

The Daily Star



CORONAVIRUS FALLOUT

Govt to help affected SMEs

Move designed to protect the industries that employ 2.45cr people

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and SOHEL PARVEZ

The government is set to bear a portion of the interest payments on working capital of small and medium enterprises that have been hit hard by the ongoing shutdown amid coronavirus scare. It may cover 4-5 percent of the 9 percent interest burden of the SMEs and export-oriented industries to help them recoup losses, according to a top government official.

"We are planning to do this to ensure that no small and medium industry shuts down for a lack of working capital, and no jobs are lost due to coronavirus-related economic problems," Tapan Kanti Ghosh, chairman of Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The SMEs are now facing a big crisis with economists and bankers urging the government to protect the businesses for the sake of the country's economic growth.

The country has 78.18 lakh SMEs that employ 2.45 crore people, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

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- » Govt may bear 4-5 percent of 9 percent in loan interest
- » Factories to continue operations after ensuring workers safety
- » Law enforcers to ensure seamless goods transport
- » Intelligence agencies to be vigilant against hoarding
- » Exporters want 2 yrs for paying back Tk 5,000crore package



Achia Begum, a resident of Gazipur, was seen waiting for transport for over two hours in the hot afternoon sun on a footpath on Mirpur Road near Shyamoli in the capital yesterday. She came to the National Institute of Kidney as she needs two dialysis a week.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

3,000 in jail could be out on bail

Home ministry mulling prisons' proposal

MUNTAKIM SAAD

The country is considering to release on bail some 3,000 prisoners, including those under trial and jailed for bailable offences, to lower the chances of coronavirus transmission in crowded jails.

The jail authorities have sent a proposal along with names of such inmates to the home ministry.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said they were discussing the matter with the authorities concerned. "It's still at a discussion level."

Talking to The Daily Star, Additional Inspector General (AIG) of Prisons Col Md Abrar Hossain said, "The proposal was sent as per the home ministry's order in light of the coronavirus situation. We are considering the minor bailable cases in which

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One more dies of coronavirus

3 new cases found; 5 die after showing Covid-19-like symptoms

STAR REPORT

The authorities yesterday said another person died of Covid-19 in the country and the total number of deaths caused by the virus now stands at six.

In 24 hours till 12:00pm yesterday, three people were diagnosed with the infection after 157 suspected patients were tested, Health Minister Zahid Maleque told a press briefing via video conference from his home in the capital.

Now, the number of Covid-19 cases is 54 in the country.

On March 8, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) reported the first Covid-19 case in the country.

To contain the transmission of the deadly virus, the government went for a 10-day countrywide shutdown on March 26 and urged people to maintain physical distancing and stay indoors.

In the latest development, the government yesterday stretched the shutdown to April 11.

"People in many places are not maintaining the government directives. They are roaming around," Zahid said while addressing the briefing.

Urging people to stay at home, the minister said, "We cannot take the country towards danger. You [people] refrain from such activities."

About the test facilities, he said, "We have expanded the facilities. I don't want anyone to be out of test facilities. Those

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EDITORIAL BY SAMPADAK PARISHAD

We are with you, you be with us

News media appeal to readers

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused the worst public health crisis in living memory in the world, including Bangladesh. The sheer scale and speed of the outbreak has left the citizens aghast and grasping for answers. To them we want to say: we in the news media remain vigilant and active on your behalf. We are with you.

Despite the pandemic's manifold challenges, we remain steadfast in our commitment to bring to you reliable, important and up-to-date information. This is a sensitive time and our objective is to deliver the news with utmost caution and determination and in keeping with your needs.

The coronavirus is changing how we live. Our healthcare system, our trade and businesses, our education sector, our family life are all at a crossroads. Every day appears to be an exercise in confronting new challenges. The journalists, therefore, are working tirelessly to bring to you stories that illustrate how the coronavirus is affecting various aspects of your life. We are careful to report in a manner that gives you a comprehensive understanding of this ever-evolving situation and helps you make better decisions for yourself.

In these uncertain times, the need for objective reporting, proper verification and careful judgment has never been so vital. The most effective way to address this crisis is through clear communication, exchange of experiences, and fruitful research. We are performing our duty sincerely, and at considerable personal risk, to get the information you need delivered at your doorstep.

We are relentlessly publishing reports, analytical stories, and opinion pieces with a focus on the preventive measures. We are bringing you the latest news as it happens. All this is geared to your need for a healthy life for yourself as well as your family, to ensure the continuity of life for you while you remain housebound, to make it meaningful and relatively pleasant, and overall to ensure that you don't get disconnected from the rest of the country and the world.

In these frightening times, one silver lining has been the enormous vitality and solidarity on display in many parts of the world. We are sharing these hopeful stories with you—stories of how scientists in laboratories in various countries are working day and night to create an effective vaccine, how some nations have managed to contain the transmission of the virus, how people are coming forward to help each other. Our objective is not

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Shutdown now extended till April 11

Pahela Baishakh, Baisabi celebrations suspended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a bid to contain the spread of coronavirus, the government yesterday extended the ongoing shutdown until April 11.

The Ministry of Public Administration issued a circular in this regard.

Earlier, the government announced the closure of all public and private offices from March 26 to April 4 after which all public transport services were suspended.

In line with the latest announcement, the apex court would also issue a notification to soon extend holidays at all the courts.

Talking to The Daily Star, Saifur Rahman, spokesperson for the Supreme Court, said holidays at all the courts, including the Appellate Division and the High Court Division, would be extended to contain the virus outbreak.

Meanwhile, the cabinet division issued

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ARMY TO GO TOUGH ON VIOLATORS -- PAGE 2

US virus death toll tops 4,000

Trump says 'hard days ahead' as White House predicts 2.4 lakh deaths

AGENCIES

Emergency field hospitals were readied in New York's Central Park and at the home of the US Open tennis tournament as the number of American deaths from the coronavirus pandemic surged past 4,000 -- higher than the toll in China.

The pandemic has killed more than 1,700 New Yorkers and President Donald Trump, a native of the city, warned in Washington of "a very, very painful two weeks" to come for the entire country.

"I want every American to be prepared for the hard days that lie ahead," Trump told reporters on Tuesday at a briefing.

Already the hardest-hit area, America's financial capital is in a race to ramp up hospital capacity before cases peak.

Around a dozen tents, equipped with 68 beds and 10 ventilators, have been put up in Manhattan's iconic park, with Covid-19 patients expected to start arriving.

"You see movies like 'Contagion' and you think it's so far from the truth, it will never happen. So to see it actually happening here is very surreal," 57-year-old passer-by Joanne Dunbar told AFP.

Declared coronavirus cases across the US surged to 1,89,510 early yesterday, according to a running tally by Johns Hopkins University, with a record 865 deaths in the 24 hours.

New York state has seen far more cases -- 76,000 -- and deaths than any other since announcing its first infection on March 1 and quickly

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A resident of the White House estate, a private condominium of 226 dwellings, collects food offered by neighbours from his balcony, using a rope made with blankets, in Marseille, southern France, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

বাংলাদেশ কলেজ অব ফিজিশিয়ানস্ এন্ড সার্জন্স
Bangladesh College of Physicians & Surgeons

BCPS
 CPS No. 776/2020
 Date: 30 March 2020

আজকের খবর

Announcement

Respected Fellows and Members,
Assalamu Alaikum.

Today the entire world is confronted with an unprecedented crisis in human history by the COVID-19 where human lives are in danger losing nearest and dearest ones in every moment and making the whole world crippled and stunned. Experts and WHO forecast that the impact of this disease could be more dangerous in our country because of population density and ignorance.

To cope with such health crisis specialists have to come forward to take the lead and to stay in the field to fight against this unseen enemy with dedication, motivation, courage and with a fearless heart until we win.

