzic and Mladic, both of whom remain in detention in The Hague.

The future of international justice now lay in a "combination of various law models", mixing big international tribunals with local courts, said Carsten Stahn, law professor at Leiden University.

Syrian atrocities for example are being prosecuted using a mixture of a UN-backed investigative archive and domestic trials based on the concept of universal jurisdiction, for instance in Germany, Stahn said.

"We see a multiplication of avenues for justice. Not only purely domestic or purely international courts, but also hybrid or regional ones," he added.

"This is the future."

US conducted cyberattack on Russia in 2018

Confirms Trump

CNN ONLINE

President Donald Trump, for the first time, confirmed the US conducted a covert cyberattack in 2018 against Russia's Internet Research Agency. The Internet Research Agency is a troll farm blamed by the US for helping to facilitate interference both in the 2016 presidential election and the 2018 midterms.

Trump gave the confirmation during an interview conducted by Marc Thiessen, a Washington Post columnist and former speechwriter for President George W Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Thiessen writes in the Post that during his interview he asked Trump whether he had launched a cyberattack. Thiessen said Trump replied, "Correct."

Trump said during the interview that in 2016, then-president Barack Obama knew but did nothing.

Trump claimed that unlike his predecessor, he acted on intelligence the US had about Russia's election interference by launching the cyberattack.

"Look, we stopped it," Trump told Thiessen.

Obama in December 2016 did announce sanctions against Russia and expelled some Russian diplomats in retaliation for Russia's interference in the US presidential election.

The Washington Post in October 2018 previously reported there was a cyberattack. The operation against the company, which is bankrolled by an oligarch close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, was carried out in order to prevent any interference in the midterms, the paper was told.

This is, however, the first official confirmation from Trump. Thiessen reports senior US officials also confirmed that the strike occurred and was effective, taking the Internet Research Agency offline.



People gather near the bridge that is damaged due to the flood at Raghu Ganga River in Myagdi, Nepal, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Floods, landslides kill 23 in Nepal

Dozens missing; thousands displaced

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Heavy rains triggered flash floods and landslides that killed at least 23 people and displaced thousands in western Nepal, officials said yesterday.

Nine people were killed and more than 30 were missing in Myagdi district, 200 km (125 miles) northwest of the capital Kathmandu, where several houses were destroyed on Friday, district administrator Gyan Nath Dhakal said.

"The toll is expected to increase as rescuers had just reached the remote site to look for victims," Dhakal said, adding that 50 people had been plucked to safety using helicopters.

In neighbouring Kaski district, seven people were killed, said a second government official in the tourist town of Pokhara. Another seven were killed in Jajarkot district in the far west.

"We are searching for eight people who are still missing," said Kishore Shrestha, a senior police official.

In the southern plains bordering India, the Koshi river, which causes deadly floods in the eastern Indian state of Bihar almost every year, was flowing above the danger level, police said.

Landslides and flash floods are common occurrence in mountainous Nepal during the June-September monsoon every year.

flood situations in Nepal's neighbours India, Bangladesh are worsening due to heavy rains. The major rivers that these countries share are running over the danger level.

High blood sugar elevates Covid mortality risk: study

AFP, Paris

Patients with abnormally high blood sugar levels are more than twice as likely to die from COVID-19, researchers in China said yesterday.

It is the first time scientists have been able to confirm that patients with hyperglycemia, but not diagnosed with diabetes, are at higher risk of death from COVID-19, they wrote in the journal Diabetologia.

The researchers examined death rates for 605 COVID-19 patients at two hospitals in Wuhan, China.

Having high blood pressure is "independently associated" with increased risk of death and complications from COVID-19, they wrote.

The study builds on previous research on diabetic patients.

One-in-10 COVID-19 patients with diabetes died in French hospitals, a far higher proportion than for patients without the condition, a May study in the

same journal found.

Exactly why high blood sugar increases COVID-19 death rates remains clear.

The authors of Friday's study suggested that blood clotting, the weakening of blood vessel linings, and cytokine storm syndrome -- an overreaction of the immune system -- could all play a role.

The authors of the report urged hospitals to test all COVID-19 patients for glucose levels, as opposed to only those known to have diabetes.

The study, which looked at hospital patients admitted in January and February, had some limitations, experts not involved in the research said.

"This is a nice report but it is fully in line with expectations," Naveed Sattar, a professor of metabolic medicine at the University of Glasgow who was not one of the study's authors, said.

More research involving randomised controlled trials is needed, Bernard Khoo, a professor of endocrinology at University College London, commented.

Indonesia 'dog doctor' rescues canines from pandemic peril

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian doctor Susana Somali and her staff cut tightly-bound plastic ropes off dozens of whimpering dogs rescued from the butcher's block after being sold or abandoned during the coronavirus pandemic.

Somali's sprawling Jakarta complex, home to about 1,400 canines, has become a refuge for at-risk animals as cash-strapped owners sell them into the Southeast Asian nation's controversial dog meat trade.

Mostly acting on tip-offs, Somali and her team hit the streets looking for stray dogs and butcher shops where more and more doomed animals are spending their last days howling in cramped cages.

Somali -- who juggles a day job testing COVID-19 samples at a local hospital -- started the shelter in an upscale Jakarta neighbourhood more than a decade ago.



Back then, she rescued one or two dogs from a butcher each week. But that number has soared to as many as 20 in recent months as strays are snatched off the streets for their meat.

The 55-year-old mother of two negotiates with often unfriendly butchers, sometimes paying them cash or supplying other meat to secure the animals' release.

"The real battle isn't rescuing them from butchers, although that is always scary. The challenge is taking care of these dogs during the pandemic,"

Somali said.

Somali and about 30 staff at Pejaten Animal Shelter are struggling to care for a huge number of animals as donations plunge in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak. Myriad breeds, including huskies, pit bulls, and German shepherds, roam the 5,000 square metre shelter, which Somali started in 2009.

Somali and her team rescued dozens of puppies bound for a local Korean eatery this month, but they don't always make it in time.

Animal welfare groups estimate as many as one million dogs are killed annually across Indonesia, with more than 100 restaurants in Jakarta alone serving their meat, according to government figures.

Dog is often a culinary speciality among Indonesia's non-Muslim minority groups. The animals are considered unclean in Islam and rarely kept as pets in Muslim-majority countries.

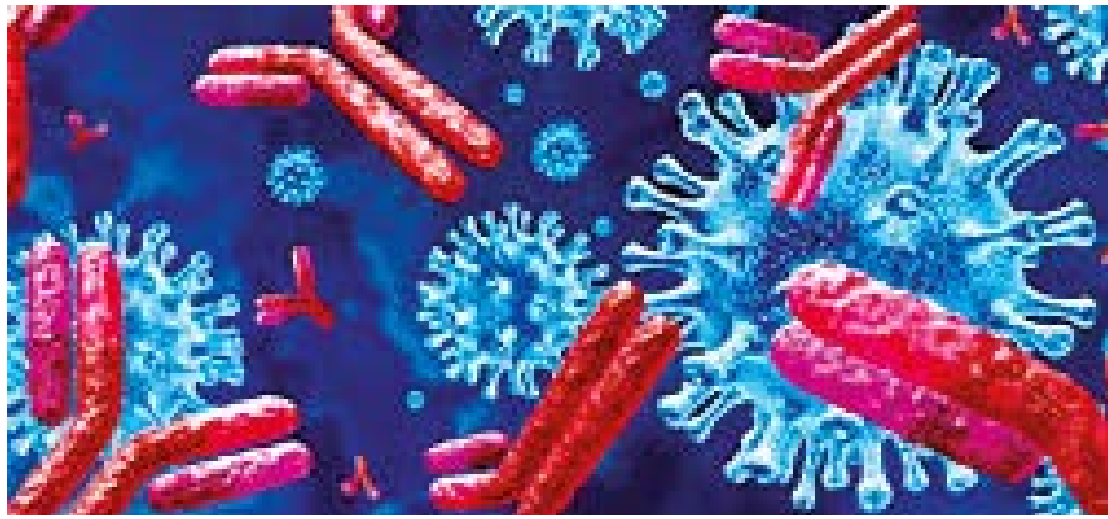
Strengthen immunity and fight coronavirus

FAHMIDA HASHEM

Fears about coronavirus have prompted online searches and plenty of misinformation about how to strengthen the immune system. As worries grow about the new coronavirus, online searches for ways to bolster the immune system have surged. One cannot avoid the risk of being affected by the virus, but the right diet is said to support the immune system so that it is ready to take on anything.

Building a healthy immune system is not rocket science, a lot of it is common sense. So, how do we support robust immunity? What to eat to help protect yourself from coronavirus? Nutrition experts reveal the foods and spices that boost your immunity and health fast. There are several nutrients that you can include in your eating plan that may help keep your immune system strong.

Ginger is an ingredient that may help decrease inflammation, reduce a sore throat and plays a powerful role as an antioxidant. Cloves help to fight cold and flu. Turmeric increases the body's antioxidant capacity and strengthens immunity. Turmeric



and cinnamon have strong anti-inflammatory properties and can be added to warm water, coffee and desserts. garlic is a popular remedy for colds, it has a strong anti-inflammatory effect.

Most people turn to vitamin C after they have caught a cold because it helps build up your immune system. It increases the production of white blood cells. Popular citrus fruits include grapefruit, oranges, lemons and limes. your body does not produce or store vitamin C, so you need daily vitamin C for

strong immunity.

Omega 3 fatty acids can reduce inflammation in the body. The lining of the cells is protected by this fatty acid. It thus keeps the immune system in check. It bolsters the immune system, so when there is a viral attack the body is prepared. Have walnuts and oily sea fish which contain omega 3.

Broccoli is supercharged with vitamins A, C, and E, as well as many other antioxidants and fibre which can fight diseases. Spinach is also packed with

numerous antioxidants and beta carotene, which may increase the infection-fighting ability of our immune systems. Like broccoli, spinach is healthiest when it is cooked as little as possible so that it retains its nutrients.

