

Help protect local fish species from extinction

PM calls for using modern, advanced farming methods, inaugurates National Fisheries Week 2020

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged people to protect the local species of fish from extinction by using advanced and modern fish farming methods.

“The prime minister has asked the people to protect the native species of fish from extinction coming out of the traditional fish farming methods by adopting advanced and modern systems,” said PM’s Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim.

Hasina made the call while inaugurating the National Fisheries Week 2020 in the morning by releasing fingerlings into the lake of the Gono Bhaban.

The PM said there are some 475 species of marine fish and more than 250 varieties of freshwater fish in the country. There is also a huge demand for shrimp, crabs, snails, and other fisheries resources in the regional and international markets, she added.

She said new jobs are being created in the fisheries sector and the national economy is being enriched due to investment in the sector.

Hasina said the Awami League government has taken various effective and fruitful measures to protect the country’s fisheries and boost fish production.

“As a result, fish production has increased by more than 50 percent in the last 11 years.”

The PM said according to the 2020 report of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Bangladesh has moved up to the second spot in the world in terms of growth rate of freshwater fish production.

“The country today is self-

sufficient in fish production. At present, we are consuming 62.58 grams of fish against the daily demand of 60 grams per capita,” said the premier.

She thanked all concerned, including the staffers of the Department of Fisheries, for the way they continued to produce, market, and export fish amid the pandemic. “This trend will have to be continued for the interest of the country.”

Hasina recalled that Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman officially released fish fry at the Gono Bhaban Lake in 1973 to inspire people to increase fish production through farming.

Fisheries and Livestock Minister SM Rezaul Karim said some 6.5 million people were employed in the fish sector in the last 11 years and income of fish farmers and fishers increased.

Fisheries and Livestock Secretary Rawnak Mahmud, PMO Secretary Md Tofazzel Hossain Miah and PM’s Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim were present on the occasion.

This year, the Fisheries Week is being observed from July 21 to 27 with the theme “Machh Utpadan Briddhi Kori, Shukhi Samridhdha Desh Gori” (Let us increase fish production and build a happy and prosperous country).

Seven killed

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firefighters rescued the victims from the damaged haulier.

Doctors at Chakariya Health Complex said two seriously injured men were sent to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for better treatment.

‘Cattle train’ plan

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Nur Nabi, a cattle farmer of Char Ratikandi village in Sirajganj’s Shahjadpur, however, explained why he would prefer trucks to trains to transport his animals.

“We load our cattle onto trucks from our village and unload them at a certain cattle market in Dhaka, Chattogram or any other district. We have to pay Tk 1,200 to Tk 1,500 for each bull or buffalo,” he said.

“If I want to use the train, I will have to hire a truck or Nasiman [a locally-made three-wheeler] to take the animals to the station. It will cost Tk 500 to Tk 600 for each animal. Again, I will have to do the same for transporting the cattle to the market from the Kamalapur station in Dhaka,” he said.

As the train would stop at different stations to pick and drop other cattle, the train journey will take more time, which means his cattle will need more food.

“In the end, I will have to spend around Tk 2,000 to Tk 2,500 for taking each cattle to the market,” Nur Nabi said, adding that loading and unloading cattle multiple times would be a hassle.

Several other cattle farmers and traders in Pabna, Sirajganj, and Kushtia echoed his views.

BR sources said the special train has not been operated yet as there is hardly any demand for it among the traders.

Asadul Haque, Pakshey divisional railway manager, admitted that they were not getting any response even after engaging field officials of the Department of Livestock in attracting the cattle farmers to avail the special “cattle train service”.

“We are trying hard,” he said.

Asadul said they have made all preparations to run at least one “cattle train” every day with five carriages. He added that the train would stop at Mobarakganj, Chuadanga, Poradah, Kushtia, and Ullapara stations.

Aminul Islam Mollah, deputy director of livestock department (Khulna division), said their officials were working to encourage farmers to take the train, instead of trucks, for the safety of the “journey”.

“But the farmers seem reluctant to use train,” he said.

He also said about 8.93 lakh cattle are supposed to be transported to Dhaka, Chattogram, and elsewhere from Khulna division alone ahead of Eid.

“Most traders from Dhaka and other districts haven’t arrived here yet,” he added.

Don’t let private

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offenders, but a few of them are talking to the media to justify their actions. The HC judge asked Attorney General Mahbubey Alam to look into the matter.