We strongly urge all of you on behalf of the BCPS Council to stay safe and to take the challenges as usual like the past.

BCPS reminds you to use PPE while dealing with COVID-19 patient and even with high suspects for your personal protection. BCPS has already uploaded in its website (www.bcps.edu.bd) all Govt instructions and informations regarding health care in Coronavirus management.

Our Hon'ble Prime Minister and her Govt. through Ministry of Health & Family Welfare are providing adequate number of personal protective materials throughout the country for your protection and to treat the patients.
May Allah Keep us all safe.

Professor Quazi Deen Mohammad
President, BCPS.
GD-713
Professor Abul Bashar Mohammed Khurshid Alam
Honorary Secretary, BCPS.

Turned away by 4 hospitals, boy dies

UNB, Khulna

A schoolboy who was suffering from cirrhosis died without treatment on Tuesday afternoon after he was turned away by three hospitals and a clinic in Khulna.

Deceased Rifat, son of Mohammad Kashem, was from Khalishpur housing bihari camp-1 in Khulna city.

He was taken to Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) around 2:30pm after his condition deteriorated.

Rifat's grandfather Kalimuddin said, "The hospital refused to admit him saying there was no doctor."

He was given medicine and the family was asked to bring him there yesterday.

Later, Rifat was taken to Khalishpur Clinic but was denied admission

there, prompting the family members to take him to Surgical Hospital.

Doctors there advised the family members to take the schoolboy to Moylapota Hospital, but he was denied admission there as well.

He died in the evening without receiving any treatment, said Kalimuddin.

Dr Sheikh Atiar Rahman, assistant director of KMCH, said their doctors were under pressure over the coronavirus situation. But the situation was not so severe that general patients would not get proper treatment, he added.

He said he would look into the complaint of the patient's family.

Khulna Civil Surgeon Dr Sujat said treatment of general patients was not stopped at any hospital. He said he would look into the matter.

Russian plane heads to US with supplies for virus fight

AFP, Moscow

A Russian military plane carrying medical equipment has departed for the United States, the defence ministry in Moscow said yesterday, as the Kremlin flexes its soft power amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The Antonov-124, "with medical masks and medical equipment on board", left for the US overnight, a statement said, without providing further details.

Video released by the ministry showed the cargo plane loaded with boxes preparing to take off from a military airbase near Moscow early yesterday morning.

Contacted by AFP, the defence ministry refused to provide any further information on the delivery, which came after Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke with US counterpart Donald Trump on Monday.

Russia has previously sent medical

supplies and experts to coronavirus-hit Italy as part of a humanitarian effort that analysts said carried geopolitical overtones.

Moscow said the aid for Italy included some 100 virus specialists with experience dealing with Ebola and swine fever, but Italian media have reported that much of the aid was not useful in the fight against the virus.

Last month, Russia said it had sent nearly 1,000 coronavirus testing kits to ex-Soviet states and countries including Iran and North Korea.

The US now has 188,663 confirmed coronavirus cases, by far the highest of any country, according to a Johns Hopkins tally, and more than 4,000 deaths.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday that Putin expected the US to return the gesture if Russia faces a similar crisis and US producers have increased their capacity to produce medical supplies.

Shutdown now extended

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a notification suspending all programmes to celebrate the Bangla Noborsho to avoid public gatherings. Baisabi, the prime festival celebrated in the CHT region marking the Bangla new year, has also been suspended.

EMERGENCY, UTILITY SERVICES WILL REMAIN OPEN

As per the latest circular of public administration ministry, utility services such as water, electricity, gas, fire service, telephone, the internet will remain open during the shutdown.

Agriculture products, fertiliser, insecticides, foods, goods, medical

equipment, daily essentials, kitchen markets, restaurants, drug stores and hospitals would also remain out of the purview of the shutdown, the circular added.

The circular also read that offices can be opened for urgent necessities. Pharmaceuticals and export-oriented mills and factories will remain open if necessary.

Operation of rail, buses and other transport would start gradually for the sake of people's livelihood.

Bangladesh Bank would issue necessary directives to keep banks open on a limited scale for the sake of people during the shutdown.

Govt to help affected SMEs

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The majority of the SMEs are cottage-based, which account for 40 percent of the total employed population of 6.08 crore.

As a whole, the SMEs contribution to Bangladesh's GDP is 20.25 percent, according to a study conducted by the International Cooperation Organisation for Small and Medium Enterprises in Asia (ICOSA), Japan.

An assistance of sorts was offered to them on March 19, when Bangladesh Bank asked banks not to consider borrowers as defaulters if they fail to repay instalments until June 30 this year. But their accounts will continue to accrue interest during the period.

Tapan said there is a plan to form a separate fund similar to the Export Development Fund, managed by the central bank, to support SMEs.

In addition, export-oriented industries will also be given support so that they can recoup losses amid the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic that have so far claimed more than 42,000 lives globally.

The government will provide the support in addition to its previously announced Tk 5,000 crore fund for export-oriented factories for paying wages of workers.

At a high-level meeting presided over by Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi yesterday, top officials discussed ways of keeping the supply chain of essentials uninterrupted to prevent mismatch between supply and demand as well as price fluctuations between production zones and urban areas.

They also had a discussion on the risk of shortage of commodities in the market owing to a lack of transport as many trucks are staying off the road for fear of coronavirus and a lack of security, said meeting sources.

At the meeting, a decision was taken to alert the law enforcement agencies to ensure seamless movement of goods throughout the country and curb scope of extortion.

Besides, intelligence agencies would be asked to be vigilant to prevent hoarding of goods by unscrupulous traders or businesses, they said.

The meeting was attended by Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam, Chief of Army Staff General Aziz Ahmed, Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus, NBR Chairman Abu Hena Mohammad Rahmatul Munim, Finance Secretary

Abdur Rouf Talukder, Commerce Secretary Jafar Uddin, Bangladesh Bank Governor Fazle Kabir and leaders of the business community.

Later, Tipu told this newspaper that if any garment factory has work orders from international retailers or global brands, it can continue operation by ensuring adequate health safety measures for its workers.

About the meeting, he said it was a coordination meeting between government high-ups, the army chief and business leaders for assessing the current situation.

The minister said there is confusion about operation of garment factories as the government announced holidays from March 26 to April 11.

Some factory owners are keeping their production units open while some others are keeping their units shut because of confusion, he mentioned.

"There is no confusion. If any factory has work orders from international retailers or brands, it can run its operation," Tipu said.

In separate statements last Friday, the Department of Inspection for Factory and Establishment, and Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association said factories can be kept open with adequate safety measures for workers.

The minister yesterday said some businesspeople want to export Personal Protective Equipment as they have been producing a lot of those recently. The ministry will decide on this later.

The exporters demanded an extension of the repayment period for the Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package. The government gave them 24 months, including six-month grace period, for paying back the money.

"We heard them. We will discuss all the issues soon and reach a decision," Tipu told this newspaper over the phone after the meeting.

He urged house owners to reduce rents for workers at this time of crisis.

The minister further said the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh has started selling some essentials, including edible oil, lentil and sugar, at low prices across the country.

There is no possibility of a sudden price hike of these goods in the upcoming Ramadan as the country has an adequate stock of basic commodities, he added.



Policemen stop motorists in front of New Market in the capital yesterday and ask them why they had left home despite the risks of contracting and spreading coronavirus.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

One more dies of coronavirus

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who suspect that they have contracted the virus, come for tests."

So far, Covid-19 tests have been conducted at six laboratories in Dhaka and one outside Dhaka.

Of them, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University has set up a "fever clinic" for patients showing Covid-19-like symptoms. There will be also test facilities.