Yoghurt that has live and active cultures called probiotics stimulate the immune system to help fight diseases and promote beneficial bacteria growth in the gut. Almonds contain vitamin E which helps to prevent and fight off colds.

Our bodies need adequate

vitamin D to produce the antimicrobial proteins that kill viruses and bacteria. These proteins are particularly active in the respiratory tract. Vitamin D can be found in fatty fish, such as salmon, and milk or foods fortified with vitamin D.

Variety is the key to proper nutrition. Eating just one of these foods would not be enough to help fight off the flu/cold, even if you eat it constantly. Pay attention to serving sizes and recommended daily intake so that you do not get too much of a single vitamin and too little of others.

Prevention is better than cure. If you boost and strengthen your immune system, you will be able to prevent sickness naturally. Your immune system does a marvelous job of fighting off germs and disease. Also, you should practice good hygiene. There is no magic pill, or a specific food guaranteed to bolster your immune system and protect you from the new coronavirus. But there are real ways you can take care of yourself and give your immune system the best chance to do its job against this respiratory illness.

The writer is a nutritionist. E-mail: fahmidahashem60@gmail.com

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE



Important HIV prevention, treatment and cure research unveiled at AIDS 2020

Leading HIV researchers announced important new developments in HIV research at the 23rd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2020: Virtual) held recently. This includes what may be the first report of an adult with HIV to achieve long-term HIV remission without the need for a bone marrow transplant and new data showing that long-acting injectable cabotegravir is superior to daily oral Truvada for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

Other announcements included promising new insights on PrEP's impact on reducing HIV incidence in rural Kenya and Uganda, encouraging data on the potential link between dolutegravir and neural tube defects, and positive results in a trial comparing multidrug antiretroviral therapies.

"Since 1985 the International AIDS Conference has helped answer the most pressing research questions in HIV, and this year is no different," Anton Pozniak, President of the International AIDS Society and International Chair of AIDS 2020: Virtual, said. "The studies presented at AIDS 2020: Virtual advance our knowledge on multiple fronts, knowledge that can potentially help the communities and regions most impacted by HIV worldwide."

HEALTH bulletin



All data can become health data!

Digitally tracking people's everyday activities creates a "digital health footprint" that puts one's privacy at risk, according to a JAMA Network Open study.

Researchers interviewed 26 experts about sources of digital information originating outside health care that could help build that footprint (for example, activity apps, text conversations, online banking).

The experts agreed that "all data can become health data." For example, a grocery store receipt could be used to predict a person's haemoglobin A1c level, or GPS coordinates could spot a visit to an abortion clinic. The experts noted that "the line between just general digital data and health data is going to become so blurred... and the regulations are not going to catch up." That could lead to "discrimination based off of just 1 or 2 streams of information."

The experts identified several risky elements of the footprint; for instance, there is a high risk for inaccuracy, the data can exist forever, and the information is highly marketable.

Antibiotic resistance: an ignored enemy in COVID-19

ŠARKER MOHAMMAD NASRULLAH, MD, SHADLY BENZADID AND AHMED HOSSAIN

The COVID-19 pandemic has already brought the world to its knees. Although the world is busy combating the obvious enemy, our other arch-nemesis is rising stronger than ever before during this pandemic. It is a threat with the ability to kill in greater numbers than any other human-known disease once it reaches its peak. Antibiotic resistance is this menace that we are facing.

Antibiotic resistance is a phenomenon where a germ becomes resistant to antibiotic treatment. A germ can be a virus, bacterium, fungus or parasite. Microbes can store information about antimicrobials in their genes. They use this knowledge to mutate and upgrade their defense to become stronger than the drugs used to kill them.

Indiscriminate use of antibiotics leads to the development of resistance in the germs when they are prescribed irrationally without proper indication of the drug. Using broad-spectrum antibiotics too frequently is yet another reason. Studies also show that almost 20-50% of all the antibiotic treatments are either inappropriately indicated or questionable.

Moreover, people often do not follow the prescription properly, stopping the medicine earlier than the prescribed period. The availability of over-the-counter antibiotics has also led to self-medication and excessive use. In



either case, if a drug is taken for an inadequate period or in an inappropriate dose, it eventually results in the development of resistance.

COVID-19 is a viral disease that greatly weakens the immune system of severely affected patients, making them susceptible to secondary infections by other germs. But it is not possible to test all the patients for coinfections as manpower is already short and focused on managing the emergencies.

Therefore, antibiotics are being used widely to prevent possible infections as well as for treating critical cases. Data show that less than 10% of COVID-19 patients have secondary viral or bacterial infections, whereas almost 70% of them are receiving antimicrobials as treatment or prophylaxis.

When the clinician does not have all the necessary information about the pathology of the infection, s/he inclines towards prescribing antibiotics even more. On the other hand, patients frequently demand a prescription of antibiotics in fear of the disease, thinking it would save them from greater suffering and cure them faster. Media reports about a few drugs, allegedly effective in treating COVID-19 without any reliable clinical evidence or trial, have only added fuel to this fire.

Despite the major setback in the global struggle to keep antibiotic resistance in check due to COVID-19, we must not loosen our grip on the leash. Appropriate and systematic testing of COVID-19 patients with symptoms of possible bacterial coinfections should be conducted to choose the proper treatment regimen as far as possible in the present circumstances. Antibiotics should not be consumed at any cost without professional medical advice. We can surely win over this crisis with great effort and some hope like many others we have overcome before.

The writers are researchers from the North South University Global Health Institute, Bangladesh.

Dhaka trial recommends Favipiravir in COVID-19 treatment

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Bangladesh Society of Medicine (BSM) has found the effectiveness of Favipiravir as the first possible clinically proven drug for the treatment of people infected with COVID-19, says a press release.

After ending trial in Wuhan province of China and Russia, the Dhaka trial revealed similar kind of effectiveness of the Favipiravir in treating the COVID-19 infected patients.

"To evaluate usefulness and safety of favipiravir in treating the COVID-19 patients, we have conducted a double-blind, placebo-controlled randomised clinical trial for the first time in Bangladesh and we named it as Dhaka Trial," said Principal Investigator of the trial, Dr Ahmedul Kabir, Professor of the Department of Medicine, Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.

Beacon Pharmaceuticals Limited, Bangladesh has manufactured 'Favipira', a preparation of Favipiravir for the treatment of COVID-19 patients.



PHOTO: COURTESY

A speaker is talking at the dissemination session of the Dhaka trial on Favipiravir. Although there is no specific prescribed medicine in the world for treating the COVID-19 patients till the date, 'Favipira', a preparation of Favipiravir showed some promise.



HOW TO HOME QUARANTINE

The home quarantined person should:



Stay in a well-ventilated single-room preferably with an attached toilet



Needs to stay away from elderly people, pregnant women, children



Restrict his/her movement within the house



Under no circumstances attend any social/religious gathering



Wash hand frequently with soap and water or with alcohol-based sanitizer



Avoid sharing household items like dishes, glasses, cups, utensils, towels, bedding



Wear a surgical mask at all time. The mask should be changed every 8-8 hours



Dispose off used mask in a closed bin and bin should also be handled responsibly



If symptoms appear, he/she should immediately inform the nearest health centre

COVID-19 OUTBREAK



In Search of Excellence

Clinics and diagnostic centres without valid licenses?

The DGHS and health ministry cannot absolve themselves of responsibility

WE are appalled to know that two-thirds of the country's private clinics and diagnostic centres have been operating without valid licences since 2018. There are more than 15,000 of such clinics and diagnostic centres responsible for various surgeries, medical treatment and pathological tests. In the context of the ongoing pandemic, the implications of such anomalies in legal compliances are quite frightening.

This inexplicable gap in accountability cannot be explained away by saying that the renewal of licenses has been slow because of DGHS's switching to digitisation—as has been claimed by an official of that body. Nor is it acceptable that all the DGHS can do is serve notices and declare clinics and diagnostic centres illegal if they violate the Medical Practice and Private Clinics and Laboratories (Regulation) Ordinance, 1982 under which these facilities are governed. These are not acceptable excuses for allowing such crucial establishments, which deal with people's medical treatment, to operate illegally for any period of time. We have seen what can happen through the case of the recent Regent Hospital scandal, in which thousands of patients were swindled by the hospital by issuing fake Covid-19 reports, endangering their very lives.

We know that there are many such clinics and diagnostic centres where both testing and treatments are questionable. And if tests are not reliable, the diagnosis will be wrong and so will the treatment.

A major revision of the process of making these medical facilities compliant with the law is urgently needed. The first step would be to carry out a proper probe into why these facilities were allowed to run without valid licences in the first place. According to DGHS, there are only three officials to look after the licences of around 5,000 clinics and diagnostic centres. The health ministry must immediately increase the DGHS's manpower and give it the authority to close down clinics and diagnostic centres that have not renewed their licences, instead of merely sending notices and publishing announcements in the newspapers.

There also has to be close monitoring of these establishments so that they maintain the basic standards of diagnostic testing, cleanliness and medical treatment including surgeries and procedures. For this, the DGHS itself must be transparent and purged of all corrupt elements that might have helped these dubious establishments to continue operations. A former director of DGHS has suggested that the licensing process be decentralised with upazilas, civil surgeons, health and family planning officers issuing and renewing licenses—of course, after thorough scrutiny of the facilities. Such suggestions should be taken heed of. The DGHS and health ministry must make clinics and diagnostic centres compliant with the law and accountable when they violate it. Lives depend on such basic oversight by these authorities.

Malaysia leading the way

Migrant workers deserve fair legal protection

MALAYSIA is planning to introduce an e-wages system which will alert the government in case foreign workers working on Malaysian territory do not get paid. It is a fantastic idea. And we couldn't agree more with the Malaysian government that such a system is necessary to ensure that foreign workers are not taken advantage of and that they regularly receive the economic compensation they have worked for.

