

Only a quarter practised it

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Prof Shahnila Ferdousi, director of the disease control unit, presented the findings of the surveys.

Among the 384 surveyed students, 72 percent had appropriate knowledge about Covid-19.

Less than one-third of them agreed that using hand sanitizer is the only way of ensuring hand hygiene while 55.4 percent believed that N-95 mask is the appropriate solution to prevent the spread of the virus.

Significantly, around a half of the 384 students did not know about the actual distance of maintaining social distancing, according to the study.

Besides, more than 8 percent students believed that smoking can "prevent" Covid-19.

Among the 604 healthcare professionals, more than 90 percent had appropriate knowledge about Covid-19 and its transmission.

However, more than half of them believed hand sanitizer is the only way to disinfect hands, found the study.

The DGHS survey report recommended that public awareness campaigns should be enhanced critically focusing the target population to cover knowledge gaps and motivate them to follow appropriate practices.

Speaking at the programme as chief guest, Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, acting director general of DGHS, thanked the study team.

Prof Shah Monir Hossen, former

DG of the DGHS, said a reluctance to follow health hygiene rules among the people is more evident, because there is a lack of community engagement in fighting novel coronavirus. "We need to form volunteer teams in every community across the country to engage the community."

Prof Shahnila Ferdousi said, "We have tried to examine the effectiveness of our awareness campaigns among the people. This will help us make our future awareness campaigns more effective."

BRAC-PROTHOM ALO STUDY
Meanwhile, another study jointly conducted by Brac and Bangla daily Prothom Alo found that 61.10 percent people cannot maintain safe physical distancing in public spaces as others around them do not follow the rule.

Among the 320,781 respondents to the survey, 67.40 percent said wearing masks caused discomfort and heat stress, while 20.90 percent said it caused breathing difficulties.

The findings of the survey were revealed in a virtual media briefing yesterday.

Of the respondents, 72.60 percent viewed that regular hand-washing is beneficial, 6.10 percent said they simply can't remember to wash hands.

The survey was conducted from July 31 to August 18. It comprised 10 questions, five of which were on wearing masks, four on hand-washing and one on social distancing practices.



With a train approaching fast, a man on a cycle goes over the lines in the capital's Khilgaon Rail Gate area. He sneaked passed the closed gates with his cycle, ignoring the risks. Such practices often lead to fatal accidents. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Govt allows trial of China vaccine

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The icddr and Chinese company Sinovac Research and Development Limited will jointly conduct the trial in Bangladesh for the next 18 months.

According to the US Centre for Disease Control, the general stages of a vaccine's development cycle are: exploratory stage, pre-clinical stage, clinical development, regulatory review and approval, manufacturing and quality control.

Phase-III clinical trial means the vaccine is at its final stage of major trials when the vaccine would be given to thousands of people to test its efficacy and safety.

Many countries are volunteering to be part of the phase-III trial of various vaccines.

The hospitals where the trial will be conducted are: Mugda General Hospital, two units (unit 1 and 2) of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Kurmitola General Hospital, Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College Hospital, Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital and Mohanagar General Hospital.

"The vaccine will be administered to the healthcare staffs who are not infected with Covid-19 as they are exposed to the disease. It will be examined whether and how much antibodies against Covid-19 grow in their bodies," Director of Bangladesh Medical Research Council (BMRC) Mahmood-uz-Jahan told this newspaper on July 19.

BENEFITS OF BANGLADESH

Currently, eight -- of which six are acceptable according to WHO -- organisations are about to conduct late-stage trials of their vaccines in different countries.

None of the Covid-19 vaccines is yet to be proven safe and effective in creating immunity.

Sinovac is currently conducting phase-III trials of their vaccine on several hundred people in different countries.

Already more than 700 people in China, 9,000 in Brazil and more than

1,200 in Indonesia have been given double doses of this vaccine as part of the trial, sources said.

Besides, such a trial is in the offing in Turkey and the UAE.

The Bangladesh government's decision has placed the country ahead in the race of getting the vaccines, experts said.

Health minister also said the country would get priority once the vaccine is proven safe and effective during the trial.

According to icddr officials, an agreement has been signed to this effect between the icddr and Sinovac.

Under the contract, Sinovac would provide 110,000 free vaccine doses to Bangladesh if the Phase-III trial of the vaccine is proven safe.

Besides, the company has committed to transferring the technology of the vaccine production in a bulk amount to a "qualified" Bangladeshi producer at a discounted price "to meet the need of the larger population of Bangladesh."

Talking to The Daily Star, Prof Nazrul Islam, member of National Technical advisory committee said, "We congratulate the government for its decision. This is a big progress in getting the vaccine. There will be a great advancement in the field of vaccine research in the country."