The minister added that the government was preparing more hospitals outside Dhaka for treating Covid-19 patients.

"We have increased the number of personal protective equipment and masks [for healthcare professionals]," he added.

Organised by the Directorate General of Health Services, Habibur Rahman, director of DGHS's management information system (MIS), and Khondoker Mahbuba Jamil, virologist at the Institute of Public Health, joined the briefing from the MIS conference room.

Meanwhile, Health Secretary Ashadul Islam said the number of tests would be increased within days.

He said this while briefing the media via video conferencing from DGHS's management information system (MIS) office after a high-profile meeting at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

Director General of DGHS was also present at the briefing.

"The prime minister has directed us to increase the number of tests as early as possible. You will see it within days," the health secretary said.

Representatives from different

government and professional bodies attended the meeting.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged people to follow the government advice to stay at home. She also urged doctors not to refuse any patients in fear of Covid-19, the health secretary added.

FIVE DIE WITH FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS

At least five people have died after showing coronavirus-like symptoms in Dhaka, Narail, Shariatpur, and Rajshahi since Tuesday night.

Two people, suffering from fever, runny nose, and cough, died at the isolation unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The victims are male. One of them, aged 65, passed away around 5:00 yesterday and another, aged 32, around 10:30pm on Tuesday.

"They were admitted to the isolation unit with fever, runny nose, and cough on Tuesday. After their death, samples were sent to IEDCR to know whether they had coronavirus infections," said Alauddin Al Azad, an assistant director at the DMCH.

Their bodies were kept at the hospital morgue, he said, adding that the bodies would be handed over to their relatives if the victims' samples tested negative for the novel coronavirus.

In Narail, a 26-year-old man, suffering from fever and breathing problems, died at Narail General Hospital on Tuesday night.

He was a betel nut trader at Rugganj Bazar.

Five families in Cherag Ali Bepari Kandi village of Shariatpur's Naria were isolated yesterday after a man of the area breathed his last at the isolation

unit of Shariatpur Sadar Hospital at that night.

The victim had fever and cough, said Joyanti Rupa Roy, Naria upazila nirbahi officer.

A college student with respiratory disease died at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital on the same night.

The victim, of Nobinagar village in Natore's Lalpur, was a student of Ishwardi Government College.

Talking to journalists, hospital's doctor Azizul Haque said the youth was not infected with coronavirus.

Besides the five families in Shariatpur, multiple families were isolated in Noakhali and Jashore as patients showing Covid-19-like symptoms were reported.

In Noakhali, six people, including three children, of two families were taken to the isolation unit at Sonaimuri Upazila Health Complex, suspecting that they had coronavirus infections.

They were suffering from fever and cold, said Mainul Islam, upazila health officer of Sonaimuri.

They became sick after coming in contact with a Dubai returnee, the doctor added.

Three members of a family of Pachpota village in Jashore's Keshabpur were sent to the isolation unit at the local upazila health complex as they had fever, cold, and cough.

In another development, a government official in Brahmanbaria's Bancharampur was sent to IEDCR yesterday for test as he was suffering from flu-like symptoms.

Our correspondents from Bagerhat, Noakhali, Benapole, and Brahmanbaria contributed to this report.

3,000 in jail could be out on bail

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prisoners are awaiting trial or have been sentenced to imprisonment for two years or less.

"There are around 3,090 people who are in jail for minor offences and we have sent their names to the ministry," he said.

The AIG said they would not consider non-bailable cases like those over murder, rape, terrorism and drugs offences.

Once approved by the home ministry, the proposal will be forwarded to the law ministry. It will be placed before courts for final approval if the law ministry does not have any objection.

"The decision on bail will ultimately be taken by the judiciary as the matter falls within its jurisdiction," said Abarar.

Law Minister Anisul Huq could not be reached for comments.

Public health specialists have expressed concern that many prisoners might contract coronavirus in the densely populated jails plagued by unhealthy and unhygienic living conditions.

Sources at the prison directorate said there are around 89,000 prisoners at 68 jails across the country, against the capacity of 41,244.

In this regard, some legal experts opined that under trial prisoners who might be sentenced to imprisonment for two years or less should be released as it would lower chances of coronavirus transmission in jails.

Until Saturday, no coronavirus

positive cases were reported at any of the jails. Forty inmates have, however, been kept in quarantine at different jails as a precautionary measure, according to a report, signed by Abdul Kadir, a deputy secretary of the home ministry.

The jails are being kept under strict vigilance to prevent the spread of the virus, he said.

Isolation centres have been opened at the jails in Kishoreganj, Madaripur, Pirojpur, Sylhet, Feni and Dinajpur, according to a report of the home ministry's special coordination cell.

Contacted, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star yesterday that the magistrates concerned can grant bail to under trial prisoners who might be punished with short jail sentences, by examining relevant files in their (magistrates) offices.

Such under-trial prisoners should be released immediately from jail as their family members were anxious about their safety amid the coronavirus outbreak, he said.

Mahbubey Alam also said the magistrates can work on this at their offices as courts are now closed due to the virus outbreak and bail petitions are not being heard or disposed of.

The government may also release such under-trial prisoners on parole from jail for a short period of time, he added.

Eminent jurist Dr Shahdeen Malik told this correspondent that "the idea of taking revenge on alleged perpetrators

of a crime is very strong in our criminal justice system.

"Like most other countries, we should also move away from this perception. The government should, first, release all convicted prisoners who have been sentenced to imprisonment for two years or less. Secondly, those who are in jails as under trial prisoners for more than two years, being accused of crimes not punishable by sentence of life imprisonment or death, should also be freed.

"Also, all cases of women prisoners should be sympathetically looked into in order to facilitate their release."

Shahdeen Malik also said "these measures will substantially reduce burden and backlog of bailable cases and will also help stem the ongoing outbreak of Covid-19 in the overcrowded prisons".

Advocate Khurshid Alam Khan, a Supreme Court lawyer and editor of Dhaka Law Reports, told this correspondent that the chief justice may constitute two High Court benches and assign some magistrates to hear the urgent bail petitions as the court functions are now closed.

"As far as I know, around 300 accused get bail on every working day from courts and a similar number of people are arrested every day across the country on an average. Now that the bail petitions are not being heard, the Supreme Court Bar Association may approach the chief justice for this purpose," he added.

US virus death toll tops 4,000

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emerging as the epicentre of the US outbreak.

Mayor Bill de Blasio said Tuesday the city was tripling hospital capacity in a bid to get ready for the peak of the pandemic expected in two to three weeks.

"(We) will require a level of hospital capacity we've never seen... never even conceived of," he told NBC.

PLEA TO EVACUATE

Fallout is spreading wider every day across the world's biggest economy.

The captain of the nuclear powered aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt, one of the most fearsome assets in the US arsenal, pleaded for large-scale evacuation, saying that the virus was spreading uncontrollably through his crew, currently in the US Pacific territory of Guam.

"We are not at war. Sailors do not need to die," Captain Brett Crozier wrote in a letter to his superiors, US

media reported. Defense Secretary Mark Esper later downplayed the drama, saying that no one was "seriously ill."

But in New York, officials are already in full blown crisis management mode, scrambling to deal with the influx of sick when hospitals are already overwhelmed and medical supplies strained.

South of Central Park, the Javits Convention Center is now operational with nearly 3,000 beds after it was adapted by the Army Corps of Engineers.

It will take non-Covid-19 patients to ease the burden on hospitals focusing on the virus.

A few blocks away at Pier 90 sits the white, imposing US navy hospital ship Comfort, with 1,000 beds and 12 operating rooms -- also for non-coronavirus patients.

A 350-bed facility at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center

in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, where the US Open tennis takes place every summer, is due to start receiving coronavirus patients next week.