The Malaysian government is also planning to enforce Section 446 of the Workers' Minimum Standards of Housing and Amenities Act from September 1 to ensure that all employers provide housing and accommodation and that their workers' welfare is taken care of. Moreover, according to Malaysia's human resources minister, his ministry will also propose that every foreign worker be given protection under the Social Security Organisation in order to meet the international standard of treating all workers, foreign or domestic, equally.

The ongoing pandemic has wreaked havoc for many a migrant worker, especially those from Bangladesh. It has also exposed the vulnerable conditions they are forced to live and work in, with employers and host countries abandoning thousands of them at the first sight of hardship. Thousands of our workers have lost their jobs, and many have been deported and even denied their wages despite having worked for them. And all of this has been possible due to there being a lack of mechanism through which migrant workers could ensure that they are not treated this unfairly.

The Malaysian government could change all this for the majority of migrant workers around the world with the steps it is mulling over. Should Malaysia implement them, a debate over protecting migrant workers could start, and other countries around the world could be convinced to follow suit. Thus, we are fully on board with these steps and would like to call upon other countries to consider taking similar measures to protect migrant workers.

A Tale of Misplaced Priorities

BLACK, WHITE AND GREY



ALI RIAZ

IT'S mind-boggling to think of a situation where there is an urgency, poor people are in dire need, and money is in the hands of the government allocated to help those in need, but the money is not being distributed properly. This is what is happening with the Bangladesh government's cash transfer programme for the poor people in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak. It is both baffling and symptomatic of the government's mismanagement in addressing the catastrophe of an unprecedented magnitude. It is also a tale of misplaced priorities.

Since Bangladesh was hit by the pandemic in March, with its first case of infection identified on March 8 and the first fatality on March 18, concerns grew about the impact of the looming crisis on public health and the economy. By the time its first case was recorded, more than two months had already passed of the global pandemic with the global death toll surpassing 7,800 and the number of infected 191,000—but the government was in denial. Ministers and ruling party leaders claimed that "we are ready". But a pandemic, like a tsunami, does not wait for someone's acknowledgement. It just ravages as it wishes. Consequently, Covid-19 continued to spread in Bangladesh while testing was done at the lowest rate in the world, even though complacency was palpable among the ruling party leaders and government officials. The focus of the entire state machinery, since the beginning of the year, was somewhere else.

The economic impact of the pandemic rapidly became obvious by late March. As businesses were being shut down, albeit partially, and economic downturn began, anyone could see that the misery would spare no one, but it would hit some more than others. There were repeated calls from the economists and concerned citizens that the poorest sections of the society need help from the government. The stimulus packages, which were declared in two phases in March and April, left the most vulnerable behind. The misplaced priorities and ambiguous modalities of these stimulus packages were evident. While cash transfer was a key component of the stimulus packages of governments all around the world, Bangladeshi stimulus packages completely ignored the option.

The government's decision to extend its social safety network, provide food relief and enhance its Open Market Sales (OMS) programme were badly needed steps taken in late March and early April. But largescale corruption, theft and pilferage defeated their purpose. Throughout April, media reports showed how local Awami League leaders, elected representatives of local councils, parliament members and local government officials were collectively part of a scheme to deprive the poor and needy. The official reaction of the ruling party was that it is "embarrassed", while

its activists filed cases against anyone who dared to speak on social media. Journalists faced the wrath and the Digital Security Act (DSA) once again became the weapon of choice. As for those who perpetrated the crime, few were reprimanded, and far fewer brought to justice.

These were happening when at least 16.4 million new people were pushed below the poverty line, according to Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). Bangladesh's overall poverty level was projected to increase by 25.13 percent, where rural poverty would be 24.23 percent and urban poverty would be 27.52 percent. According to the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM), the rate of poverty in Bangladesh may have doubled to 40.9 percent since the beginning of the pandemic.

By mid-May, there were some realisations that those who are in the informal sector and relying on daily

allocated to cover the cost of distribution. As the lists were being prepared, copious press reports revealed how it became a repeat of the relief distribution scam, with the ruling party activists, their families, local officials, and local representatives being listed to receive the money. Dozens of cases were reported in which a single phone number, of an influential local AL leader, was used to list dozens, in some cases hundreds, of names.

Almost two months have passed since the announcement was made—"help is on the way". But as of July 7, only 1.6 million have received the money. Some 3.4 million are yet to get any support. Why the delay? Because the lists prepared by the local administrations are full of flaws. Those who should not be eligible were listed; for example, 3,000 government employees and 7,000 pensioners were listed. These lists included people who are receiving support from other social safety programmes. Some are listed with

in the wake of Covid-19 all around the world were meant to help individuals address the immediate crisis. They have been implemented accordingly. In many instances, there have been more than one round of cash transfers. Bangladeshi poor are waiting.

The failure to administer the cash transfer programme quickly and efficiently is symptomatic of the mismanagement of the government. Lack of coordination, from testing to economic stimulus packages, is easily discernible. Instead of trying to address the rampant corruption and reign in the party activists and loyalists within the administration, the government's actions have slowed down the programme itself. Most importantly, it has revealed the priorities of the government—poorer segments are the least of its concerns. The public health system has already failed to serve the citizens, particularly the less fortunate, while the elite and so-called VIPs are



The poor in Bangladesh are still waiting for cash assistance.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

income, the poorest of the poor, are in a desperate situation. Despite the claims of the previous years that economic growth has addressed poverty, within weeks of the pandemic the huge disparity that these strategies have engendered was laid bare. The extent of vulnerabilities of the poor and the lower middle class became difficult to hide behind the rhetoric of success.

It is against this background that the government declared a plan to provide a one-time assistance of Tk 2,500 each to five million families among the most vulnerable sections of society. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the initiative on May 14, and it was promised that the fund would reach everyone before Eid-ul-Fitr, May 20. The listed families were supposed to receive the money through mobile financial services. The government allocated a total of Tk 1,250 crore for this initiative; Tk 8 crore was

inaccurate information. Interestingly, according to a press report, some government officials have reportedly worked out an arrangement with their fellow officials—"I list your people, you list mine." But so far, nobody has been held responsible for these corrupt practices. There is no way one can justify these as "mistakes". Not holding anyone responsible is nothing short of condoning the crimes committed. The culture of impunity of the past years has contributed to these practices as those who did all these are well aware that nothing will happen to them.

The Covid-19 situation is rapidly deteriorating in Bangladesh, and the economic fallout is being borne by those who are at the bottom of the ladder. But they are the ones who are being ignored by the government, except for lip service. The cash transfer programmes adopted

being treated differently. The decision to impose fees for coronavirus tests at the government sites demonstrates the same mind-set. The number of tests has declined since the fee has been imposed, and it is the poor people who are now avoiding the test because they can hardly afford to spend the money at this time of economic hardship.

The economic crisis caused by the pandemic is not going to go away soon. The global recession is already upon us. Bangladesh's economy is bound to face more difficult days ahead. But it should not be the poor and middle class who disproportionately bear the burden, while the members of the privileged class and political elite enjoy preferential treatment.

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Is population growth risking our food security?



AHM ZEHAJUL KARIM

IN 1830, the world population was only 1 billion. It took 100 years for this number to double. But within a span of only 30 years, in 1960, global population reached 3 billion. Since then, the world population estimate started to spike exponentially, and it took hardly 15 years to reach the 4 billion mark, by 1975. The global population reached 6.8 billion in 2009, and it is estimated to reach 9.1 billion in 2050—with an increase of 47 percent over this period—showing an average addition of approximately 82 million people every year since 1930. This pace of increase is naturally disconcerting for social scientists and demographers globally.

We also have statistical evidence showing that 80 percent of the total population of the planet comes from lower-income countries in Asia and Africa, and the growth rate of these countries is also comparatively higher than that of the developed nations. Demographic pressure and poverty go hand in hand. The question is, why is the population of the underdeveloped nations increasing so rapidly compared to the developed nations? We also have to keep in mind that the worldwide growth rate of population at 1.8 percent does not apply to people living in rural areas and those living in urban slums and low-cost areas in the Third World countries. Although the overall population growth throughout the world as well as in a few developing countries decreased considerably in the recent past, this trend of slower growth has not been seen in many poor and underdeveloped countries.

In fact, most of these countries have already been overburdened with excessive

population pressure and its concurrent economic pressure. For example, Bangladesh has a total population of 165 million living in an area of 147,570 sq. km. As such, it remains the most densely populated country in the world, facing tremendous pressure on agricultural land and settlement. Although the economy recorded a sizable growth due to government initiatives in the last few years, there are reasons to fear that the country will not be able to attain

There are reasons to fear that the country will not be able to attain its wider development goal unless its demographic pressure is not overcome through appropriate social and human development.

its wider development goal unless its demographic pressure is not overcome through appropriate social and human development. It may not be able to show real progress unless it attends to other indicators of development, such as environmental protection, healthcare facilities, decreasing pollution, minimising the income gap, etc. Economist Amartya Sen argues that development entails a set of linked freedoms relating to social and human progress and rights which are essential elements of real development.

That makes it imperative for all countries of the world, including the Third World nations of Asia and Africa, to pay equal attention to the social crisis besides the economic one.

In the coming days, food crisis and economic hardship for these countries may reach a critical point. In a recent report, it has been mentioned that due to desertification, cropland loss, water scarcity, and resource depletion, food production throughout the world could be as much as 25 percent less than the projected demand for it by the year 2050. Another report estimates that the demand for food is expected to increase by 60 percent by 2050. The reason for this is undeniably the population growth. There are multifarious effects of a fast population growth and the most noticeable victim of it is the agricultural sector. Since land is the principal source of food production, it is directly affected by population pressure, which is also true for a country like Bangladesh.

The richest countries of Europe, the United States and Canada have a growth rate of less than 1 percent while the growth rate in the African countries still continues at 2.4 percent. We know that world population is increasing at the rate of 1.2 percent, yet the doubling time for population growth in many underdeveloped nations is estimated to be 25-37 years. In 1930, Bangladesh had a population of 35.5 million. It reached 153.5 million in 2008, despite the fact that the country has succeeded enormously in reducing its birth rate. The Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was reportedly terrified at the prospect of a huge demographic pressure on his country. In a speech in 1972, he expressed his concern over this matter and warned by saying that "if we are not careful, our population might reach 150 million in future, creating enormous problems in terms of our food and nutrition." Now, we

have already crossed that mark, creating an unsustainable environment for us all. This also goes for many other Third World countries. It is believed that many of these countries will face immense problems in terms of managing their food and nutrition intake, if the population increase is not halted immediately.