The attorney general told the HC that the government has taken necessary steps so that the private hospitals run properly.

The court said it did not pass any order against doctors, but its directives are against the hospitals’ irregularities and mismanagement.

At one stage of the hearing, Mahbubey Alam sought time from the HC to submit a compliance report on its July 6 directives.

The court granted the time and asked the government to submit the report by August 16.

During a hearing of the writ petitions, the HC bench on July 6 directed the health secretary and the director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) to conduct an enquiry into the reported allegations against some private and government hospitals of denying treatment to patients during the pandemic.

They had been ordered to submit the enquiry report to the HC by July 21.

Yesterday, the DGHS submitted a partial compliance report to the HC through the attorney general and said four-member committees led by civil surgeons have been formed in every district to investigate allegations

against hospitals, according to court sources.

On July 6, the HC asked the DG of DGHS to take necessary measures so that the patients, who are deprived of treatment at any hospital, can lodge complaints with the office concerned by email.

It also asked the authorities concerned to take necessary steps so that the patients suffering from serious diseases like cancer and kidney are tested for Covid-19, test reports are provided within 36 to 48 hours, and their treatment is ensured at the hospitals concerned.

The government has also been directed to fix the retail and refilling prices of oxygen cylinders in 10 working days.

People can lodge complaints with the Anti-Corruption Commission if they were charged extra for the oxygen cylinders, the court said.

Jamiul Hoque Faisal and AKM Ehsanur Rahman, two of the writ petitioners, told The Daily Star on July 6 that they have found more than 20 allegations published in newspapers against some government and private hospitals of denying treatment to the Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 patients during the pandemic and submitted a statement containing the reported allegations to the HC.

Aneek R Haque, Mahfuzur Rahman Milon, and Yeadia Zaman also appeared for the petitioners, while Attorney General Mahbubey Alam represented the state.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina releasing fish in the lake on the Gono Bhaban premises while inaugurating the National Fish Week-2020 yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Shutdown ended, not their hardship

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The family didn’t receive any food or monetary support from anyone since the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak.

Eti said she had submitted photocopies of her father’s NID to a local political leader’s associates in the slum for relief but nothing has happened.

“In fact, there has been no relief distribution in our slum after the Eid-ul-Fitr,” she said.

Md Billal Hossain, a barber who lives near Bauniabadh slum area of Mirpur, said it seems that the days of distributing relief items, taking photos and uploading those on the internet have come to an end.

“These days, nobody is here to give me a fistful of rice without work,” said Billal.

FUNDS RUNNING DRY

Although there is still need for assistance, many private charities and benevolent individuals cannot help as they are not able to raise funds.

Bidyanoondo Foundation, a voluntary organisation that worked on large scale relief distribution during the shutdown, has shifted their focus on providing health support.

They stopped that programme

because they feel people now have the option to work, earn and buy food, said one of the representatives of Bidyanondo, who has been with the organisation since its inception.

Non-resident Bangladeshis, who donated to Tanzina Aktari’s Tears of Middle Class, also hold similar views.

Tanzina said she has stopped contacting people for donations because she feels nobody is willing to donate money in such uncertain times.

Donors themselves are afraid for their future survival, she said.

“These days, many are helping their relatives in distress, saying their poorer relatives need the support,” she added.

During the first few months of the pandemic, Tears of Middle Class had sent money through mobile banking to more than 100 middle-income families.

Habib Prince, a member of charity organisation Prottoy, said they too had to stop their relief activities due to fund scarcity.

“Our members, who are service holders, are facing a salary cut and are anxious about their job security.

“The ones, who run businesses, are facing huge losses due to the

shutdown. Those who live abroad are unable to send remittance like before. This is why we are taking a break,” said Habib.

Before Eid-ul-Fitr, Prottoy had provided food, masks, hygiene products to 500 lower-income families of Kapasia in Gazipur.

BRAC STUDY

A Brac survey conducted among 2,317 respondents across the country showed that 95 percent households experienced income loss because of the pandemic.

The study, titled “Economic Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic and Way Forward for Bangladesh”, also found that average household income decreased to 76 percent of the normal in April and May.

Released last month, the survey was conducted between May 9 and 13 with 68 percent respondents from rural areas and 32 percent from urban areas.

It also showed that 69 percent of households, who needed help, received none while only 14 percent received cash or food assistance.

More than half the respondents opined that the government should continue food and cash aid.