Governor Andrew Cuomo -- whose brother, CNN anchor Chris Cuomo, announced on Tuesday that he had the virus -- warned New Yorkers that the fight to defeat Covid-19 was going to be a long one.

"Calibrate yourself and your expectations so you're not disappointed every day you get up," he told reporters.

The White House projects 1,00,000 to 2,40,000 Americans will die from coronavirus if "full mitigation" measures are taken, Coronavirus Task Force response coordinator Deborah Birx said during a marathon Coronavirus Task Force briefing that lasted more than two hours.

Without social distancing, deaths could be much higher, the White House projects.

SHUTDOWN

Army to go tough on violators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The army will take stern actions from today if anyone violates the government directive on maintaining social distancing and following home-quarantine rules, in its efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus.

"To assist the local administration, the army will strictly ensure social distancing and home quarantine at all places of the country from tomorrow [today]," said a press release from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) last night.

"Strict actions would be taken against those who would violate the directives given by the government," it added.

The move came following media reports that many are still roaming on streets and alleyways in cities and other urban areas, ignoring the government advice to stay indoors.

On March 23, the government announced closure of all public and private offices from March 26 to April 4 as part of its efforts to contain the spread of novel coronavirus. Yesterday, it extended the closure up to April 11.

From March 24, the army, following a government announcement, started assisting the local administration at divisional cities and district towns in ensuring social distancing and implementing other precautionary measures.

The army, in coordination with district magistrates, would monitor the treatment of corona patients and the quarantine facilities for suspected cases in districts and divisions, the announcement said.

They will also monitor whether any person returning from abroad is neglecting the mandatory self-quarantine rules, it added.

A total of 496 teams of the army took part in various activities with local administration in 62 districts of the country to prevent the spread of coronavirus, according to an ISPR statement issued on Tuesday.

The navy is also assisting the civil administration in coastal areas while the air force was engaged in carrying medical supplies to hospitals and other emergency transportation, said the ISPR.

Free transport for doctors, nurses launched in city

UNB, Dhaka

A free transport service for caregivers, including doctors and nurses, was launched yesterday so that they could go to hospitals faster.

A number of busses and minibuses have been arranged to pick up doctors and nurses from their homes and drop them at hospitals in three shifts -- at 8am, 2pm and 8pm.

Apart from the scheduled shuttle services, transport will also be provided to doctors and nurses in case of emergency calls within the capital, said a press release.

Under the supervision of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), non-governmental organisation 'The Earth Society' and vehicle IT solution firm 'Bondstein Technologies' jointly took the initiative with support of DBL Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Dhaka Hub of Global Shapers.

The service was named as 'Crack Platoon Transport Service' inspired by the famous guerrilla unit named 'Crack Platoon' that had conducted a number of heroic commando operations in Dhaka during the War of Liberation in 1971.

Over 250 doctors and caregivers have so far registered in the website for availing themselves of the service and any doctor or caregiver in need of the service can register through the website - bit.ly/crackplatoontransport and can call at the hotline number - 09639595959.

We are with you

FROM PAGE 1

to spread panic. Our objective is to inform you of the situation as it is and help you prepare with the correct and up-to-date information.

The responsibility of the news media now is greater than ever before. At the same time, the industry is under tremendous strain because of the adverse effects of the coronavirus, with a major shortfall in revenue. The distribution and marketing channels of the newspapers countrywide are being disrupted. Despite that, we have continued to publish newspapers considering the greater public interest. We have brought our workstations and printing houses under the emergency health protocol, provided our journalists with protective equipment, and distributed masks, gloves and hand sanitisers among our agents and hawkers across the country including the capital Dhaka.

We acknowledge the profound need for unity, friendship and cooperation in this period of crisis. Only through this do we stand a chance to overcome this crisis.

Dear reader, we in the news media are with you, as we expect you will be with us.

What about their security?

Members of railway security force vulnerable for lack of safety gears, hygiene products



Members of railway security force live in unsanitary conditions -- cramped together in close quarters -- amid Covid-19 concerns. PHOTO: STAFF

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

When thousands of homebound people on March 24 thronged Airport Railway Station in Dhaka, sepoy Saddam Hossain of Railway Nirapatta Bahini (RNB) was given the responsibility to deter people from getting on the train roof.

Holding a cane in one hand, he blew whistle every now and then to caution people. At times, he even had to grab hold of some passengers who by any means wanted to go home after the government on March 23 declared closure of offices and transports to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus.

"No, I didn't have any gloves. I did my job with bare hands," Saddam told this newspaper recently.

At the end of the day, Saddam and his colleagues went to their Gopibagh Barrack, where over 250 RNB members including some Ansars share rooms, toilets and washrooms as well as the risk of transmitting Covid-19.

Meanwhile, IEDCR has repeatedly been requesting people to maintain social distance and personal hygiene.

In addition, such way of travelling increases the risk, and IEDCR in a following press briefing asked travellers to remain in quarantine for 14 days once they reach home.

But Bangladesh Railway authorities seem oblivious to the call and remain forgetful about the potential risk of RNB members who discharged their duties at stations on those days.

"No masks, gloves or soap; they gave us nothing," said an RNB member, wishing anonymity.

These correspondents interviewed

around 30 RNB members who made similar claims.

On Sunday, this newspaper saw some of them on duty in and around the Kamalapur Railway Station without any protective equipment.

Though the station is devoid of passengers now, they still have to deal with vagrants and locals.

"If one of us somehow gets infected, it will affect us all," said another RNB member. Pointing to the mask on his face, he said, "I bought this myself."

"The authorities rely on us for the security of public assets worth thousands of crores of taka but they leave us without protection," he added.

CONDITION OF RNB BARRACK

The two-storey yellow building has already been declared vulnerable to collapse. Rusty rods have become visible as plasters are falling off at places.

On the ground floor, 14 beds [in two rows] have been set up in a congested way in a room where 12 persons sleep. Four members, who had night duty, were sleeping while some were getting ready for evening shift, this newspaper saw during a visit. There were three water tanks for them -- some were bathing, some washing clothes while some collecting water to drink from those.

RISK FACTOR

A scientific brief on modes of virus transmission, published on March 27 by WHO, said novel coronavirus is primarily transmitted between people through respiratory droplets and contact routes.

Droplet transmission occurs when a person is in close contact (within 1 metre) with someone who has respiratory

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CORONAVIRUS DETECTION

Testing begins at RMC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi Medical College began testing for coronavirus from yesterday, using the Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machine installed at the laboratory of its virology department.

The machine is capable of testing samples of 96 persons every six hours. However, authorities have decided to run tests of eight persons a day, considering the low number of suspects, an official of RMC said.

The laboratory would only test those who were prescribed by a committee of doctors who are the coronavirus-related focal points at upazilas and districts in Rajshahi region, they said.

Heads of hospitals would also send requests for coronavirus tests that would be okayed by senior health officials, including the civil surgeon and principal of RMC, they said.

The first test began with samples of throat and nasal swabs collected from a patient from the "Corona Unit" of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, said microbiologist Sabera Gulnahr, who is chairing the virology department of RMC.

The patient, a 16-year boy from Paba upazila, has been kept in isolation since his admission four days ago.

"Two specially-trained technologists collected the samples, and we ran the samples for tests in the machine in the afternoon," said Dr Gulnahr, who is leading a 30-member team of 18 doctors and 12 technologists at the laboratory.

She said samples of four more patients from Bogura were on way to reach the laboratory yesterday.

The PCR machine reached RMC on Thursday, as part of the government's initiative to expand its facility to conduct Covid-19 tests across the country. Six other medical colleges across the country have also been provided with the machines.