When the global population continues to increase at an abnormally high rate, it is obvious that there would be demand for more food for the survival of people. To feed such a large population, we would be left with only two alternatives: i) to bring more and more uncultivable land, forest and hills under cultivation which would further reduce our unused land resources; or ii) to increase our food productivity by cultivating the same plot of land repeatedly through a massive use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides and underground water by employing deep-tube wells and shallow tube wells, which would put a tremendous strain on the ground water table.

It so happens that people sometimes get unrealistically inspired by the cornucopian viewpoints about agricultural growth being supported by high technology which, they believe, can be effective in reducing hunger and malnutrition. Despite the increase of food production through technification of agriculture, we must think about the catastrophic destruction of our valuable land. Today, we hardly think about the destruction of land fertility and damage to soil which occurs due to overuse of chemical fertilisers and modern forms of extensive irrigation. The bottom-line is, if we want a better life free from diseases and with proper access to food and nutrition, we have to keep our population size at an optimum level. This has to be the priority going forward.

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UK's long-awaited 'smart' action against human rights abusers

KAMAL AHMED

THE United Kingdom has finally adopted the long-awaited Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime aimed at tackling human rights abusers around the world. With the announcement of targeted measures known as Magnitsky sanctions against individuals and entities accused of serious human rights violations in Russia, Saudi Arabia, Myanmar and North Korea on Monday, the UK has now joined the United States and Canada in bringing in legislation to penalise rights abusers. The term "Magnitsky sanctions" is derived from the name of a Russian auditor, Sergei Magnitsky, who died from custodial torture in a Moscow jail in 2009 after his revelation of a USD 230 million fraud by Russian tax officials in the UK.

The Magnitsky Act, first enacted by the US Congress in 2012, was hailed by human rights defenders as a much-needed "smart tool" to counter autocratic regimes across the world. It allows Western governments to target perpetrators without punishing the ordinary people of a country. Since then, legislators in all major Western countries have been demanding similar initiatives in their respective countries. Baltic nations have already enacted such laws. The European Union has also drafted a European Magnitsky Act, and the UK draft had been awaiting approval since 2018. This legislation enjoys cross-party support and the opposition has been blaming the ruling party, the Conservatives, for its deferment. Meanwhile, the US administration in recent years has

slapped dozens of travel bans on civil and security officials including ministers and their family members from a number of countries under this act. It has also frozen assets and bank accounts linked to those individuals and organisations.

On Monday, announcing the

in the sanctions list are 25 Russian nationals involved in the mistreatment and death of Sergei Magnitsky, 20 Saudi nationals involved in the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, two Myanmar generals accused of violence against the Rohingyas (Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of the

torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and 3) the right to be free from slavery, servitude or forced or compulsory labour. The new legislation empowers the government to target a wider network of perpetrators, including those who facilitate, incite, promote or support these crimes. According to Mr Raab, this network of perpetrators extends beyond state officials to non-state actors as well. A Foreign and Commonwealth Office spokesperson later told LBC Radio that "future targets of the regime may include those who commit unlawful killings perpetrated against journalists and media workers, or activity motivated on the grounds of religion or belief."

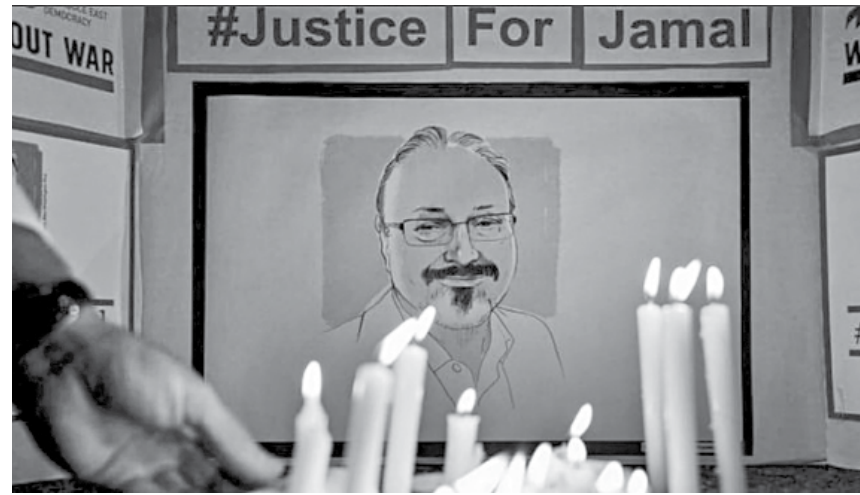
The Magnitsky Act in the US and Canada covers corruption by foreign dictators, their families and associates. Foreign Secretary Raab said that his government would explore the possibility of expanding the law further in line with the US and Canada. Recognising the limitations of such punitive actions against the worst offenders, Mr Raab told parliament that "targeted sanctions are most effective when they are done through coordinated collective action." He said that the UK would be working closely with other partners including the US, Canada, the European Union and Australia (the latter two are currently considering similar legislation).

Though this legislation is widely regarded as a right step in the right direction, doubts remain among rights campaigners about its wider application due to the current scale of human rights abuse in the world

by various authoritarian regimes. Application of the act by the Trump administration has already shown that it is very much a selective one, and many of the worst offenders are being spared. So possible exclusions due to wider strategic and trade interests may require some convincing of the rights groups. Inclusion of 20 Saudi officials in the list may help alleviate such suspicion. In the UK parliament, backbench MPs from the ruling party have already raised questions about why no one from the Chinese government was included in the sanctions list despite the persecution of Uyghur minority Muslims. Sir Ian Duncan Smith, former leader of the Conservative Party, has demanded imposition of sanctions against the Chief Executive of Hong Kong Carrie Lam.

Questions will inevitably arise about sparing authoritarian leaders and limiting actions against a few officials instead of the whole regime of a country where a climate of gross violation is set by the leaders. Despite these crucial questions, the latest British action should be seen as a powerful message to serious abusers that impunity enjoyed in their own countries does not extend beyond their borders. There are reasons to be hopeful that given the closer ties between some Commonwealth countries and the UK, it might work as a deterrent in places that suffer from democratic deficiency and lack of rule of law.

Kamal Ahmed is a freelance journalist based in London, UK.



Among the 49 people and organisations named in the UK sanctions list are 20 Saudi nationals involved in the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and two Myanmar generals accused of violence against the Rohingyas. PHOTO: REUTERS

imposition of sanctions on 49 people and organisations behind the most "notorious" cases of human rights abuse in recent years, the UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab termed them "thugs of despots and henchmen of dictators". He said the move sends a clear message and will stop those trying to launder their "blood-drenched ill-gotten gains". Among those named

Myanmar Armed Forces, and his deputy Soe Win), and two North Korean organisations linked with forced labour.

The criteria, unveiled by the UK government, under which alleged perpetrators of human rights abuses will be determined are: 1) the right to life, where it is threatened by assassinations and extrajudicial killing; 2) the right not to be subjected to

Malaysia's changing policy on Rohingya refugees

NEHGINPAO KIPGEN and DIKSHA SHANDILYA

MALAYSIA'S criticism of Myanmar over the Rohingya issue has been vocal, especially in recent years. Government leaders have spoken out through different platforms including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). However, things have visibly changed in recent months, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic. Kuala Lumpur has not only changed its tone but also its policy and actions toward the people it had stood up for.

Its actions have indicated that Kuala Lumpur has transformed from being a vocal critic of violence on the Rohingya community into a country of refusal.

One important reason why Malaysia has been sympathetic to the cause of Rohingyas is because of its shared beliefs in Islamic teachings. But it is intriguing as to why Malaysia has decided to change its position toward the Rohingyas whose fates are still very much precarious. Of course, one widely reported reason is the fear of contracting Covid-19 through the refugee population.

Though it is not a signatory to the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, Malaysia has for years been one of the favourite destinations for Rohingyas fleeing the oppression they are experiencing in Myanmar.

Strong words to support the Rohingya cause

At the 34th ASEAN summit in Thailand last year, Malaysia strongly condemned violence against the Rohingya community. During a meeting with his Southeast Asian counterparts in Bangkok on June 22, Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Bin Abdullah called

for the "perpetrators of the Rohingya issue to be brought to justice."

Earlier on November 13, 2018, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad slammed Myanmar and said, "It would seem that Aung San Suu Kyi is trying to defend what is indefensible... They are actually oppressing these people to the point of killing them, mass killing."

During an interview with Anadolu Agency in July 2019, Mahathir Mohamad also said, "They (the Rohingyas) should either be treated as nationals, or they should be given their territory to form their own state... massacre or genocide is involved and Malaysia is against genocide and the unfair treatment of the citizens of Myanmar."

In January 2017, former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak called on Muslim countries to lead international action to address the plight of Rohingyas. In his opening statement to the OIC gathering in Kuala Lumpur on January 19, 2017, Razak said, "Far too many people have lost their lives in Myanmar. Many have suffered appalling deaths, and those that have lived through the atrocities have witnessed or endured unspeakable cruelty. That in itself is a reason why we cannot keep silent."

From sympathy to abandonment? In a sharp contrast from its usual words of sympathy and concerns, Malaysian Defence Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob on June 9, 2020 said that boats carrying Rohingya refugees were not welcomed to Malaysia and instead pushed them back to Bangladesh. The minister warned that "the Rohingya should know, if they come here, they cannot stay."

In early June this year, the National Task Force of Malaysia said it had

detained 396 people attempting to sneak into the country illegally since May, along with 108 boat skippers and 11 suspected smugglers. During the same period, it also turned away 22 boats with some 140 immigrants trying to enter the country illegally.

