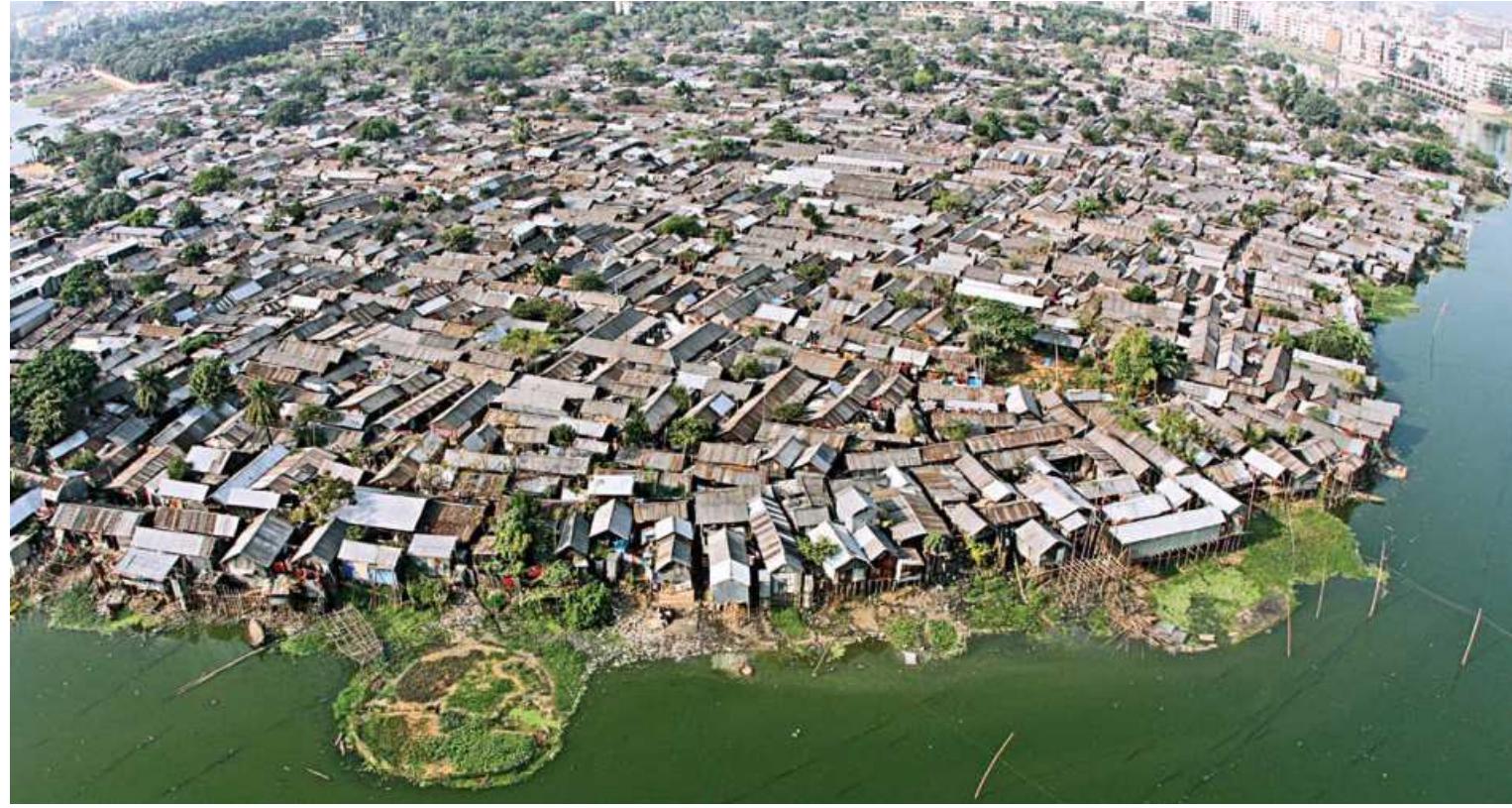


CORONAVIRUS

Most slum residents kept out of the loop



This aerial view of the Korail slum shows how congested the place is. With millions living in such slums across the city, a coronavirus outbreak could easily have severe impact at community level here.

STAR FILE PHOTO

NIIMA JAHAN

With calls ringing louder for raising awareness on cleanliness and "social distancing" in wake of coronavirus infections being reported in the country every day, a large population group of the capital -- who live in cramped slums with poor hygiene standards -- appears to be largely clueless about the virus and precautions needed.