For initial launch of the PCR machine, the college was provided 240 kits for testing coronavirus, Prof Gulnahr said. "With the kits, PPE and N95 masks provided, we can run tests of samples from 96 persons every six hours with the PCR machine," she added.

"Not all patients require the test; we will test only those who require it," Rajshahi Civil Surgeon Md Enamul Haque told The Daily Star.

66,000 families in Sylhet city to get daily essentials

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) -- with the help of the government, councillors and locals -- is all set to support around 66,000 underprivileged families.

After criticism arose centring slow action of authorities, the city's mayor on Sunday took initiative of creating a food fund with support from others.

According to the corporation, around 2.5 lakh individuals of about 66,000 families are living in the city's 1,094 slums. They are mostly underprivileged and worst hit by the countrywide shutdown.

So far, SCC received 50 tonnes of rice from the government as part of the relief distribution and Tk 1 crore from local government and rural development ministry.

SCC Mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury said, "Besides government support, people from all walks of life extended their assistance for the cause."

"So far, 35 tonnes of rice, 10 tonnes of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Sylhet City Corporation has stockpiled daily essentials that are going to be distributed among 66,000 underprivileged families of the city. This photo was taken on Tuesday from the corporation's building. PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

Leave no one behind: MJF

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) yesterday urged the government to set up a special "Leave No One Behind" fund to alleviate suffering of marginalised communities and workers in the informal sector, caused by Covid-19 pandemic.

"People belonging to various types of marginalised communities and informal sector workers are hardest hit in the absence of economic activities and income, following countywide shutdown due to coronavirus," said Shaheen Anam, executive director of the organisation.

"While we appreciate the government's efforts to offer economic packages for RMG workers and relief for vulnerable groups, the compensation for marginalised communities and informal sector workers are not enough compared to per capita allocation of resources," MJF added.

"The poor and the most vulnerable people need to be protected in this crisis moment, and MJF calls upon the government to set up a 'Leave No One Behind Fund' in the upcoming national budget, to reflect its political commitment of reducing poverty made under the Seventh Five Year Plan and Sustainable Development Goals," the statement added.

"We should also not forget that seasonal floods are likely to begin in July-August, which will further exacerbate the sufferings of those already hardest hit by income loss during the present crisis," the statement noted.

MJF urged the government to rise to the occasion so that lives of millions of needy people are fully protected during the Covid-19 crisis and beyond.

HIT BY MOTORBIKE Jashore AC-land flown to CMH

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Assistant Commissioner (land) of Jashore Kazi Nazib Hasan, who sustained injuries after being hit by a motorcycle while on duty in Jhikargachha upazila, was moved to Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka yesterday.

He was flown from Faridpur Medical College Hospital (FMCH) by helicopter, Jhikargachha UNO Sumi Majumder said.

On Sunday, a motorbike hit Nazib when he and law enforcers were trying to prevent a gathering in Godkhali Bazar.

With injuries on his leg, head and abdomen, Nazib was rushed to a district hospital and was later shifted to FMCH.

The two youths who were on the motorbike fled, said the bike.

Abdur Razzak, officer-in-charge of Jhikargachha Police Station, said they arrested the pillion, and were looking for the rider.

DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

Another case against 'missing' journo Kajol

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three weeks after journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol went missing, his family on Tuesday came to know that a second case was filed against him under the Digital Security Act on March 10, the day he was last seen.

Amnesty International yesterday in a statement said such action raises further fears of an enforced disappearance.

Talking to this newspaper, the missing journalist's son Monorom Palak said they received a call from Kalabagan Police on Tuesday, enquiring about the second case filed with Hazaribagh Police Station.

Kalabagan police was following up on the case, as Kajol's office is located in Hatirpool, under their jurisdiction.

Ekram Ali Mia, officer-in-charge of Hazaribagh Police Station, confirmed that a case was filed under the Digital Security Act on March 10.

"I can't remember the case details now," the OC said.

Amnesty International said they have obtained the copy of the second case that police have registered against Kajol (50), a photographer and editor of the daily Dainik Pokhokhal.

It said three hours after the journalist went missing around 10:10PM on March

10, police recorded the case against Kajol filed by Usmin Ara Bailey, a member of Awami League, who accused him of committing "extortion" by "obtaining information illegally" and publishing "false, intimidating and defamatory" information on Facebook and Messenger under sections 25, 26 and 29 of Digital Security Act.

Bailey said in the case statement that she filed the case after consulting with the central leadership of the ruling party.

Amnesty said it is concerning to note that the second case was issued only three hours after he was last seen on CCTV cameras, and less than 24 hours after the first case was brought against him on the night of March 9.

Kajol's disappearance came a day after ruling party lawmaker (Magura-1) Saifuzzaman Shikhor filed a case against him, Editor-in-chief of daily Manabzamin Matiar Rahman Chowdhury, and 30 others on charge of publishing a report with "false information" and circulating it on social media.

A CCTV footage obtained by Amnesty shows that Kajol arrived on his motorbike at his newspaper office at Meher Tower in

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ensure enforcement of PM's pledge: TIB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday called for strict and unbiased enforcement of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's pledge that no irregularity will be tolerated in government response to the Covid-19 crisis.

In a press statement, the graft watchdog said the PM's statement confirms that there is no alternative to highest level transparency and effective corruption control for successful response to this type of major crisis.

Referring to a March 28 statement by TIB, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of the organisation, said the premier's strong statement was well-expected. "As much as the Prime Minister's pledge is encouraging, it is now incumbent upon her party leaders, activists, supporters and beneficiaries to effectively enforce it."

The statement said it is also natural that in order to meet the crisis and manage its evolving socio-economic impact, activities like public procurement and distribution need to be fast-tracked. In spite of such obligation, all measures must be taken to ensure accountability and transparency. Under no circumstances can anyone be allowed to indulge in undue profiteering and take advantage of this crisis for immoral and illegal enrichment.

"The supply chain of essential food and daily necessities including perishable products must be maintained steadily... Failure to maintain the supply chain of essential consumables and perishable goods will deepen the crisis and push the farming population of rural areas in particular into extreme disadvantage and poverty", the statement said.



Nazifa Tasnim Janita (6), dressed in her school uniform, looks on from her balcony, waiting for the day she can meet her friends and teachers at Mollika Kindergarten and High School again. She has been doing so for the last few days, feeling restless from being stuck home due to the shutdown to prevent transmission of coronavirus, her father said. The photo was taken from Barishal city's Branch Road yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS



সহনশীল ও সংবেদনশীল হোনঃ প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা

- করোনভাইরাসের কারণে শুধু বাংলাদেশ নয়, গোটা বিশ্ব এক সঙ্কটময় সময় অতিক্রম করছে।
- এ সময়ে আমাদের সহনশীল এবং সংবেদনশীল হতে হবে।
- বাজারে কোন পণ্যের ঘাটতি নেই।
- যতটুকু না হলে নয়, তার অতিরিক্ত কোন ভোগ্যপণ্য কিনবেন না।
- সীমিত আয়ের মানুষকে কেনার সুযোগ দিন।
- দেশের অভ্যন্তরে এবং বাইরের সঙ্গে সরবরাহ চেইন অটুট রয়েছে।
- অযৌক্তিকভাবে নিত্যপ্রয়োজনীয় জিনিসপত্রের দাম বৃদ্ধি করবেন না।
- বিত্তবানদের অসহায় মানুষের সহায়তায় এগিয়ে আসতে হবে।

জিটি-৭০৯

China Harbour donates equipment to fight Covid-19

CITY DESK

China Harbour Engineering Company Ltd (CHEC), a state-owned Chinese company, has donated 3,000 coronavirus detection kits, 3,000 sets of PPE and 20,000 surgical masks to the government, said a press release.