As well as its refusal to accept the boat people, Malaysia's tone has changed with a heightened form of hate speech and xenophobic treatment in recent months. The surge in hate speech is believed to have been triggered partly by claims that the Rohingyas were demanding citizenship and other legal rights in Malaysia. The Malaysian government's decision in early April to turn back boats carrying Rohingya refugees also contributed to the increase in hate speech.

The rise in hate speech was followed by an anti-Rohingya banner put up in front of a mosque in the state of Johor, which read: "We are not welcoming Rohingyas... We do not need you here."

On May 11, an open letter signed by 83 organisations urged the government to combat online hate speech and xenophobia. The letter said, "We urge you to act immediately to address the recent proliferation of 'hate speech' and violent threats against the Rohingya community and to ensure the incendiary rhetoric does not trigger discriminatory acts or physical attacks." However, the letter seemed to have made no significant difference.

Threat of Covid-19 pandemic? The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an increase in xenophobia against Rohingyas. Recent incidents of refugee boat turn-backs and immigration raids of undocumented migrants have become an increasing concern since many of them live without legal protection in a society where they are often viewed with suspicion.



This handout photo taken and released on April 5, 2020 by the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency shows a wooden boat carrying suspected Rohingya migrants detained in Malaysian territorial waters off the island of Langkawi.

SOURCE: AFP

Moreover, due to the movement control order (MCO) amid Covid-19 pandemic, public health concern has become an excuse to stop saving lives at sea and a display of political muscle on immigration control. Hence, the Muslim-majority Malaysia which initially welcomed the Rohingyas has, in recent months, hardened its rhetoric dismissing the displaced people as illegal immigrants.

While Malaysia has a right to protect its national interest and security,

it can still show magnanimity in responding to the refugee crisis. The failure of ASEAN to respond to the influx of refugees and provide a basic human rights framework has now demonstrated the failure of every ASEAN government in their unified vision of "one ASEAN community"

Dr Nehginpao Kipgen is an associate professor, assistant dean and executive director respectively at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), Jindal School of International Affairs, and O.P. Jindal Global University. Diksha Shandilya is a research intern at CSEAS.

QUOTABLE Quote

NELSON MANDELA
(1918-2013)
President of South Africa.

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Texas border town
- 7 Toledo setting
- 11 Became frosted
- 12 Jack or joker
- 13 Give the meaning of
- 14 Pine or palm
- 15 Showed fear
- 17 Tampa team
- 20 One of the Titans
- 23 " - little teapot ..."
- 24 Internet stop
- 26 Knight's title
- 27 Annex
- 28 French denial
- 29 Chess finish
- 31 Punk rock offshoot
- 32 Energy choice
- 33 Cold War side

DOWN

- 1 Pot part
- 2 Great serve
- 3 Field worker
- 4 Works copy
- 5 Sahara sight
- 6 Ready for business
- 7 Big singing groups
- 8 Uncompromising positions
- 9 Rage
- 10 Keats work
- 16 Black color
- 17 Gets up
- 18 - acids
- 19 Gridiron markings
- 21 Molecule's makeup
- 22 Madrid mister
- 24 Sports
- 25 Avenue tree
- 30 Launch site sight
- 33 Road reversal
- 35 Puts away
- 36 Detective's find
- 37 Sandal sight
- 38 Mendes of movies
- 40 Got together
- 41 "The Matrix" hero
- 42 Road-house

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

I D L E S S H O O T
 D E A L T H I N G E
 E A R L Y R I S E R S
 A R K L I E S E T
 G A P E S D O R M S
 E X E S Y E A H
 T E P I D P O P P Y
 T N E A R S
 A B S U S E A S A
 L A T E C H A R G E S
 P L A N E C H E C K
 S E N D S H O S T S

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

YOU GOT A LETTER? FROM MY GIRL BACK HOME WHY DOESN'T SHE JUST EMAIL? SHE CAN'T PUT PERFUME ON IT

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

COME ON GUNS! LET'S GO! I'M TIRED OF GETTING STUCK IN THE BACK SEAT! BUT IT'S SAFER FOR YOU TO RIDE BACK THERE, ZOE. I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM WITH RIDING BACK HERE... I'M JUST TIRED OF GETTING STUCK! HEY YOU FOUND MY GUM!

War crimes

FROM PAGE 12
RECOGNITION BY TANZANIA
 Tanzania today announces recognition of Bangladesh. So far, 78 countries have accorded recognition to the newly-independent country.

1 LAKH TUBE-WELLS FOR VILLAGES
 The ministry of local government has undertaken a scheme to ensure supply of drinking water in the rural areas by sinking one lakh new tube-wells across the country. Besides, 60,000 old tube-wells which are out of commission will be repaired.
SOURCES: July 13, 1972 issues of *Bangladesh Observer*, *Dainik Bangla* and *Dainik Ittefaq*.

Rape accused

FROM PAGE 12
 connection. Akram was named the prime accused in the case, the OC said.
 Around 2:00am yesterday, a police team launched a drive in Uttar Manikpur village on information that Akram and his cohorts were staying there.

Sensing the presence of law enforcers, the criminals opened fire at cops. Police fired retaliatory shots, triggering a "gunfight", the OC said. After about 15 minutes, the criminals backed off and escaped the area, leaving bullet-hit Akram behind. Police rushed the injured to Noakhali General Hospital where doctors declared him dead. Three cops were wounded during the "gunfight", police claimed.

Akram's sister Aklima Aktar said Cox's Bazar police picked up her brother from her home in the district on Thursday night.

"Police later took him to Uttar Manikpur village in Noakhali and staged the gunfight there about 27 hours after his arrest," Aklima said. Senbagh police also claimed to have recovered a gun, a Chinese machete, and six bullet shells from the spot. They filed two cases in connection with the incident.

On June 15, a suspect of another rape case, Mizanur Rahman, 40, was killed in a "gunfight" with police in the same upazila.

DGHS

FROM PAGE 12
 to increase, DGHS signed the MoU with Regent Hospital, "supposing it would encourage other private hospitals to come forward to treat Covid-19 patients," the letter reads. The DGHS also claimed it was unaware of the fraudulent activities of Shahed and his hospitals. After being informed by the intelligence agency, they, along with Rab, conducted a raid at the hospital.

DGHS also said it gave permission to JKG Group to set up booths and collect samples of coronavirus patients as its coordinator Ariful Chowdhury went to DGHS and claimed that that his organisation was able to set up booths -- like in South Korea -- to help the government deal with the Covid-19 crisis.

But after receiving allegations, DGHS cancelled the permission of JKG's sample collection, it reads. Seeking cooperation from people, DGHS in the letter said a vested quarter was trying to tarnish the image of DGHS by providing false information to media.

Five killed

FROM PAGE 12
 Police earlier posted pictures of some of the confiscated weapons on Twitter, saying they were dealing with a "hostage situation and shooting". One potential motive for the attack is a power struggle at the church between rival factions, local media reported.

Four people were found shot and burnt to death in a car while a fifth victim, a security guard, was also fatally shot, local authorities said.

The National Commissioner of Police General Khehla John Sitole said the quick response by authorities averted even more destruction and death.

"I am certain that the speedy response by the joint security forces has averted what could have been a more severe blood bath," Sitole said in a statement yesterday. "... It is rather unfortunate that such an incident takes place during a time when South Africa is being plagued by a deadly virus and violent crimes."

The South African Police Service and National Defense Force responded to reports of a shooting and an alleged hostage situation at the International Pentecostal Holiness Church at 3:00 am local time.

Bangladeshi

FROM PAGE 12
 it to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital for an autopsy. Jamil also said, "We are vigilant at the border and continuing awareness campaign among locals. We urge all people in bordering areas not to risk their life by entering India."
 So far, five Bangladeshis were killed either by Indian Khasia citizens of bordering villages or Indian Border Security Force in three bordering upazilas of Sylhet in the last three months.



Workers of a ready-made garment factory blocked Begum Rokeya Sarani for around five hours yesterday as over 2,000 of them suddenly received a transfer notice to Tongi, an area known for high Covid-19 transmission.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Syndicates active again

FROM PAGE 12
 with each syndicate having around eight to 10 members. The syndicates are now also involving women to evade law enforcement, he further said.

"Most of their ringleaders have been arrested earlier but go back to the crime after getting bail."

On June 23, Nilphamari district police arrested five members of a note forgery syndicate -- the first such arrest in the district in the last five years.

During interrogation, the arrestees told the police they were visiting various border districts and North Bengal to spread counterfeit notes ahead of Eid-ul-Azha due to their lax monitoring systems.

Mohammed Mokhesur Rahman, superintendent of police in Nilphamari, told The Daily Star that they learnt from the arrestees that note forgery syndicates are targeting North Bengal and the border districts to spread counterfeit notes. But the police remain alert and increased vigilance to detect these crimes, he

said. "We have also got some syndicate members' identities but they went into hiding after the arrests of their associates. We are now conducting drives to arrest them," he said.

According to a source in Police Headquarters, around 7,203 cases were filed regarding arrests and recovery of counterfeit notes across the country in the last 19 years.

A high-placed police official said the majority of these cases were filed in Dhaka, Chattogram, Barishal, Feni, Bogura, and Meherpur districts. This year is the first time that the activities of note forging syndicates were witnessed in North Bengal.

Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Abdullah Abu told The Daily Star they tried their best to prove these note forgery cases when they reach the courts, in order to ensure punishment.

"The convocation rate of these cases is around 80 percent," he added.

A lawyer of a Dhaka court told this newspaper that the police mainly brought charges against note forger

syndicates under sections 420, 468, 469, and 471 of the Penal Code. For these charges, the accused may get sentenced to imprisonment for life or with imprisonment of either three or seven years for a term which may extend up to ten years, he said.

"But, courts generally award seven years of imprisonment in note forgery cases," he added.

In jail, a year's term ends in nine months, meaning the arrestees usually get released within five years and return to their previous profession, said police officials.

