

Bangabandhu’s

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Heavy rains coupled with flash floods from Siliguri have seriously affected Tetulia and Panchagarh thana of Dinajpur. According to the Deputy Commissioner of Dinajpur a large number of mud houses have collapsed and most of the 30,000 affected people are taking shelter on elevated land.
SOURCES: July 30, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.

No indication

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experiencing symptoms, the isolation of cases and quarantining of contacts. The global health body’s warning came as governments across the world imposed new restrictions yesterday in a bid to cool coronavirus hotspots after new infections shot up in some countries, sparking fears of a second wave.

Iran suffered its worst day yet of the pandemic, reporting 235 new deaths yesterday, a record toll for a single day in the Middle East’s hardest-hit country.

“The situation is worrying,” health ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said.

“Tehran, the most populous province, has turned red for the first time since the first peak of the virus.”

Authorities have made masks mandatory in enclosed public spaces and allowed the hardest-hit provinces, including Tehran, to re-impose restrictions that had been progressively lifted since April to reopen Iran’s sanctions-hit economy.

CHINA SURGE
Chinese authorities scrambled to halt the possibility of a second wave of infections after a new cluster in the northwest port city of Dalian spread to other provinces.

China had largely brought the virus under control since it first emerged in the country late last year, through a series of strict lockdowns and travel restrictions.

But in recent months a number of small outbreaks have given cause for concern, with China reporting 68 new infections yesterday -- the highest daily number since April.

Of those, 57 were in the northwest region of Xinjiang, where an outbreak has seen millions of residents tested and strict lockdowns in the regional capital Urumqi.

Health authorities said the Dalian cluster had now spread to nine cities in five regions across the country, including as far away as the southeast coastal province of Fujian.

Beijing has tightened measures in the affected region, introducing mass testing in Dalian and heightened scrutiny of travellers arriving in the city, reports AFP.

Ease approval

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General of Health Services [DGHS] decides whether a Covid-19 patient will be able to get admitted to a hospital. Such instance of centralisation cannot be found anywhere else in the world. It creates scope for corruption.”

Explaining why most of the private hospitals don’t have DGHS approval, Zafrullah said, “In fact, the Ganoshasthaya Nagar Hospital and Ganoshasthaya Dialyses Centres too do not have DGHS approval.

“It is almost impossible to follow the rules made by the health ministry for getting approval to private hospitals, laboratories and diagnostic centres. The health ministry even fixes the number of toilets and nurses having diplomas.”

Besides, every hospital needs to get separate approvals for laboratories and departments, including x-ray, dental and blood transfusion units, he pointed out.

Since 2018, the licence fees for these departments have been increased 30-50 times, reads the letter.

The registration fees for a private hospital with a laboratory and a diagnostic centre should not be more than Tk 1 lakh. “The rules for approval to hospitals need to be eased,” he said.

“You [the PM] want a poverty-free and healthy Bangladesh, and want to tackle the rapidly spreading novel coronavirus. It is not possible to materialise without universal health coverage.”

About duties on medical equipment, he said the price of an electronic brachytherapy for cancer treatment is around \$1 million. But in addition to 1 percent import duty, 5 percent advance tax, 5 percent advance income tax and 15 percent vat have to be paid for it, which is unacceptable.

“There are discriminatory import duties on different medical equipment. Import duty on ultrasonic devices is 1 percent but it’s 5 percent on cardiac monitors.”

There should be only 1 percent import duty on medical equipment and no other taxes, Zafrullah said.

He called upon the health ministry to ensure that pharmaceutical companies follow the rules and regulations properly.

At the end of the letter, Zafrullah requested Hasina to work together with all the politicians in the country to overcome the present crisis.

Health ministry calls meeting

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the city over issuing fake Covid-19 certificates and operating without renewing licences timely.

Besides, the scams of two private facilities -- Regent Hospital and JKG Health Care -- over faking the Covid-19 tests added fuel to the fire. The handling of the situation by the Directorate General of Health Services also came into question after the scandals.

The government has already started restructuring the health services by replacing top officials, including the embattled director general of the DGHS, to ensure better coordination. Moreover, around 30 doctors of DGHS were also transferred.

On July 21, the health ministry sought from the DGHS a complete list of private hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centres that did not renew their licences timely.