Fu Xiakuan, managing director of CHEC Bangladesh, handed over the materials to Brig Gen Md Shahidullah, director of Central Medical Stores Depot, at his office in the capital. Habibur Rahman, additional secretary to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, was present on the occasion.

WB grants

FROM PAGE 3

localities; and the women-friendly spaces inside Rohingya camps.

The project will also help fill vacant positions of health professionals and ensure adequate medical supplies. Within the camps, the project will provide psychosocial counselling, immunisation, tuberculosis screening and treatment, and nutrition services.

The \$100 million additional financing to the Emergency Multi-Sector Rohingya Crisis Response Project will scale up access to energy, water, sanitation and disaster-resilient infrastructures for Rohingya and host communities.

With these, WB has provided \$480 million in grants to Bangladesh to deal with the population inflow.

M'singh woman strangled to death by husband: police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A woman was strangled to death allegedly by her husband in Gafargaon upazila of Mymensingh yesterday.

The deceased is Jesmin Begum (42), wife of Shaheen Mia, said police.

The mother of three did not allow her husband to get married for the second time. Additional Superintendent of Police Ali Haider Chowdhury quoted the family as saying. Shaheen also used to torture Jesmin, forcing her to go to her parents' house often, said the ASP.

The couple had an altercation yesterday morning; at one stage, Shaheen strangled Jesmin with a rope, he added.

Police recovered the body -- that bore injury marks on different places -- and sent it to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy, the ASP said.

The victim's young brother Rubel Mia filed a case accusing Shaheen, who has been on the run since the incident, Ali Haider Chowdhury added.

SPREADING RUMOUR ON COVID-19

Youth held for 'hacking' friend's Facebook: CID

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As the coronavirus crisis drags on, spread of misinformation on the internet just doesn't seem to stop. Despite strict government directives against it, the misinformation "virus" keeps going viral on social media. However, a novel attempt to stop it came to light on Tuesday.

On March 23, Naimur Rahman alias Nayeem (19) not only spread rumours about how many people have died from coronavirus, he did so by hacking into his friend's Facebook profile, leaving this friend out to dry when the CID came knocking.

To make matters more shocking, he confessed to CID that he did it to take revenge over an incident that happened years ago.

Not only that, he created a fake Facebook ID and alerted the authorities of the same misinformation that he himself spread from the friend's ID, in order to get the latter arrested.

"We first detained the friend who told us that his Facebook ID was hacked on March 23. We found proof of his claim and later located Nayeem -- leading to the arrest from Jatrabari area around 11:30pm on Tuesday," Khairul Alam, additional superintendent (Cyber Crime Unit) of CID, told The Daily Star.

The CID official claimed that Nayeem was a professional hacker and used to hack social media accounts on contract. This time, however, he finally had his comeuppance as the CID sent him to jail following his arrest. "He wanted to kill two birds with one stone -- to create chaos and take revenge on his friend," Khairul said.

A case was filed with Kadamtali Police Station in this connection.

What about their security?

FROM PAGE 3

symptoms such as coughing or sneezing and is therefore at risk of having their mucosae (mouth and nose) or conjunctiva (eyes) exposed to potentially infective respiratory droplets.

Transmission may also occur through fomites in the immediate environment around the infected person. Therefore, it can occur by direct contact with infected people and indirect contact with surfaces in the immediate environment.

WHAT AUTHORITIES SAY

Jahirul Islam, chief commandant of RNB (east), said they are yet to get government support as it takes a while. "We have collected some PPE, sanitisers, masks and gloves ourselves," he told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

Regarding the barrack's condition, Jahirul said it is not possible to address all the issues immediately. "We have instructed our officials to spray disinfect regularly and maintain hygiene properly."

The support may not reach all staff members immediately for the sudden shutdown, but officials were asked to ensure it, said the chief commandant, who is stationed in Chattogram.

Jahirul suggested communicating with Md Shahidullah, assistant commandant of RNB (Dhaka), saying that Shahidullah has been given the responsibility of ensuring safety measures for RNB members in the capital.

Contacted, Shahidullah told this newspaper that they have received a small fund from the office of RNB chief commandant (east).

"We have arranged some masks

and gloves from that but we did not get any PPE support yet," he said. "We gave masks and handgloves to Dhaka staffers using the fund, but it is not adequate as it did not reach all of them," he said.

Shahidullah continued, "We have received a supply of PPE three to four days ago but the higher authorities did not give any decision regarding its use yet. We heard they will take a decision within a day or two."

Talking to The Daily Star on Tuesday, Md Shamsuzzaman, director general of Bangladesh Railway, however, said they have provided necessary safety equipment including PPE to RNB officials soon after the health ministry issued directives. "One or two may miss those mistakenly but it's not true that they didn't get it. We have taken all necessary steps and officials were tasked to ensure that," he added.

Another case

FROM PAGE 3

Dhaka's Hatirpool at

4:14pm on March 10.

Several unidentified men were seen suspiciously moving around his motorbike and keeping an eye on it for nearly three hours before he left the premises.

In six minutes between 5:59PM and 6:05PM, three men approached his motorbike separately and appeared to tamper with it, Amnesty added, referring to the CCTV footage.

The journalist is seen getting out of his office with another person at 6:19pm and walking past his motorbike. He then comes back and can be seen leaving the place on his motorbike alone at 6:51PM. That is the last time anyone has been heard from him, the rights body added.

Kajol's family suspects that he was abducted, and has been urging authorities to ensure his safe return.

"While everyone else is worried about Covid-19, my family is worried about where my father is; we cannot think about anything else. I hope no one has to live through this uncertainty," Palak told this newspaper yesterday.

Last year, human rights organisation Odhikar documented at least 34 alleged enforced disappearances. Eight were later found dead, 17 shown arrested while the fate of nine remain unknown.

"States have a responsibility to protect lives of people and ensure that no one has to live through such uncertainty about their dear ones," said Saad Hammadi, South Asia Campaigner for Amnesty.

Ctg constable held for extortion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three persons including a police constable were arrested after they were beaten by locals for allegedly extorting money from businessmen at a bazar in Sitakunda upazila of Chattogram on Tuesday night.

The arrestees are Md Sohel Rana (28), a constable of Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP), and Md Imran (27) and Md Monaf (25).

Meanwhile, CMP officials told this newspaper that Rana has a history of drug abuse and departmental action is underway against him over the issue.

Police and local sources at Sitakunda said the incident took place in Boro Kumari Bazar area around 8pm.

The constable along with his two aides came to the market in civil dress and introduced himself as a sub-inspector of Sitakunda Police Station. Rana started charging traders, asking why the shops were open amid the countryside shutdown, said witnesses. They said Rana also had an empty gun holster on his waist during the time.

Store owners then got out of the shops and fled fearing further harassment, and at one point, Rana started taking money from the stores' cash boxes. Witnessing this, others started to gather and eventually beat them up.

Sheikh Firoj Hossain Molla, officer-in-charge of Sitakunda Police Station, said, "Seeing the incident, local businessmen caught the three and informed the union parishad member and law enforcers. Police arrested them on the spot. We also informed the matter to our higher authorities." A case was filed in this connection.

Contacted, Amir Zafar, deputy commissioner of CMP, said, "Sohel Rana is a drug addict and has been absent from the police lines for last four months."

"Departmental action against him was underway, and after this incident, he has been suspended," Zafar said.

66,000 families

FROM PAGE 3

lentil, 25 tonnes of onion, 7,000 litres of oil, 31,000 bars of soap, and many other necessities were purchased with donations worth Tk 96.70 lakh," he said.

Moreover, the city corporation's own funds, councillors' personal donations, and a day's worth of salaries of the SCC employees are being incorporated into the food fund. Till Tuesday afternoon, 237 tonnes of rice, 27 tonnes of onion, 45 tonnes of potato, 14 tonnes of salt, 27 tonnes of lentil and 23,000 litres of oil were purchased, and distribution started from that night, the mayor said.