Meanwhile, syndicate members were found to be adopting new techniques to make counterfeit notes avoiding detection.

On June 29, Rapid Action Battalion arrested six members -- including two women -- of a note forgery syndicate from Bashundhara in the capital. Rab recovered around Tk 4 crores worth of counterfeit notes, around Rs 40 lakh worth of counterfeit Indian currency, and materials to prepare around Tk 25 - 30 crore more counterfeit notes.

Rab said the arrestees used to boil original Tk 100 banknotes in water and once the colour was washed away, print the colour of the Tk 500 note on the paper. This is why the paper and security measures on the counterfeit notes were the same as the original banknotes.

The syndicate's plan was to spread the counterfeit notes in the market ahead of Eid and cattle market.

Police and Rab officials said due to these new techniques and expenses taken to prepare counterfeit notes, the price for Tk 1 lakh worth of counterfeit notes went up by three times from that last year.

Last year, counterfeit note syndicate members used to sell Tk 1 lakh worth of counterfeit notes for only Tk 8,000 - 10,000 but are now selling the same for Tk 30,000 - 40,000.

DB DC Mashur Rahman said that they have learned of the higher price of counterfeit notes and the new techniques used. "We have already increased vigilance to detect their [the syndicates'] hideouts."

Virus affects entire body

FROM PAGE 12
 Center in New York City -- one of the hospitals flooded with patients in the spring -- went through their own experiences and collected reports from other medical teams around the world.

Their comprehensive picture shows the coronavirus attacks virtually every major system in the human body, directly damaging organs and causing the blood to clot, the heart to lose its healthy rhythm, the kidneys to shed blood and protein and the skin to erupt in rashes. It causes headaches, dizziness, muscle aches, stomach pain and other symptoms along with classic respiratory symptoms like coughing and fever.

"Physicians need to think of Covid-19 as a multisystem disease," said Dr Aakriti Gupta, a cardiologist fellow at Columbia who worked on the review, in a statement. "There's a lot of news about clotting but it's also important to understand that a substantial proportion of these patients suffer kidney, heart, and brain damage, and physicians need to

treat those conditions along with the respiratory disease."

Much of the damage wrought by the virus appears to come because of its affinity for a receptor -- a kind of molecular doorway into cells -- called ACE2. Cells lining the blood vessels, in the kidneys, the liver ducts, the pancreas, in the intestinal tract and lining the respiratory tract all are covered with ACE2 receptors, which the virus can use to grapple and infect cells, the Columbia team wrote in their review, published in the journal *Nature Medicine*.

"These findings suggest that multiple-organ injury may occur at least in part due to direct viral tissue damage," the team wrote.

Coronavirus infection also activates the immune system. Part of that response includes the production of inflammatory proteins called cytokines. This inflammation can damage cells and organs and the so-called cytokine storm is one of the causes of severe symptoms.

"This virus is unusual and it's hard not to take a step back and

not be impressed by how many manifestations it has on the human body," Dr Mahesh Madhavan, another cardiology fellow who worked on the review, said in a statement.

Blood clotting effects appear to be caused by several different mechanisms: direct damage of the cells lining the blood vessels and interference with the various clotting mechanisms in the blood itself. Low blood oxygen caused by pneumonia can make the blood more likely to clot, the researchers said.

These clots can cause strokes and heart attacks or can lodge in the lungs or legs. They clog the kidneys and interfere with dialysis treatments needed for the sickest patients.

Damage to the pancreas can worsen diabetes, and patients with diabetes have been shown to be at the highest risk of severe illness and death from coronavirus.

The virus can directly damage the brain, but some of the neurological effects likely come from the treatment. "Covid-19 patients can be intubated for two to three weeks; a quarter

require ventilators for 30 or more days," Gupta said.

"These are very prolonged intubations, and patients need a lot of sedation. 'ICU delirium' was a well-known condition before Covid, and the hallucinations may be less an effect of the virus and more an effect of the prolonged sedation."

The virus affects the immune system, depleting the T-cells the body usually deploys to fight off viral infections. "Lymphopenia, a marker of impaired cellular immunity, is a cardinal laboratory finding reported in 67%-90% of patients with Covid-19," the researchers wrote.

Doctors need to treat all of these effects when coronavirus patients show up in the hospital, the Columbia team said.

There is some good news. "Gastrointestinal symptoms may be associated with a longer duration of illness but have not been associated with increased mortality," the researchers wrote. Many of the skin effects, such as rashes and purplish, swollen "Covid toes," also clear up on their own.

Pandemic highlights danger posed by wildlife crime: UN

AFP, Vienna

The novel coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the need to combat the threat to human health posed by the illegal trafficking of wild animals, according to a UN report published Friday.

The report published by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) points out "zoonotic diseases -- those caused by pathogens that spread from animals to humans -- represent up to 75 percent of all emerging infectious diseases."

"Without human interference through capturing, slaughtering, selling, trafficking, trading and

consuming of wildlife, the evolution and transmission of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 would have been highly unlikely," the UNODC said in its annual *World Wildlife Crime Report*.

Pangolins, the mammals thought by some scientists to be the possible host of the novel coronavirus, are the most trafficked mammals in the world and the report says seizures of their scales have increased tenfold between 2014 and 2018.

Pangolin scales are prized in traditional Chinese medicine -- despite a lack of scientific proof -- and used for

the treatment of various diseases such as arthritis, ulcers and tumours.

The report warns that the current pandemic may worsen some forms of trafficking as some "wildlife products may be touted as 'cures' for Covid-19, notably bear bile."

In terms of other trends in smuggling of flora and fauna, the report noted that "demand for tropical hardwood timber has grown greatly in the last two decades" with illegal African rosewood entering some legal supply chains, such as the international wood furniture trade.

However, the report says the

demand for African ivory and rhinoceros horn is in decline.

The report's analysis of trends in wildlife crime uses a database compiling details of 180,000 seizures from 149 countries and territories between 1999 and 2009.

"To build back better from the Covid-19 crisis, we cannot afford to ignore wildlife crime," UNODC director Ghada Waly said in a statement accompanying the report, calling for further anti-trafficking legislation to be adopted in affected countries, as well as better inter-agency co-ordination.

US judge delays federal execution, citing pandemic

AFP, Washington

A US court halted Friday what would have been the first federal execution in 17 years, yielding to a request from victims' relatives worried about traveling during the pandemic to watch the inmate die.

Hours later the Justice Department appealed against the decision.

Daniel Lee, a 47-year-old white supremacist, was convicted in 1999 of killing a gun dealer, his wife and her eight-year-old daughter in Arkansas.

Lee had been scheduled to die Monday by lethal injection at a prison in Indiana.

But relatives of the victims,

including Earlene Peterson, the grandmother of the little girl, asked this week for the execution to be delayed because of the pandemic.

They said they faced the tough choice of exercising their right to witness the execution and protecting their health by avoiding travel during the coronavirus crisis.

Jane Magnus-Stinson, chief judge of the US District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, agreed to put the execution on hold.

"The public, like the government, has an interest in (the) prompt and orderly execution of Mr. Lee's death sentence," she wrote.

"But the public also has an interest --

codified by Congress -- in ensuring that crime victims are treated with fairness and with respect for the victim's dignity," Magnus-Stinson added.

US prosecutors can appeal the decision all the way to the Supreme Court but Baker Kurrus, a lawyer for Peterson and other relatives of the victims, expressed hope that they would not.

However, the US Justice Department said late Friday that it would in fact appeal to keep the execution on track for Monday.

Peterson opposes the death penalty and has asked the administration of President Donald Trump several times to grant Lee clemency.

Flood strikes

FROM PAGE 12
 In Kurigram, a two-year-old boy named Arman Hossain was drowned in the floodwaters of a small beel next to his residence at Nawdabosh village under Phulbari upazila on Friday afternoon.

In Nilphamari, the Teesta was flowing 28 cm above danger level yesterday afternoon, according to the local WDB office.

The river will continue to rise, worsening the flood situation, the office warned.

Officials of local administration are preparing to evacuate people from the risky areas.

In Gaibandha, yesterday afternoon the Teesta crossed the danger mark by 0.2 cm at the Kaunia point for the first time this year.

Meanwhile, the Brahmaputra's water level almost reached the danger mark at the Fulchari point around 3.00pm yesterday.

In Bogura, the Jamuna and the Bangali are rising again after falling below the danger mark about three days ago.

Within the next two to three days, both the rivers will cross the danger level, said Md Humayan Kabir, assistant engineer of the Bogura WDB.

In Tangail, for the last two days, the Jamuna river has been rising again due to heavy rain and onrush of water upstream from the district, thus threatening a worsening of the flood situation.

Earlier this month, around 1.5 lakh people of the char and low lying areas of six out of the district's 12 upazilas were affected by flood after the Jamuna overflowed.

FLASH FLOODS IN THE NORTHEAST
 In Sunamganj and Sylhet, flood situations are worsening again, a week after the previous flash flood situation had improved.

Yesterday, the Surma was flowing at 54 cm above danger level at Sunamganj town area and 166 cm above at the district's Chhatak upazila.

In Sylhet's Kanaighat upazila the river was flowing 77 cm above the danger level, according to local WDB officials.

Meanwhile, the Jadukata river is flowing 134 cm above the danger mark at Shaktiarkhola of Sunamganj's Tahirpur upazila. Many roads at Sadar, Bishwambarpur, Tahirpur, Jamalganj and Chhatak upazilas are submerged in floodwaters.

Mamun Ahmed, a shopkeeper in Sunamganj municipality's Ukil Para, said, "My shop was flooded a couple of days ago. It has flooded again. I don't know when the flooding will stop."

Earlier on June 25, a flash flood affected 82 unions and four municipalities of all 11 upazilas of the district. Later, the water receded and before the situation could completely improve, another flash flood hit the district severely.

Mohammad Abdul Ahad, deputy commissioner of Sunamganj, said, "As we had forecast of the flash flood, we prepared for it and already started opening shelter centres for affected people."