Govt going for DGHS shake-up

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investigated and people responsible should be held accountable, he said.

He suggested forming a national commission to look into problems in the health sector and make recommendations to the government.

Meanwhile, a team of Detective Branch of police went to DGHS yesterday afternoon and spoke to Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration), and Aminul over JKG Health Care’s fake Covid-19 testing.

They wanted to collect evidence regarding JKG’s “Chairman” Sabrina Arif Chowdhury and Chief Executive Officer Ariful Haque Chowdhury and their involvement in the scam, said DB sources.

There were reports of mismanagement and irregularities centring the state-run organisation that spearheads the country’s war on Covid-19. The fraudulence of Regent Hospital and JKG over coronavirus testing brought the directorate’s deals with hospitals into the spotlight.

Amid controversies and severe criticism, embattled DGHS director

general Prof Azad quit on Tuesday and his resignation was accepted yesterday.

Four people have been shortlisted to replace Azad, sources said. The shortlisted are: Nasima Sultana, AHM Enayet Hussain, director general of Medical Education at the DGHS, Nazmul Islam Munna, line director of medical education at the DGHS, and Bayezid Khurshid Zahan, director of the National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM).

A high official of the DGHS seeking anonymity told this newspaper yesterday that intelligence agencies had already started vetting these people.

Speaking on the appointment of a new DG, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said the decision of appointing a new DG would be made after consulting with people concerned.

“If necessary, we will talk to the highest level of the government,” he added.

He said a taskforce had been formed to examine any irregularities in public, private hospitals and clinics.

“HEALTH SERVICES IMPROVED”

During yesterday’s briefing at his ministry, Health Minister Zahid claimed that his ministry was doing well in the fight against the pandemic, compared to the US and other countries.

The death rate from the virus is 6 percent globally and 10 percent in the US. But the mortality rate is 1.26 percent in Bangladesh, he said.

“This yardstick confirms that we have done a good job,” he said.

The minister said the number of patients in hospitals dedicated to Covid-19 dropped by half, especially in Dhaka city. “You may ask why, because the health services have been improved a lot,” he said.

More than 3,000 Covid-19 beds are vacant in Dhaka now, he said.

Zahid said the government would decide on the application of Chinese Covid-19 vaccine in the country after discussing with the national technical advisory committee.

“We are closely observing the efficacy of vaccines under development globally ... we are communicating with countries that are in the final stage of coronavirus vaccine development,” he said.

A formula for disaster?

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“One kit is manufactured for one test. There is no scope of compromising reagents. If it is compromised, the result will be questionable,” said Dr Jahidur Rahman, virologist and assistant professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College.

Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) of DGHS, said from the perspective of laboratory science, without the approval of DGHS and without a standard operating procedure (SOP), such a practice is unscientific and unethical.

“It may give false results and it is not acceptable,” he said.

Dr Jamal Uddin, virologist and public health specialist of National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM), however, claimed that the process is scientific and that the result does not vary if two tests are done using a single kit.

Asked whether any other country in the world uses this method, he said, “Probably India. The kit crisis is acute across the world and some other countries may use this technique, but we don’t know.”

Prof Dr Shakil Ahmed, in-charge of the Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID) laboratory, said a shortage of testing kits prompted them to use this method of conducting more testing with fewer kits.

He said Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute first initiated this

method.

“They did a study first and found positive results. We followed them, and in our study, we also got similar results,” said Prof Shakil.

However, the BITID lab study only had a sample size of 15 which they tested over three days.

When asked if the sample size was enough for taking such a crucial decision, he said, “As there is a shortage of testing kits, either I have to do fewer tests or go for more tests reducing the reagent used. I chose the second option.”

Prof Shakil said they received 2,500 testing kits against their demand of 5,000 on July 2. BITID conducts around 200 tests each day. Chattogram Medical College Hospital is also following the same practice but they declined to officially comment on the matter.

“DGHS has asked us to use the reagent of one kit for testing two samples and we are complying with the order,” an official related to the testing process told The Daily Star, wishing not to be named.

The 300-bed Narayanganj Hospital also uses less reagent than normal when testing for Covid-19.

“We are getting good results. We are not facing any problems,” said Goutam Roy, superintendent of the hospital.

The Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU) Covid-19 testing lab is also using

one kit for testing two samples. The facility tests around 200 samples per day.