According to media reports, two thirds of the country’s over 15,000 private clinics and diagnostic centres have been running without any valid licence since 2018 facing almost no consequences.

The DGHS did nothing but send

notices to these facilities and make public announcements in newspapers, officials admitted.

MEETING ISSUES
The ministry’s letter mentioned that raids at different private hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centres over irregularities in Covid-19 treatment following media reports in recent time are the first issue of the meeting.

The other issues include media reports about irregularities over Covid-19 testing; operations of different private hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centers without licence renewal; overcharging for treatment and inhuman behaviour with patient’s attendants.

Contacted, Prof Dr Maniruzzaman Bhuiyan, president of Bangladesh Private Clinic and Diagnostic Owners’ Association, told The Daily Star yesterday that they were yet to get the invitation letter for the meeting.

Asked about the allegations, he said, “We are embarrassed over such incidents that are tarnishing our reputation.”

He, however, said none of the

hospitals raided by the law enforcers recently were their members.

“We have sent letters to our members to refrain from such malpractices,” said Prof Maniruzzaman.

The association has 10,000 members.

Asked about the allegation of overcharging, he said treatment costs have increased during the pandemic as they have to pay more to their doctors and staffers.

“But we’ve asked our members not to charge patients irrationally.”

He said many private hospitals do not have renewed licences for “many reasons.”

The government has increased the renewal fees for a 10-bed hospital from Tk 5,000 to Tk 50,000 one year ago. “Is it possible for a small hospital to give the money,” Prof Maniruzzaman questioned.

Besides, trade licences of hospitals in residential areas were not renewed after 2018, and for not having the renewed trade licences, many hospitals can not apply for renewing their licences, he said.

“We will talk to the health minister about the issue,” he added.

New dimension in the judiciary

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another two-week vacation began on July 24.

NEW CHAPTER
The lower courts across the country heard and disposed of a total 1,36,399 bail petitions and granted bail to a total of 67,229 accused, including 755 children, in the 50 working days between May 12 and July 23, according to a statement by SC spokesperson Md Saifur Rahman.

Between May 12 and July 23, 508 detained on criminal charges were sent to three juvenile development centres -- leading to a total of 870 children staying there, added the statement.

The SC statement also said the subordinate courts concerned have disposed of surrender-related petitions of the accused in 4,310 criminal cases -- granting bail to 11,796 accused and sending 938 accused to jails -- between July 19 and July 23.

More than 300 courts have passed

bail orders after holding virtual hearings of the petitions.

The introduction of virtual court proceedings is a new chapter in the history of the country’s judiciary, Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star on May 10.

During a virtual hearing on a writ petition on May 12, the High Court extended thanks to President Md Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, and the law minister for launching virtual court functions.

Virtual court functions are the first step in establishing an e-judiciary in the country, observed Justice Obaidul Hassan, a judge of a High Court bench.

The High Court Division has held hearings on several bail petitions and some writ petitions filed as public interest litigation, and also issued several important directives through the virtual court.

Lawyers have to file petitions seeking necessary directives by emailing the courts concerned. They do not need to swear any affidavit for moving the petitions before the courts other than making an undertaking that the information they mentioned in the petitions are true and explaining the need for their urgent hearings, according to the practice directives issued by the chief justice.

On May 10, the chief justice issued 20 practice directives on virtual court functions in line with the Usage of Information and Communications Technology by Court Ordinance 2020.

According to the practice directives, the lawyers concerned have to print the petitions, scan them and send the documents to the courts and opposite parties before the hearing. After receiving the petitions, the judges of the courts concerned fix dates for hearings on the matters and they are then included in the cause list as per

No end to their trauma in sight

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Alam, an expatriate in Oman, has already spent more than Tk 2 lakh to pay lawyers and meet other court-related expenses.

“I need to spend at least Tk 500 every time I go to the court in Old Dhaka from our Tejgunipara home for travelling, food and other expenses,” Tarek, now 21, told The Daily Star recently.

“We’re too tired ... it all happened after I was framed by police. The cases are not only hampering my studies but also are throwing my future into uncertainty,” he said.

He expressed frustration as investigation in any of the nine cases -- seven for vandalism and two for spreading rumour -- has been completed yet.