Our correspondents from Lalmonirhat, Bogura, Nilphamari, Tangail and Sylhet contributed to the story.

Scientists

FROM PAGE 12
 conditioning as people would be able to stay cool by leaving their windows open.

A proof-of-principle study is published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, detailing a prototype that makes use of 18 microphones and 24 speakers to eliminate half of the sounds passing through a window.

The 4.5cm speakers were arranged in a grid pattern on bars attached to the inside of a window, though future iterations of the device could involve much smaller speakers hidden from view.

The system was tested with road traffic, train and aircraft noise, resulting in a 10 decibel noise reduction for sounds above 300Hz.

"Compared to noise cancellation headphones, what we have achieved is far more technically challenging as we needed to control the noise in a large open area, instead of just around the ear," said Professor Gan Woon Seng, director of NTU's Centre for Infocomm Technology and lead author of the research.

"Our innovation not only computes the right amount and type of 'anti-noise' to emit, but also does it faster than the detected noise can reach inside the building."

The NTU researchers are currently working with government agencies in Singapore to reduce the gadget's size and make it more cost-effective to produce.

"We are currently finding ways to improve the technology further so that it can be used not only at window grilles with large openings, but also provide a cost-effective solution that can be easily installed and replaced," Prof Gan said.

"Ultimately, we aim to integrate this technology into window grilles that can help mitigate urban noise pollution conveniently."

SONY SIX

England v West Indies
First Test, Day 5
Live from 4:00pm

FACEBOOK LA LIGA

Espanyol v Elbar
Live from 6:00pm
Levante v Athletic Club
Live from 9:00pm
Leganes v Valencia

Live from 11:30pm
Sevilla v Mallorca
Live from 2:00am (Monday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

PREMIER LEAGUE
Wolves v Everton
Live from 5:00pm
Aston Villa v Crystal Palace
Live from 7:15pm
Tottenham v Arsenal

Live from 9:30pm
Bournemouth v Leicester City
Live from 12:00am (Monday)

TEN 2 SERIE A

Genoa v Spal
Live from 9:15pm
Fiorentina v Verona
Live from 11:30pm
Napoli v AC Milan
Live from 1:45am (Monday)



Real Madrid's Marco Asensio celebrates, after scoring the second goal with a simple tap in, with provider Karim Benzema, who netted the first one from a spot-kick to take his tally to 18 in this season during 2-0 win against Alaves on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

'We have three finals still to go'

AGENCIES



Real Madrid took another step towards their first La Liga title in three years by beating free-falling Alaves 2-0 at home on Friday, overcoming a number of high-profile absences to secure their eighth consecutive victory.

Real were missing three of their first-choice defenders as captain Sergio Ramos and Dani Carvajal were suspended and Marcelo was injured, but they again showed defensive solidity and recorded a fifth consecutive clean sheet.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Once considered the heir to the Bernabeu throne, Gareth Bale has been alienated by Zinedine Zidane, who has made it clear he does not have a place in the team. During Real Madrid's 2-0 win over Alaves on Friday, the Welsh forward -- relegated to the bench as usual -- put his mask over his eyes, lounged back and apparently took a short nap.

Thibaut Courtois had to make two smart saves but Madrid were cruising by the end.

Courtois is the first Real goalkeeper to keep 18 clean sheets in a season since 1987-88 and the Belgian became the first Real goalkeeper to manage five clean sheets in a row in La Liga since Iker Casillas in 2007-08. He needs two more clean sheets for Los

Blancos to break the record held by Francisco Buyo, who kept 19 clean sheets in 1986-88.

After restoring their four-point advantage at the top of the table, the pressure is back on Barcelona. If Barca fail to win away at Real Valladolid on Saturday, Madrid will clinch the title with two games to spare by beating Granada on Monday at Los Carmenes.

Yet even if Madrid have to wait, it seems inevitable they will hoist the trophy given they also have a superior head-to-head against Barcelona with three games left.

"We still don't know what is going to happen," said Zinedine Zidane. "La Liga is very hard and we have three finals still to go."

"The noise about VAR does not bother us, we can only control the attitude we show on the pitch," said defender Raphael Varane. "We are focused on our objective and we have three finals left. It was vital to win and it was important to keep another clean sheet and that gives us a lot of confidence."

Zinedine Zidane's side got off to a comfortable start as Karim Benzema converted from the spot in the 11th minute after Ferland Mendy was judged to have been fouled by Ximo Navarro just as he entered the area.

It was the third game in a row in which Real had broken the deadlock thanks to a penalty and they sealed the win when Benzema turned provider and allowed Marco Asensio to tap into an empty net early in the second half.

BCB yet to meet and discuss resumption scenarios

SPORTS REPORTER



The options for the Bangladesh Cricket Board to return to international cricket have been closing one after another, with the postponement of the Asia Cup the latest setback.

Following the postponement of five bilateral series this year, the BCB were eyeing the Asia Cup, scheduled for September, as the foundation for their return to the international circuit. Cricketing activities have been stopped in Bangladesh since mid-March due to the pandemic.

Bangladesh's next international series according to the Future Tours Programme is scheduled for October, when the Tigers are supposed to tour New Zealand for a three-match T20I series. That is followed by a home series against Sri Lanka in December, but both series are uncertain.

With no international series in the near future, the BCB have to shift their focus to the domestic circuit to restart proceedings. The Dhaka Premier League (DPL) was stopped after the first round due to the coronavirus outbreak in March.

Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) chairman Kazi Inam Ahmed stated that they were considering Cox's Bazar or BKSP as alternative venues for the DPL and also arranging accommodation to maintain isolation so they could start on short notice when the situation is conducive to resumption.

However, there were no meetings, not even virtual ones, among the board members

yet to discuss and chalk out further steps. According to BCB director and chairman of the media and communications committee, Jalal Yunus, they are waiting for board president Nazmul Hassan, who underwent surgery in London on Thursday, to return to the country.

"The BCB president is currently in London as he just underwent a surgery on Thursday and he is doing fine at the moment. No virtual meetings have taken place yet. We had plans for a meeting but since our president took ill, we couldn't do that. There will be a meeting once the president returns but so far there is nothing scheduled," Yunus told The Daily Star.

Pressure is mounting to tackle the difficult situation and find ways to resume cricketing activities but with the situation in Bangladesh worsening, the board is being forced to play the waiting game.

"Needless to say, if players miss out on even a single season, it will be difficult for them to make a comeback. This is a pandemic and all other aspects of everyday life are being affected. Let us not forget that all the other crises arising are due to the fallout from the health crisis," said BCB director Ahmed Sajjadul Alam Bobby.

"So, we have to fix the root cause first. And those taking decisions on re-opening should be asking themselves if it is prudent to decide on behalf of someone else's child when they would not be inclined to do the same in their child's case. I wish there was an easy answer to this situation but one should take steps considering all the facts and variables."



Opener Dom Sibley plays one through the on-side during a gritty knock as England fought back in their second innings on the fourth day of the first Test against West Indies at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Booters' camp from early Aug

SPORTS REPORTER



Football is likely to become the first team sport to be back in some sort of activity as Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday declared its plan of starting national team's training camp in isolation after Eid-ul-Azha.

Football, like most other sport, has been halted since mid-March due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Now, despite the growing number of cases, some sporting authorities are planning to resume training and football is at the forefront. While cricket's return to training is still uncertain with the postponement of Asia Cup, football will lead the race in resumption with an eye on Bangladesh's remaining World Cup Qualifiers which will be played in October and November.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin and other high-ups of the federation held a meeting with 27 footballers of the national team at its headquarters yesterday where resumption of the training camp and the payment issues of the players with their respective clubs were discussed.

Tabith Awal, vice-president of BFF and a member of national teams committee, informed media that they plan to start the training camp in early August.

"We dearly want to start an isolation camp (for the national team) right after the Eid ul Azha, maybe by August 2 or 3. We have two private resorts just outside of Dhaka in our strong consideration for the camp. We want this isolation camp to run until before the first match of World Cup qualifiers, which is on October 8 (against Afghanistan)," Tabith told reporters after the meeting.

While thanking the footballers for maintaining their fitness during the break, Tabith promised they would arrange at least two international friendlies ahead of the qualifiers once international flights resume fully.

"We have renewed two-year contracts with head coach Jamie Day and assistant coach Stuart Watkiss while the contracts with the fitness coach and goalkeeping coach are of short term," Tabith said addressing the footballers.

It has been learnt that the foreign coaching staff are not likely to arrive in Dhaka before the third week of August.

However, the BFF did not arrive on any decision regarding the players' contracts with their respective clubs. Salahuddin said that footballers should focus on preparations for the crucial World Cup qualifiers while the BFF continues to work to resolve issues regarding their contracts, wages, transfers and resumption of next season.

Wimbledon to disburse prize money

REUTERS

The prize money set aside for the Wimbledon Championships will be distributed to 620 players who were set to take part at this year's cancelled tournament, the All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC) said on Friday.

Wimbledon, which was initially scheduled for June 29-July 12, was cancelled for the first time since World War Two due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has killed more than 44,000 people in the United Kingdom.

"We are now in a position to allocate prize money to the 620 players whose world ranking would have enabled them to gain entry into The Championships by direct acceptance into the main draw or qualifying event," AELTC said in a statement.

AELTC said 224 singles players will receive 12,500 pounds each while the 256 players in the main draw will receive 25,000 pounds each. Doubles players will receive 6,250 pounds each while wheelchair and quad wheelchair players are set to get 6,000 and 5,000 pounds each respectively.

AELTC also announced that the men's singles seeding from the 2021 tournament will be based "solely on ranking".

VAR must not show 'wrong idea of solidarity', says Collina

REUTERS



Video Assistant Referees (VAR) must not show the "wrong idea of solidarity" by appearing to protect officials who make mistakes on the pitch, the head of FIFA's Referees' Committee has said.

Speaking at the World Football Summit, Italian Pierluigi Collina also stressed the importance of on-field referees using pitchside monitors during games to review decisions.