“We came to know from our other colleagues that using half the reagent of a kit gives the same result. We talked to DGHS and DGHS officials said if it is effective, then to go for it as there is a shortage of kits,” said Zonaid Siddiki, lab in-charge of CVASU.

Contacted, DGHS officials said they were aware of the practice but did not give any formal directives in this regard.

“A few labs are getting good results using a single kit for testing two samples. The issue is in our knowledge but we did not give any directives,” Dr Ayesha Akhter, spokesperson of DGHS, said.

She also said those who are getting good results are following this practice and the remaining laboratories are following the regular process, i.e. one kit for one test.

Currently, 80 institutions countrywide are conducting Covid-19 tests. The average daily testing capacity in those facilities is between 13,000 and 19,000.

Bangladesh performs low in testing coverage in the region -- with 2,412 tests conducted per 1 million of the population -- which is lower than in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, according to a WHO country Covid-19 situation report last month.

2,744 more test Covid positive

42 die in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Forty-two people died in the country from novel coronavirus in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, said Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the Directorate General of Health Services.

Speaking at the regular online briefing yesterday, she said the death toll from Covid-19 in Bangladesh now stands at 2,751 and the death rate at 1.29 percent.

She said 2,744 more people tested positive for the virus during the 24-hour period. With them, the total number of novel coronavirus cases in the country rose to 213,254.

The total infection rate stands at 19.99 percent, according to the DGHS. Bangladesh is currently on the 16th position in the list of worst affected countries in the world in terms of number of Covid-19 cases, according to worldometers.info.

A total of 12,050 samples were tested across the country during the same 24-hour period, said Nasima.

Meanwhile, 1,805 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the period. With them, the total number of recoveries stands at 117,202 and the recovery rate at 54.96 percent.

The DGHS official said among the 42 dead were 30 males and 12 females. Of them, one was aged between 11 and 20, one between 21 and 30, three were between 31 and 40, three between 41 and 50, 11 between 51 and 60, 14 between 61 and 70, eight between 71 and 80 and one was aged between 81 and 90.

China says French claims on Uighur rights are ‘lies’

AFP, Beijing

French claims about the imprisonment of ethnic and religious minorities in China’s Xinjiang region were unacceptable, Beijing said yesterday, criticising the accusations as “false”.

China’s response came a day after Paris demanded it let independent human rights observers visit the northwestern region, where rights groups and experts estimate over one million Uighurs and other Turkic-speaking minorities have been rounded up into a network of internment camps.

France’s foreign affairs minister Jean-Yves le Drian said China’s actions were “unacceptable” and said they “condemn them firmly”.

Beijing has defended its strategy in Xinjiang as necessary to avoid extremism.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a regular press briefing yesterday that “China has repeatedly responded to and clarified false reports and accusations on Xinjiang-related issues”.

Imran Khan

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and the steps taken by the government, Ihsanul said.

The Bangladesh premier described the initiatives and measures taken by her government to contain the spread of the virus. She also elaborated on other steps taken for medical purposes and the overall flood situation.

Meanwhile, Pakistani Prime Minister’s Office in a statement yesterday said Imran offered condolences to his counterpart for the loss of lives in Bangladesh due to Covid-19 and flooding.

He commended the Bangladesh government for the measures taken by it to curb the spread of novel coronavirus.

Imran also wished early recovery of the people affected by flooding.

He apprised Hasina of his government’s measures to save people’s lives and livelihoods, and also of his “Global Initiative on Debt Relief” for developing countries.

Reaffirming Pakistan’s commitment to Saarc, Imran underlined the importance of both countries working for enhanced regional cooperation for sustainable peace and prosperity.

Sharing Pakistan’s perspective on what he said the grave situation in the Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJ&K), Imran stressed the importance of peaceful resolution of the dispute for a safe and prosperous region.

He reiterated his invitation to Hasina to visit Pakistan and said his country was committed to deepening fraternal relations with Bangladesh on the basis of mutual trust, mutual respect and sovereign equality.

Earlier in October last year, Imran called Hasina, hours ahead of her visit to India amid his campaign on the Kashmir issue after the Indian government had revoked Jammu and Kashmir’s special status.

Diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan soured since the beginning of the trial and execution of war criminals in Bangladesh.

Despite Dhaka’s repeated calls to Islamabad not to interfere in the internal matters of Bangladesh, Pakistan’s national and provincial parliaments adopted resolutions against the trial of war criminals in 2016.