"There are complexities regarding the issue of vaccines. So, we need to keep more than one source... Actually, we don't have enough money to buy vaccines for such a large population," he added.

Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology at BSMMU and member of the BMRC's ethical committee that evaluated the vaccine proposal, also welcomed the decision.

"This is a very good decision. I think we are going to have vaccine development capacity through this initiative," Prof Sayedur said.

He, however, said, "This is a costly vaccine. Sinovac has fixed the vaccine price at \$145. We have to stay alert about it."

Every house to be lit up

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Mentioning that the government was providing a huge amount of subsidy to the power sector, Hasina reiterated her call to the people not to misuse electricity.

"A huge amount of money is spent for producing electricity. We're now importing LNG and we are still providing a huge amount of subsidy to the power sector. But all have to keep in mind that it is not possible to give subsidy continually."

The premier said the government has already been able to provide electricity to 97.5 percent people of the country and it was hopeful about giving power to 100 percent people by 2021.

She said her government has planned to generate 24,000 MW electricity by 2021, 40,000 MW by 2030 and 60,000 MW by 2041 for the overall economic development of the country.

"We are setting up 100 special economic zones across the country for further industrialisation and generating more employments. Electricity will be needed for this."

Hasina said the government has also established Digital Bangladesh. "With the increasing use of ICT in the country, the demand for power will go up."

Noting that the government has multifaceted electricity production, she said power is now being produced from gas, coal, and solar panel.

The PM said her government's development works were not only capital- or town-centric. "We want to transform every village into a town by reaching civic amenities to the houses of rural people."

Hasina later exchanged views with cross section of people, including public representatives, deputy commissioners, superintendents of police, teachers, students, imams, housewives as well

as users of electricity from five districts -- Noakhali, Patuakhali, Cumilla, Gopalganj and Manikganj.

Talking about the novel coronavirus pandemic, she said the entire world was suffering due to it.

When a student from Noakhali exchanged views with her, the premier said the study of students is being affected due to the closure of educational institutions. "We have made arrangements for taking classes virtually and through television."

Belal Hossain, a resident of Noakhali, sang a song on Bangabandhu.

Earlier, the PM opened cent percent electrification in 31 upazilas of 18 districts. The upazilas are Nabinagar, Sarail and Ashuganj in Brahmanbaria, Faridganj and Kachua in Chandpur, Barura and Muradnagar in Cumilla, Bhanga and Boalmari in Faridpur, Sadullapur in Gaibandha, Jhenidah Sadar in Jhenidah, Manikganj Sadar, Daulatpur, Singair and Shibalaya in Manikganj, Rajnagar in Moulvibazar, Manda, Dhamoirhat and Sapahar in Naogaon, Domar in Nilphamari, Begumganj in Noakhali, Mirzaganj in Patuakhali, Rajbari Sadar, Pangsha and Baliakandi in Rajbari, Baghmara in Rajshahi, Sathkira Sadar in Sathkira, Zakiganj and Osmaniganj in Sylhet, Raypara in Narsingdi and Kalkini in Madaripur district.

The two power plants opened by the premier are 110 MW Confidence Power Bogura-1 Ltd and 113 MW HF Power Ltd, Noakhali.

State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid was connected to the programme from his ministry office.

PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus moderated the function while the secretaries concerned to the PM were present at the Gono Bhaban.

PM hints at no exams this year

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proposal," Mahub Hossain, secretary of secondary and higher education division of the ministry, told The Daily Star.

"Now we are discussing the promotion of JSC and JDC examinees [to the next class] and the scholarships [used to be] awarded after the exams," he said.

The PECE and its equivalents for fifth-graders and JSC and its equivalents for eighth-graders were scheduled for November. These are two of the largest public examinations.

Yesterday morning, the prime minister said, "As the final exams are approaching, we are looking for ways to do what we can. There will be no exams ... we are thinking about what more we can do. Maybe we can promote without an exam."

"I know our students are in discomfort as there have been no classes for a long period of time," she said, while speaking at a programme from the Gono Bhaban.

"They are facing education losses. But we have nothing to do ... because not only Bangladesh, but the whole world is facing a similar problem due to the coronavirus."

The prime minister urged all students to study more at home as they have their books with them.

"We are broadcasting [classes and lessons] through TV and there are online classes. We are trying hard," she said.

Meanwhile, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and National Academy of Primary Education are trying to curtail the syllabus for

secondary- and primary-level students with the assumption that class may resume in October and November.

Several education ministry and primary and mass education ministry top officials said that the prime minister's hint could become a directive for them in chalking out academic plans for whatever time they get for classes and exams this year.