Tarek is not the only student suffering this way for taking to the street demanding safe roads two years ago.

With investigation in most cases, filed following the unprecedented road safety demonstration in 2018, tangled up, the future of many other students seem bleak.

Investigation officers are not sure when the probes would be over, adding to the frustration of the students and their family members.

After two students of the capital’s Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College were killed by a speeding bus on Airport Road on this day in 2018,

protests spread like wildfire across the capital and elsewhere in the country.

During and after the protest, more than 100 people, mostly students of private universities and colleges, were rounded up in around 60 cases in the capital alone over “causing violence and spreading rumours”, according to Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

The cases were filed against several thousand unidentified students and young people for assaulting police, damaging government properties and obstructing law enforcers from discharging duties.

The accused included 22 private university students who were arrested during the demonstrations in July and August that year. Although they were released on bail later, they had to appear before court almost every month before the Covid-19 outbreak.

Most courts in the country are now holding virtual hearing to avoid coronavirus transmission.

The FIRs of cases filed by police in the city’s Badda and Bhatara mentioned the names of 32 accused, including the 22 students. Some of the accused students, however, said they did not even join the demonstration.

The rest of the students were picked up from Kotwali, Dhanmondi, Paltan, Shahbagh, Uttara, Ramna and New Market areas between August 4 and 6 that year.

Besides, 22 cases were filed under the then section 57 of the ICT act

Roads just as risky as before

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Following the demonstration, lawmakers hastily passed the Road Transport Act-2018, the Prime Minister’s Office issued a 17-point directive, and police observed multiple “traffic weeks” to bring discipline to roads.

A Dhaka court in December last year handed down life sentences to two drivers and a helper of Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan in connection with the incident, saying, “The callousness of drivers and helpers in the transport sector is causing many deaths which must be stopped.”

But the numbers of road crashes and fatalities increased last year compared to the previous year.

According to police data, 4,138 people were killed in 4,147 road accidents last year. The previous year, 2,609 road crashes claimed 2,635 lives. The data was prepared based on cases filed with different police stations across the country.

However, the figures are significantly lower than those of other road-safety organisations.

The rising trend of road crashes remained almost the same until late March when the government suspended operations of public transport to contain the spread of Covid-19. Public transport resumed operations on June 1.

TWO MAJOR INITIATIVES YET TO BEAR FRUIT

The parliament passed the RTA in September 2018, but the government did not make the law effective till November last year.

When the government took initiative to enforce the law, transport associations called strikes demanding that the government does not penalise drivers of commercial vehicles even if they violate some key sections of the act until June this year.

In the face of their demand, the government decided not to penalise those who drive heavy vehicles with licences meant for light or medium vehicles until June this year and later extended the relaxation for another year.

It also waived the late fees for not renewing driving licences and fitness documents of vehicles till December this year.

Meanwhile, a committee led by former Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan was formed last year to give recommendations for curbing road crashes and bringing discipline to the sector.

The committee in April last year gave 111 recommendations and a taskforce led by Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan was formed in October last year to implement those.

The taskforce held its only meeting in November to include three more members in it. It assigned four secretaries to recommend and plan how the recommendations could be

implemented. No further movement of the taskforce was visible.

WHAT AN EXPERT SAYS?
Prof Shamsul Hoque, also a member of the taskforce, said although the authority had taken some initiatives following the movement, but did not take steps to reform the sector.

“Bus routes rationalisation and introduction of bus franchise system are needed in Dhaka city to bring discipline to the public transport system. But these were not done,” he said.

Rather, more buses were given route permits and the number of motorcycles is increasing in an unregulated way, which are further complicating the situation.

As per the planned bus franchise system, all buses operating in the city will be brought under six companies and by route rationalisation, and all the bus routes in the capital and adjacent areas would be brought under 22 major routes.

He said “ad-hoc” basis steps were taken after any major incident, but no steps were taken to strengthen the capacity of BRTA and Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA).

“Such ad-hoc initiatives have no continuation, and therefore, no sustainability,” he added.

“It takes time and power to make a reform. The government had the opportunity but unfortunately, it did not take it,” he added.

Ex-PM Najib sentenced

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Court Judge Mohamad Nazlan Mohamad Ghazali sentenced Najib to 12 years and a fine of 210 million ringgit (\$49 million) on a charge of abuse of power.