"The coming days will be more challenging; the government has already extended the shutdown till April 11. We must be prepared for the long run. We will continue to support those in need," he added.

Virtual classes not reality yet

FROM PAGE 12

SMS, email, and social media groups.

"We have a plan to introduce online education in the future," said Professor Syed Golam Faruk, director general of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE).

"But there are some problems -- many students do not have access to the internet, especially in disadvantaged areas. Internet speed is another issue. These are in our consideration.

"We welcome schools individually introducing online-based education. We will encourage them."

In an effort to stem the spread of the virus, all educational institutions were ordered shut from March 17 to 31. This has since been extended to April 9.

Countrywide, some 3.68 crore students in all types of educational institutions and over a million teachers and other school personnel are now confined to their homes.

Top DSHE officials say there is a strong possibility that the government will extend the closure till April 14 -- and perhaps even till the 25th. And in case of the latter, schools and colleges will remain off till May 31 for the Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr vacation.

WHAT ARE SCHOOLS DOING?

Sunnysdale school authorities said teachers usually send homework and links of their lectures to students via email. For example, teachers are now uploading math tasks, the process of solving it, and giving several problems for practice.

"Right now, there is no remote classroom education. We never imagined this kind of situation would arise. If we have to go for further lockdown, the situation may call for an online education system. We will then have to introduce that," said Vice Principal Yasmeen Habib.

"If we stop children's education, a large gap will be created. They will lag behind in acquiring proper

knowledge. If these children sit idle, they will be negatively impacted."

Sharmeen Rahman, coordinator of the senior section at the Uttara branch of South Breeze School, also said the school is yet to start online classes.

The school gave hard copies of two weeks' worth of homework to students on March 18. Later, they continued to send homework through email, coordinated by teachers and mentors.

Students of Class IX are learning using Google Classroom and students of class X to XII have WhatsApp groups where teachers send assignments and students have group discussions on solving problems.

Zia Hashan, coordinator of communications at Scholastica, also said that they do not have online education right now. "We are providing homework to students through SMS and email," he said.

Rajuk Uttara Model College, Viharunisa Noon School and College, and Dhaka Residential Model College are also not conducting online classes.

These institutes said that they have instructed their students to follow the televised lessons regularly. In these lessons, the teachers are assigning homework which the students will need to submit after schools reopen and which will be considered part of their continuous assessment.

They also said the introduction of online education is under consideration.

"If the schools remain closed for a long time we will have to move to an online education system," said Brig Gen Kazi Shameem Farhad, principal of Dhaka Residential Model College.

"We will talk with others, consider options, and talk with DSHE."

Teachers of his school have started to upload lectures through Google Classroom and YouTube, so that students can go through these lessons at their convenience, he added.

For virtual classes the teachers and

students will have to be on a shared online space where they will work together simultaneously. Usually, these interactions take place through videoconferencing.

UNEVEN ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY Echoing the DSHE director general, educators said many students, especially those living in rural areas, lack the steady internet connection or the devices to be able to learn remotely.

Rajuk Uttara Model College Principal Brig Gen Kazi Showkat Alam said that there are multidimensional obstacles in the introduction of online classes.

In his school, for example, secondary and higher secondary students study in both Bangla and English sections. The school also has morning and day shifts. On average, there are 680 students in a class.

"It remains to be seen whether all students have devices and internet access. Even after having access, we can connect at best 50 students," he said.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 found only 37.6 percent of households in the country has access to the internet by any device from home. It also found only 5.6 percent of households have a computer or tablet.

Telecom insiders said there is 30 percent smartphone penetration in Bangladesh. There are a total 10 crore SIM cards -- of these around four crore are unique users.

"Preparing learner-centred and interactive content is also a challenge," said M Kaykobad, professor of computer science at Buet.

"Bangladesh can develop interactive TV education year-round. Besides this, it can make DVDs of renowned teachers and distribute these. Groups of student can come to a place where a TV or computer can be set up, to participate in learning this way."

NY now a city of worries

FROM PAGE 12

that 140,000 patients with Covid-19 would need hospitalisation and some 40,000 ventilators would be needed this week.

"New York is in no way prepared to handle such a staggering number of patients," she told The Daily Star via messenger Tuesday night.

Authorities are trying hard to make sure all infected people get healthcare. Therefore, a military hospital has been open for the civilians and Marriott Hotel was turned into a hospital. Eight makeshift hospitals were built by the authorities. Yet, there are long queues in front of every hospital, she said.

"Emergency number 911 is a very effective service in the United States. If you call this number, ambulance arrives in three to five minutes. But now it is taking longer for the ambulance to arrive."

The New York City mayor is trying to bring in health professionals from other states amid shortage of health professionals in the city. Some retired doctors and nurses are also working. Many of them are working 16 to 18 hours a day, she noted.

Asked why Covid-19 transmission rate is so high there, she said three weeks ago when there were reports of coronavirus infections in New York. But people took it lightly. Many thought the reports were rumours.

"I can tell about my landowner in Queens. He had the virus symptoms and then called the hospital... Meanwhile, he visited different places and after four days

he tested positive. By then, he must have transmitted it to many others."

Though generally the elderly and people with underlying conditions are the ones who get critically ill, there are cases where people aged 30-40 died of Covid-19. Even, three nurses who were young and healthy had died, she said.

Referring to American scientists' prediction that between 100,000 to 240,000 Americans may die of coronavirus, she said fear had gripped everyone.

"I went to buy groceries and had to visit four stores. All of them had long queues," she said, adding that many of the community-based grocery stores were closed and the ones open were also in the process of closing.

"If the grocery stores close, there will be food shortage. Even if there is food, and the stores are closed, who's going to supply food to people?"

Trump administration has declared \$2 trillion coronavirus recovery plan, which means in the next three weeks, all American taxpayers will get \$1200 for a month.

"But what do you do with dollars if you don't have food?"

Meanwhile, people at the home are getting bored and that may lead to a rise in mental health issues, she said.

To people in Bangladesh, she said, "Please don't take coronavirus lightly. Stay home, isolate the patients or anyone with symptoms. To the government, my request is, do as many tests as possible and isolate the patients. Otherwise, we will see a generation die."

2 sent to jail

FROM PAGE 12

caught Rony and handed him over to police.

In Cumilla, local madrasa teacher Badiul was jailed for allegedly raping a speech-impaired and mentally challenged girl.

Jahirul Anwar, OC of Debidur Police Station, said the victim's mother filed a case against Badiul on the same day.

Police arrested Badiul yesterday morning.

In Jashore, Babu, leader of Sramik League, was arrested for attempting to rape a housewife in Benapole municipality area.

Mamun Khan, officer-in-charge of Benapole Port Police Station, said they arrested Babu upon receiving complaint from the victim's husband.

The PBI rescued a 4th grader yesterday after she was kidnapped and raped for 25 days.

PBI also arrested two in connection with a case that the victim's mother filed, said Abul Kalam Azad, superintendent of PBI in Rajshahi.

Don't demand

FROM PAGE 12

At a public meeting in Thakurgaon, the Prime Minister says that he will prefer help and cooperation of his people than of the army and police to rule the country. He calls upon people to come forward in ensuring law and order in the country and restoring a condition that is congenial to peace and progress of the society.

FORM GANO COMMITTEES TO STOP SMUGGLING

Bangabandhu today calls upon the people to form gano committees (public committees) in every police station in the bordering areas and says that all efforts of the government and the people will be fruitless if smuggling of food grains and resources out of the country is not stopped. He further says that he has already told the Indian government to take effective steps to stop smuggling.