Education Minister Dipu Moni yesterday sat down with her ministry officials to discuss plans for during and after the pandemic.

She instructed Dhaka Education Board, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, and the NCTB to prepare a proposal recommending an alternative evaluation method for advancing students of class-VI to class-XII to the next class.

The ministry officials also discussed preparing a contingency plan in case the HSC and its equivalents could not be held this year. The tests, scheduled to begin on April 1, have been deferred indefinitely.

CLOSURE EXTENDED
The education ministry and primary and mass education ministry in separate statements said educational institutions will remain closed until October 3.

Qawmi madrasas will be out of the purview of the directive, said the education ministry statement.

The announcement comes after the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 recommended educational institutions stay closed for the time being.

After a meeting yesterday, it said, "The [Covid-19] situation is still not favourable for reopening educational

institutions. Decisions regarding opening educational institutions and exams should be taken later ..."

Students, teachers, staffers, parents, and others would be at the risk of getting infected. A large number of the population were involved in the month-long HSC exam activities. If the exam were held, chances of more infections would increase, the committee said in a statement.

Since mid-March, when all schools and other educational institutions were closed, academic activities of about four crore students of primary and secondary levels have been hampered. First- and second-term exams at primary schools and half-yearly tests at secondary schools have been postponed, worrying parents about the education of their children.

To reduce class-time being lost, the government started telecasting lessons on Sangsad TV for secondary students from March 29, for primary students from April 7, and for technical and madrasa students from April 19.

It also launched classes for primary students via radio on August 12.

Many parents claimed that these initiatives were only stop-gap measures.

About half of the country's people -- many of them underprivileged -- do not have access to TV sets.

Many who do not own digital devices cannot join online classes of public universities. There is a fear the long closure would create session jams there.

Most private universities and teachers of many schools and colleges in the capital and large cities are imparting lessons online.

3G, 4G mobile services to resume soon

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were waiting for the official order from BTRC.

"It will take three to four hours to resume the services," the official added.

The decision to lift the restrictions comes amidst repeated calls from UN agencies, local, national and international NGOs, and humanitarian aid workers. They have been saying that the restrictions hinder the desperately needed services and access to information in the world's largest refugee settlement.

The BTRC in September last year directed all telecommunication operators to shut down 3G and 4G services and to block all services, except voice calls, in the Rohingya camp areas of Ukhiya and Teknaf.

Officials said at the time that the decision was taken to stop the refugees

from using WhatsApp, Viber, and WeChat.

It was said that the Rohingyas used the apps to contact people in Myanmar. The apps were also used for committing crimes in the country, officials said.

A technical committee of the telecom regulatory commission also found that Rohingyas of Ukhiya and Teknaf upazilas of Cox's Bazar were using around three lakh mobile connections of local carriers.

The operators were then asked not to sell SIMs to the Rohingyas.

On Monday, Foreign Secretary Masud bin Momen in a webinar disclosed the government's decision on lifting the restrictions.

At the programme, he alleged that spread of "baseless rumours and misinformation" could create panic and destabilise the camps, where a few

refugees have been killed in internal clashes in recent years.

"Yet, responding to the requests from our friends and for greater internet connectivity, we have taken the decision on lifting the restrictions," he said.

Meanwhile, UK-based international human rights organisation Article 19 in a statement commended the decision to lift the restrictions on the internet.

Faruq Faisal, regional director for South Asia of the organisation, said, "This decision comes at a point when the Bangladesh government is in a race against the clock to contain the spread of coronavirus, including in the Rohingya camps."

About 750,000 Rohingyas fled to Cox's Bazar amid a brutal military crackdown in Myanmar that started on August 25, 2017.

OC Pradeep sued

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10 lakh for his release, but she could give them only Tk 5 lakh, Senuara's lawyer Mahmudul Haque Mahmud told The Daily Star.

Pradeep, who was the officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, got suspended in connection with the murder of Major (ret'd) Sinha Md Rashed Khan.

Meanwhile, two more members of Armed Police Battalion (APBn), who are accused in the Sinha murder case, yesterday gave confessional statements before a Cox's Bazar court.

They are: Assistant Sub-inspector Md Shahjahan and Constable Razib.

Judge of Teknaf Upazila Senior Magistrate Court Tamanna Farah recorded the statements under section 164 of the code of criminal procedure, a court official said.

Senior Assistant Superintendent of Police Khairul Islam of Rab, also the investigation officer of the murder case, produced the duo before the court around 1:30pm.

On Wednesday night, another APBn member Constable Md Abdullah, who is also accused in the Sinha murder case, gave confessional statement before the same court.