Misconceptions and the belief in a higher power were found to be common upon visits to several slums in the city over the last few days, with awareness campaigns by the two city corporations not reaching nearly enough people.

The awareness level inside the slums was found to be low, as dwellers claimed they didn't come across any significant initiatives addressing the global pandemic.

Five-five-year-old Shahinoor Begum, a resident of Karail slum, told this newspaper that she thought the "korolavirus" spread from "korola" (bitter gourd).

"Recently, people have started talking about this virus disease. I thought this spread from korola, so I forbade everyone in my house from buying it," said Shahinoor, who collects beef

tripe from butchers and sells to wholesalers at Mohakhali kitchen market.

Like Shahinoor, a majority of people living in informal settlements have heard about the virus but have no proper information of the do's and don'ts to prevent it.

"How will I know about the risks? I live in the slum; I don't have a TV; I don't read the newspaper. Nobody told me what is happening with this virus. We do not know how deadly it is, who is at risk, what are the symptoms, and where to go if I have any symptoms," she said.

At the same slum, a 65-year-old man who has been suffering from asthma for three years, was found anxious about the virus.

"I am feeling a little bit scared but I don't know where to go. I believe my case is not coronavirus, but still," he said, on condition of anonymity.

Ranu Akter, a homemaker living in the Tejgaon Baulbagh slum, said she wished people would come to them and advised what to do and what not to do. "Otherwise, we will be most vulnerable," she said.

Although experts say poor sanitation, overcrowding, and lack of hygiene materials are major factors in the transmission of Covid-19,

most slum dwellers who are day labourers, small business owners, factory workers, or household help, said it is difficult for them to maintain cleanliness or avoid gatherings.

Niamat Ali, a rickshaw-puller living in Karail slum, said, "If I stay home wearing masks and doing nothing, how will I feed my family? Here, everyone works from morning till night to earn their bread."

Sabita Rani was found sitting on a garbage-filled narrow lane of Karail slum, with nine other women and teenage girls. "See, is it possible to avoid people when over 40,000 of us are densely packed here? I have two rooms where I live with nine family members. I mingle with around 50-60 people in front of my house every hour," she said.

Anu Rani, 18-year-old homemaker talked about how she has given up on keeping her three-year-old son clean at all times, as it is impossible to avoid human contact in such an unhealthy environment.

"I cannot keep him on my lap at all times since I'm busy doing household chores. Also, my son is learning to walk and he doesn't stay

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

'Follow quarantine rules or face action'

Home minister tells returnees

UNB, Dhaka

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday urged overseas returnees to follow the quarantine rules for the sake of the country, warning that stern action will be taken if anyone breaches those.

"The government doesn't want to enforce the law from the beginning. But if anyone of those asked to remain in quarantine doesn't follow the health ministry's instructions, legal action will be taken against them," he said while inaugurating a Bangabandhu Corner at the head office of NRB Bank in Motijheel.

On Monday, the government decided that all those arriving here from abroad must stay in 14-day quarantine.

Bangladesh has so far reported 14 coronavirus cases, including the first death reported yesterday, while many people who have returned from abroad in recent weeks have been quarantined.

However, media reports suggest that a number of the returnees are not following the home quarantine protocols, in absence of monitoring.

BRIBERY CASE
Ex-DIG Mizan, Basir indicted
COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against Mizanur Rahman, suspended deputy inspector general of police, and Khandaker Enamul Basir, suspended director of Anti-Corruption Commission, in a bribery case.

Mizan and Basir, now in jail, claimed themselves innocent and demanded justice after Judge Shaikh Nazmul Alam of Special Judge Court-4 read out the charges to them.

Earlier in the day, the court rejected their petitions filed for clearing them of the charges. The court fixed every Monday from March 23 for recording statements of witnesses.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Dhaka's air quality improves, but still 'unhealthy': AQI

UNB, Dhaka

Although the air quality of the capital marked a significant improvement yesterday morning, it was still classified as "unhealthy" in the Air Quality Index (AQI).

Dhaka had an AQI score of 135 at 10:17am, standing at 20th in the list of cities with worst air. Pakistan's Lahore and India's Mumbai occupied the first and second spots with scores of 187 and 177 respectively, while Poland's Krakow ranked third with 176.