Najib, 67, also received 10 years in jail on each of three charges of criminal breach of trust and three charges of money laundering for illegally receiving nearly \$10 million from SRC International, a former unit of the state fund.

“After considering all evidence in this trial, I find that the prosecution has successfully proven its case beyond a reasonable doubt,” Mohamad Nazlan said.

He ordered the jail terms to run concurrently.

The judge allowed a request by Najib’s lawyers to delay the jail sentence and the financial penalty, but asked Najib to post additional bail and report to a police station twice a month.

Najib had pleaded not guilty, and said he would appeal the verdict in Malaysia’s Federal Court if convicted. The verdict could potentially be

partially or fully overturned by the higher court on appeal, though that could take years.

The nearly \$10 million in the SRC case is a fraction of the funds Najib is alleged to have misappropriated from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), the state fund.

Prosecutors say more than \$1 billion of 1MDB funds made its way into Najib’s personal accounts, over which he faces a total of 42 criminal charges. Najib had led the country for almost a decade before losing the 2018 election.

US and Malaysian authorities say a total of \$4.5 billion is believed to have been stolen from 1MDB, a fund Najib founded to promote economic development, and used by his associates to buy art, a superyacht and fund the “Wolf of Wall Street” movie.

PINK DIAMONDS

Prosecutors have also said \$27 million was used to buy a pink diamond necklace for Najib’s wife, Rosmah Mansor, and some of the money went into war chests for Najib’s election campaigns.

Four drug

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four of them lying on the spot.

The injured were rushed to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared them dead, the police officer added.

Police claimed to have recovered 50,000 yaba tablets, two firearms, and eight bullets from the spot.

The bodies were sent to Cox’s Bazar Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsies.

Police filed three cases in connection with the incident.

OC Pradip said the peddlers smuggled in the drugs from Myanmar.

Indian

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orbit, a SPACE India spokeswoman said.

Radhika Lakhani, the other student, said she was working hard on her education. “I don’t even have a TV at home, so that I can concentrate on my studies.”

Asteroids and comets pose a potential threat to Earth, and scientists discover thousands of them each year. In 2013, an asteroid heavier than the Eiffel Tower exploded over central Russia, leaving more than 1,000 people injured from its shockwave.

Keep up

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keep up the progress in the agriculture sector so that our people don’t suffer, at least from food shortage. We will have to pay attention to it,” she said.

The PM was speaking at the weekly meeting of the Executive Meeting of the National Economic Council (Ecneec).

The meeting was held virtually, with the premier, also the Ecneec chairperson, in the chair. The prime minister and Planning Minister Abdul Mannan joined the meeting from the Gono Bhaban through videoconferencing, while other Ecneec members were connected from NEC Bhaban.

Describing the government’s assistance to the agriculture sector, Hasina said, “We’ve been providing all kinds of assistance so that our food security is not affected.”

She said the government has reduced the prices of fertilisers, and has been distributing quality seeds and other agricultural inputs. The government also provided some 2 crore agriculture cards to avail of agricultural inputs and created scope for farmers to open a bank account depositing Tk 10. Now more than one crore farmers have such bank accounts.

The PM said the price of DAP fertiliser was Tk 90 per kg during the tenure of the previous BNP government, but her government reduced the prices in several phases and now the farmers are getting the fertiliser for Tk 12 per kg.

“If we can keep food in our house, we may not have so serious problems on other fronts. We will be able to overcome [the coronavirus crisis].”

Hasina said leaders and activists of Awami League and its associate bodies -- Chhatra League, Jubo League, Krishak League and Swetchhasebak League -- stood beside the farmers by joining their paddy harvesting amid the Covid-19. “Joining the harvesting work, many leaders and activists even got infected with coronavirus and some of them also died.”

She said standing beside people is their duty.

Talking about the 2030 sustainable development agenda, the premier said the government would continue pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve the targets which are particularly effective for Bangladesh.

“We will have to achieve SDGs as well, particularly its 17 goals effective for our country. We don’t need to deal with all.”

Hasina said the goals which are effective for Bangladesh have already been incorporated in the 8th Five Year Plan and the government has been working on achieving those. “We’ll be able to achieve that [SDGs],” she said.