"Another thing to be considered (is) a sort of wrong idea of solidarity," Collina said. "If you belong to a team,

you always try to protect your team mates. If your team mate made a mistake you try to find everything to say 'no, no, no, he was correct'."

"It's a sort of friendship I'd say. Referees must understand the solidarity and friendship that they want to show is to tell their colleague 'be careful, you might have made a mistake'."

"It's better that you have another chance watching the incident on a monitor, you have assessed probably wrongly, so that finally you can avoid a mistake."

Former World Cup referee Collina, 60, said wrong decisions taken in

important games can "really kill a referee's career."

"VAR is a very important safety net," he added.

VAR was involved in controversy during the last round of Premier League matches, prompting Tottenham Hotspur manager Jose Mourinho to say that officials should be obliged to explain their decisions.

Mourinho was left baffled after Harry Kane was denied what looked a clear penalty early in the 0-0 draw at Bournemouth on Thursday, even though it was referred to the VAR officials.



IS SOCIAL DISTANCING THAT HARD DURING CELEBRATIONS?: (Clockwise from L) Manchester City's David Silva celebrates a goal engulfed by teammates during a Premier League match against Newcastle while England fast bowler James Anderson celebrates Roston Chase's wicket by hugging teammates during Day 3 of the first Test against the West Indies. These players may have momentarily forgotten social distancing guidelines, but Jofra Archer certainly remembered, as evidenced by his elbow bump celebration. The Premier League has contacted all 20 clubs regarding their players' failure to adhere to social distancing guidelines.

PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS



Jack Charlton dies at 85

REUTERS

Jack Charlton, a World Cup winner with England who became the darling of Ireland after leading their national team to unprecedented success as manager, has died aged 85.

A family statement said that the former Leeds United defender, who helped England beat West Germany to become world champions in 1966, died peacefully on Friday at his home following a long-term illness.

Charlton, the elder brother of Manchester United great Bobby, was a tough tackling centre back who graduated from the Leeds academy and spent his entire playing career at the club. He helped them win the second division in 1963-64 and then the top-flight title in 1968-69.

He helped Alf Ramsey's side lift the World Cup on home soil in 1966, playing every match.

He led Ireland to their first major soccer finals at the 1988 European Championship and guided them to the World Cup quarterfinals in 1990.

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Flood strikes twice

Many who returned home after water subsided are forced to go back to shelters

STAR REPORT

For a second time this monsoon, heavy rainfall and rising river waters have inundated vast areas of the country's northern and northeastern regions.

Many, who had moved to shelters after the June flooding and recently returned to repair their homes, found their houses and properties submerged again.

"Our houses were damaged by flood only a few days ago. Then, the water receded and we came back home. But now our houses have been inundated again, so we are going back to the shelter," said Jobeda Bewa, 63, from Char Khuniagachh under Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

FLOOD IN THE NORTHERN DISTRICTS

The Dharla river was flowing two centimetres above the danger level at Shimulbari point in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila yesterday evening.

Around the same time, at Dowani point near the Teesta Barrage in Hatibandha upazila, the Teesta river had risen 33 cm above the danger mark.

The Teesta's water is rising due to incessant rains and hill waters from India, upstream from Bangladesh, said Abdul Quader, sub-divisional engineer of Lalmonirhat Water Development Board (WDB).

He said all the gates of the barrage have been opened due to the pressure of water upstream of the dam.

Hundreds of chars and low-lying areas, including 110 villages in 21 unions of Lalmonirhat along the Teesta and Dharla rivers, have been inundated due to rising water levels, he added.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 6



A man, along with his goats, looks for fodder on a raft made of banana trees in Companiganj upazila of Sylhet. Heavy rainfall and rising river waters have inundated vast areas of the country's northern and northeastern regions, causing immense sufferings to villagers and their cattle. Some of the areas were flooded for the second time this summer.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

REGENT HOSPITAL DGHS was directed to sign the deal

Says its letter to health ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) yesterday in a letter said it took the initiative to sign the memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Regent Hospital after being directed by "higher authorities" in the health ministry.

DGHS also said it signed the MoU on condition that the Regent authorities renew the expired licences of their two branches.

The DGHS issued the letter, signed by its Assistant Director (Coordination) Dr Jahangir Kabir, to clarify its stance before media about the fraudulence of Regent Hospital owner Md Shahed and JKG Group.

As patients were reportedly being denied by hospitals due to the evolving Covid-19 situation and the number of confirmed cases continued

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

FAKE NOTES BEFORE EID Syndicates active again

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Once again, ahead of Eid-ul-Azha when huge sales of sacrificial animals take place across the country, counterfeit note forgery syndicates have targeted the cattle markets like they do every year.

This year, along with divisional cities, members of such syndicate members have planned to spread counterfeit notes in North Bengal and especially in the border districts, as these areas are largely not equipped with adequate monitoring systems to detect forged banknotes, said law enforcement officials.

Following arrests of several members of such syndicates from different districts in the last few weeks, law enforcers claimed to have learned about these illegal schemes.

"We have learned about the activities of around a dozen note forgery gangs and they remain active in spreading counterfeit notes ahead of Eid. Some of these members remain under our surveillance and we are hopeful of arresting them soon," Mashiur Rahman, deputy commissioner of the police's Detective Branch, told The Daily Star recently.

Around 14 counterfeit note forgery syndicates remain active in these districts,

SEE PAGE 10 COL 2

FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

'War crimes issue to be settled with Bangladesh'

July 12, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

PM ATTENDS OFFICE AFTER RECOVERY

Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today attends his office at the secretariat after six days. Bangabandhu was suddenly taken ill with pain in the abdomen on July 5. He resumed his work at the Gono Bhaban, his official residence, on July 10.

INDIRA FOR DURABLE PEACE

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi tells a press conference held in New Delhi today that she considers the controversy over the war crimes trial to be a bilateral matter between Bangladesh and Pakistan. She adds, "Bangladesh is primarily involved with the issue." Earlier commenting on ZA Bhutto's observation that if India hand over prisoners of war to Bangladesh for trial it would mar the chances of success of another summit, Indira Gandhi says, "There is nothing much India could do about it. The troops did surrender to a joint command and thus Bangladesh has a say in the matter."

TEESTA BRIDGE OPENS

Communication Minister M Mansur Ali today formally opens the Teesta Bridge, the third biggest railway bridge of the country, for railway traffic. The bridge was seriously damaged by the retreating Pakistan army in November last year. The 2,075 feet bridge was repaired jointly by the engineers of Bangladesh and India.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



Rape accused killed in Noakhali 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

The prime accused in a gang rape case was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Noakhali early yesterday.

The dead, Akram Hosen, 25, was from Uttar Manikpur village in the district's Senbagh upazila.

Akram's family alleged that he was shot dead around 27 hours after his arrest. Law enforcers, however, denied the allegation.

OC Abdul Baten Mridha of Senbagh Police Station said Akram and his cohorts kidnapped a 19-year-old intellectually disabled woman from in front of her home in Uttar Manikpur village on June 6.

They took her to a nearby graveyard and gang-raped her.

Five days later, the victim's mother filed a case with the police station accusing 10 people in this

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

Scientists create noise-cancelling windows



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have developed a gadget that can reduce the intensity of noise pollution passing through an open window.

The system works in a similar way to noise-cancelling technology found in high-end headphones: a microphone captures the real-world noise and speakers emit sound waves to counter it.

Researchers from Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore and the University of Southampton who came up with the device claim that it can be used within commercially available windows.

They say that while the cost of the window may increase, it would reduce the need for air

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Five killed in siege at S African church

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Five people were killed in an attack on a church west of Johannesburg in the early hours of yesterday, South African police said, with some of the attackers taking hostages who were later freed.

Police arrested around 40 people and seized 40 firearms, including rifles, shotguns and handguns, related to the attack on the International Pentecost Holiness Church in Zuurbekom, police spokesman Vishnu Naidoo told the eNCA television station.

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PRAYER TIMING JULY 12

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4-10 12-45 5-00 6-55 8-17
JAMAAT 5-45 1-15 5-15 7-00 8-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Bangladeshi shot dead inside Indian territory

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A Bangladeshi man was "shot dead" and another injured allegedly by a group of villagers inside Indian territory near the Utma border in Sylhet's Companiganj upazila yesterday noon.

The dead, Babul Hossain, 20, was from Lamagram village in the upazila, BGB officials said, adding that injured Koyes Miah, 20, a resident of the same village, was on the run since the incident.

The incident occurred around 800 metres inside Indian border when the two crossed the border allegedly to steal pineapples from a Khasi village, said Lt Col Ahmed Yusuf Jamil, commanding officer of BGB 48 Battalion in Sylhet.

"Seeing them, the villagers opened fire on them, leaving one dead on the spot and another injured," he said, adding that they recovered the body in the afternoon and sent

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Children splash into Mahesh Khal in Agrabad residential area of Chattogram city. After days of rain last week, the canal swelled up. The children could not resist the temptation of cooling of the in the water as the weather was hot and humid in the afternoon.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Virus affects entire body

Doctors give first comprehensive review of Covid-19's effects

CNN ONLINE

Coronavirus damages not only the lungs, but the kidneys, liver, heart, brain and nervous system, skin and gastrointestinal tract, doctors said Friday in a review of reports about Covid-19 patients.

The team at the Columbia University Irving Medical

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WE MOURN

Our respectable Chairman, Ms. Zebun Nesa (Mother of Honorable MD Mohd. Idris Shakur and Honorable DMD Mohammad Arshad) has died on 6th of July, 2020 at 12.10am due to old aged complicity at the age of 75. We all employees of IDS Group mourn for her death and pray to Almighty Allah for her departed soul to rest in peace and grant Jannat ul Ferdaous for her. Moreover, her departure is irreparable loss for the family & IDS Group as a whole. We all express deep sympathy to the grieved family and hope Merciful Allah will assist them to overcome from this irrecoverable loss. We again, pray for her departed soul to rest in peace and for Jannat ul Ferdaous to Almighty Allah, Ameen.

Family Member & IDS Group