When the AQI value is between 101 and 150, members of sensitive groups may experience health effects while general public is less likely to be affected, according to the index.

In Bangladesh, the AQI is based on five pollutants: particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5), NO2, CO, SO2 and Ozone (O3).

Dhaka has long been grappling with air pollution, making it to the top of the list on a number of occasions in recent months.

The air quality usually improves during monsoon.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



Youngsters find abundant space to put their stumps in place and have a friendly game of cricket, as the capital's roads are getting emptier due to coronavirus spread. This photo was taken yesterday from Tejgaon area.

Six 'human carriers' of yaba pills arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In two special drives, Detective Branch (DB) of police yesterday claimed to have arrested six people engaged in smuggling yaba pills for years.

The arrestees were identified as Md Chan Miah (45), Md Alam (55), Md Liakat Ali (56), Md Khokon Sheikh (36), Md Selim Molla (32), and Md Selim Mahmud (22).

A team of DB (north) first arrested Chan, Alam and Liakat from Khilgaon and Sadarghat areas on Tuesday night, Golam Saklai, additional deputy commissioner of DB police, told The Daily Star yesterday.

A case was filed against the three with Khilgaon Police Station. In another drive, the three others were arrested from the capital's Paltan, he said, adding that a separate case was filed against them with Paltan Police Station.

The DB team recovered around 9,500 yaba pills from their possession, which they brought in the capital inside their stomachs, said the additional commissioner.

Police also seized a motorbike reportedly used to transport the pills. The carrier would first wrap around 40 to 50 pills in sticky tape, and insert those inside the bananas they would then eat, before starting off for Dhaka from the coastal district, said ADC Saklai, adding that once they reached Dhaka, they brought those out from their stomachs and handed those over to yaba traders.

For each yaba pill, they were paid Tk 10, he said. With an aim to dodge law enforcers, Khokon, Selim and Mahmud first went to Chandpur from Cox's Bazar and then took a launch to reach Dhaka, said the official.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Coaching centres open, defying govt directive

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

at 14.

"We gave lessons to some students who came to the coaching centre in the morning. We will keep our centre closed from tomorrow [Thursday]," said Shyamol Kumar Mondal, manager of Aim Professors Chamber, a coaching centre at Mirpur 10.

Education Minister Dipu Moni, while announcing the closure of educational institutions from March 17 to 31, had said coaching centres would remain shut. "Students should stay at home. This closure is not for attending coaching classes or going on holidays," she added.

Sheikh Mustafizur Rahman, co-founder of Commerce Centre at Mirpur, was found tutoring three students at his coaching centre. Students said Shafiqul Alam, another teacher of the coaching centre, tutored six or seven students in the morning.

"We usually tutor honours level students. We are observing the situation. We will take decision about shutting down the coaching centre in a day or two," Mustafizur said.

He said they were unaware about the government decision to close all coaching centres.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

CORONAVIRUS
Brac asks head office staff to work from home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brac, the world's largest NGO, has instructed all non-essential staff working at its head office in the capital's Mohakhali to stay at home and work online from March 22 to March 25, as a preventive measure against novel coronavirus.

Brac staff at field offices across the country will also maintain curtailed activities, said Brac Executive Director Asif Saleh.

Employees were asked to avoid non-essential travels, he said, adding that the interim measures will continue for a week.

Bracfield officials working under different programmes across the country have been instructed to join the force of its health programme and act as health volunteers in different awareness campaigns for coronavirus prevention, it further said.



Journalists form a human chain in front of the National Museum at Shahbagh yesterday, demanding the immediate locating of photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kazal, who went missing on March 10.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Manabzamin editor secures anticipatory bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday granted a four-week anticipatory bail to Bangla daily Manabzamin Editor-in-Chief Matiur Rahman Chowdhury in a case filed under Digital Security Act on charge of "publishing false news and circulating it on social media".

The court, however, asked him to surrender before the cyber tribunal concerned after expiry of his bail in the case.

The bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim and Justice Md Riaz Uddin Khan came up with the order after he submitted a bail petition in connection with the case. Earlier in the day, he appeared before the HC bench for bail.

His lawyer, Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, told The Daily Star that the HC granted bail to his client as there is no specific allegation against him.

Saifuzzaman Shikhor, a ruling party lawmaker from Magura-1, filed the case accusing Matiur and 31 others with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station on March 9.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1