On August 17, Rab arrested the three APBn members.

Each of them were placed on a seven-day remand by a court later. On August 22, Rab took them in custody for interrogation.

They were on duty at the Shamlapur checkpoint at 9:30pm on July 31, yards away from the spot where Maj (ret'd) Sinha was killed, Lt Col Ashiq Billah, director of Rapid Action Battalion's legal and media wing, told a press conference at a resort in Cox's Bazar on August 17.

RAMU OC APOLOGISES

OC of Ramu Police Station Md Abul Khayer yesterday unconditionally apologised before a court for making two seizure lists of evidence found on August 1 at Nilima Resort, where Stamford University student Shipra Debnath was arrested.

Shipra was a film crew member of Maj Sinha's YouTube channel.

After her arrest, police made two seizure lists. In one list, police said they recovered liquor and marijuana.

In the other list, police said they recovered some electronic devices like laptops.

But police submitted only the first seizure list before the court.

Khaleda to seek

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take the decision soon," Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the party, told The Daily Star.

He also said the party chief's physical condition did not improve as she had to stay indoors due to the pandemic.

Asked whether the party would seek Khaleda's permanent bail or an extension of her bail order, he said, "It has not been fixed yet."

Khaleda was released from prison on March 25 after she served in jail for 776 days.

The government through an executive order released her for six months on conditions that she will stay at her home in the capital and not leave the country. It suspended her sentence as per section 401 of Criminal Code of Procedure on "humanitarian grounds".

The 75-year-old former prime minister is suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, and ophthalmological and dental ailments, said party sources.

"Her physical condition is same as when she walked out of prison on March 25. As better treatment is not available in the country amid the pandemic, we want to take her abroad," said Zahid.

"In case Khaleda does not get better treatment, she might become crippled," he said.

This correspondent reached Khaleda's family members for comments, but none of them agreed to say anything except that they would soon file for the extension of the government order that released her.

HC summons 2 investigation officials

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saying they killed the child after rape and dumped her body into the Shitalakya river.

The trio was then sent to jail.

On August 24, a police team, however, found the girl alive in Kushiara area of Narayanganj's Bandar upazila, 49 days after she had gone missing.

Interestingly, the girl on August 23 called her mother and informed that she was fine and she needed some money. Police then found her in Kushiara area where she was living with a youth in a rented house, said law enforcers.

Asked about the confessional statement, Asaduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Sadar Model Police Station, told our Narayanganj correspondent that the statement was given to court.

"We have no idea why anyone would make a false statement like this. The accused might have committed any crime in the past and mistakenly admitted their involvement [in this case]."

'SHE WENT WILLINGLY'
Talking to The Daily Star, the girl's family members said she met Abdullah on July 4. They also said she then went with one of her friends named Iqbal willingly and never returned.

She has also given a statement to a court under section 22 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, saying she had no links with the three accused, said her family.

Police have meanwhile detained Iqbal and produced him before a court with a five-day remand plea.

ALLEGATION AGAINST COPS
Abdullah's mother Sheuli Akter alleged her son was arrested without any investigation.

After he was placed on remand, some policemen demanded her family gave them Tk 20,000 to save him from being tortured. Later, they paid Tk 10,000 to Sub-inspector Shamim Al Mamun of the police station, also the investigation officer of the case, she alleged.

Rakib's brother Sajib alleged that investigation officer took Tk 30,000 from their family, promising to release Rakib.

Khalilur's wife Sharmin also claimed of paying Tk 6,000 to the policeman in vain.

Meanwhile, police in Narayanganj has formed a three-member fact-finding committee to look into the incident.

Besides, on Wednesday, Shamim was closed to ensure an impartial investigation into the incident.

Mostafizur Rahman, additional

superintendent of police in Narayanganj, said they came to know that the victim was not raped. She met Abdullah on the day of the incident and then met Iqbal with whom she starting living in Kushiara.

SHOW-CAUSE NOTICED SERVED

In another development, the judicial magistrate's court in the district yesterday issued a show-cause notice on the Sadar Model Police Station OC Asaduzzaman and SI Shamim over the incident.

The court also fixed August 31 for hearing bail petitions of the three arrested accused and remand prayer for Iqbal.

Defence lawyer Md Rokun Uddin said the court asked the OC and SI to submit a written answer, replying to the notice, in two working days.

Meanwhile, locals formed a human chain on the court premises yesterday, demanding withdrawal of the case against the three and their immediate release.

Abdullah's father Azmat Hossain said the girl returned safely to her parents, but his son was still languishing in jail for no reason.

Talking to this newspaper, the father of the girl said they were trying their best to settle the issue.