FIRST SOVIET SALVAGE SHIP ARRIVES AT CTG PORT

The first of the Soviet fleet of 20 salvage ships for clearing ports of Chittagong and Chalna of the wrecks of damaged and sunken vessels arrives today. A large, welcoming crowd greets the ship as it touches the jetty carrying the flags of Bangladesh and the Soviet Union. The head of the Soviet salvaging expedition Sergey Pavlovich Zuenko, talking to the pressman says that as the top priority the team shall minesweep the approaches to the port of Chittagong, make this accessible for incoming ships and eliminate existing prime dangers.

TORNADO HITS MYMENSINGH

At least 70 people are killed and over 350 injured seriously in a tornado which with 150mph velocity hit Fulbari thana of Mymensingh tonight.

SOURCES: April 3, 1972 issues of Ittefaq, The Bangladesh Observer, Azad, Morning News, Dainik Bangla and Purbodosh.

Defer hajj plans this year

FROM PAGE 12

confirmed cases of Covid-19.

Saudi Arabia has reported 10 deaths so far. The Middle East has more than 71,000 confirmed cases, most of which are in Iran, and over 3,300 deaths.

Saudi Arabia has barred people from entering or exiting three major cities, including Mecca and Medina, and imposed a night-time curfew across the country.

Like other countries around the world and in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has suspended all inbound and outbound commercial flights.

Each year, up to two million Muslims perform hajj, a physically demanding and often costly pilgrimage that draws the faithful from around the world.

The state-run Saudi Press Agency cited Banten's remarks in stories early Wednesday, saying that Muslims should "be patient" in making their plans for hajj. The pilgrimage was

expected to begin in late July this year.

The religious affairs secretary yesterday told this correspondent that the response of intended hajjis for completing the registration process is slow this year due to the uncertainty of hajj being held this year, following global coronavirus pandemic.

He said only 50,000 intended hajjis so far completed registration this year.

"In the previous years, we almost completed all the processes, including renting houses, registration, ticketing and other issues. But this year, the process is abnormally slow due to coronavirus," he added.

Earlier on March 25, the religious affairs ministry extended the deadline for registration till April 8 to perform hajj this year amid lukewarm responses from aspirant hajjis.

"If needed, we will have to further extend the deadline for registration," said Nurul Islam.

A total of 1,37,198 Bangladeshis are scheduled to perform hajj this year which is likely to be held on July 31, depending on the sighting of the moon.

Of the total hajjis, 17,198 are scheduled to perform hajj under government management, while the rest are scheduled to perform hajj under private management.

Hajj flights are scheduled to start from June 23.

The government on February 24 approved three hajj packages. Hajjis will have to pay Tk 4.25 lakh for package-1 and Tk 3.60 lakh for package-2 under government management, which are Tk 6,500 and Tk 16,000 more than the corresponding packages of the previous year.

With affordability in mind, the government has also introduced package-3 for the first time, which hajjis can avail at a cost of Tk 3.15 lakh.

অনলাইনে বীমা সেবা

সরকার কর্তৃক দেশব্যাপী করোনা ভাইরাসের সংক্রমণ মোকাবেলায় এবং এর ব্যাপক বিস্তার প্রতিরোধকল্পে সতর্কতামূলক ব্যবস্থা হিসাবে আগামী ৪ এপ্রিল ২০২০ তারিখ পর্যন্ত সাধারণ ছুটি ঘোষণা করা হয়েছে। এমতাবস্থায় সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের সদয় অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, বীমা গ্রাহকদের জরুরী সেবা নিশ্চিতকল্পে প্রগতি ইন্স্যুরেন্স লিমিটেড অনলাইনের মাধ্যমে গ্রাহক সেবার ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করেছে।

অনলাইনে বীমা সেবার জন্য নিম্নোক্ত কর্মকর্তাদের সাথে যোগাযোগের জন্য বিনীত অনুরোধ করা হলো।

ক্রম	নাম ও পদবী	মোবাইল ও ই-মেইল
০১.	জনাব শরীফ মুক্তাবা ডিএমডি ও শাখা প্রধান এসিফ্যান্ট রোড শাখা, ঢাকা।	০১৮১৯-২৩৮১৯৮, ০১৫৩৬-১৭৫২৬১ er@pragatiinsurance.com
০২.	জনাব মামুনুল হাসান বিভাগীয় প্রধান, শাখা নিয়ন্ত্রণ বিভাগ।	০১৭১১-৮১৬৮০৬ mamunul.hassan@pragatiinsurance.com
০৩.	জনাব মোঃ আবু সুলয়মান আশ্বদ আইটি প্রধান।	০১৯১১-০০৩৮১০, ০১৭৯৭-২৬০৪৪১ sufian@pragatiinsurance.com

ঘরে থাকুন, সুস্থ থাকুন

প্রগতি ইন্স্যুরেন্স লিমিটেড

প্রধান কার্যালয়ঃ ২০-২১ কাওরান বাজার, ঢাকা

ফোনঃ ৯১৩৩৬৮০-২, ই-মেইলঃ info@pragatiinsurance.com

Stay united, stay indoors, 'add oil'

Wuhan residents tell the world

REUTERS, Wuhan

Life in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus first emerged, is slowly returning to normal as the government relaxes a more than two-month-old lockdown that cut the city off from the world and kept most of its 11 million residents at home.

Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, was once the epicentre of the now global pandemic and was subjected to the strictest curbs on movement and business.

Reuters asked several Wuhan residents to share their experiences with the millions of people across the globe now in some form of lockdown or isolation.

Their advice? Stay united, stay indoors and "add oil", a Chinese saying that means stay strong.

"In the beginning, I was quite scared because my job involves meeting lots of people, so I went home and quarantined myself," says Mu Zi, a taxi driver.

"After the government measures to control the epidemic started to work in February, I became more relaxed and in a better mood. And since my housing compound has had no cases, they've started allowing us to go out.

"The situation overseas, especially in Italy, really makes my heart ache. I hope that overseas coronavirus patients will be able to overcome this."

Ding fan, 27, said, "In the beginning I was pretty scared, because the week after the lockdown was when the infections in Wuhan peaked, and the numbers published every day made me very sad.

"We live in the same world, and we need to work hard together to defeat this illness. Everyone should go out less, stay at home to read books, watch television and play games with the family."



A New York City Police officer (NYPD) takes a selfie while in the middle of the street in an almost empty Times Square, during the coronavirus disease outbreak, in New York City, on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

LATEST UPDATES

MORE THAN 8,65,970 CASES

The worldwide number of officially confirmed fatalities from the novel coronavirus rose to 43,082 yesterday, according to a tally compiled by AFP from official sources. More than 865,970 declared cases have been registered in 186 countries and territories. Italy has recorded 105,792 infections, while Spain 9,053 fatalities and 102,136 infections. China -- excluding Hong Kong and Macau -- has to date declared 3,312 deaths and 81,554 cases.

JAPAN'S FUJIFILM STARTS AVIGAN TRIAL TO TREAT VIRUS

Japan's Fujifilm has begun clinical trials to test the effectiveness of its anti-flu drug Avigan in treating patients with the new coronavirus, after reports of promising results in China. Trials in China have suggested Avigan could play a role in shortening the recovery time for patients infected with coronavirus. "The trial will be conducted on 100 patients," a company spokesman said yesterday.

AUSSIE PAPERS STOP PRINTING

Rupert Murdoch's Australian flagship media group News Corp announced yesterday it will stop printing around 60 regional newspapers, as the troubled sector received a fresh blow from a Covid-19 advertising downturn. News Corp said papers in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia would cease printing and move online.

30 SCIENTISTS FIND A HOME IN DEEP SEA

Nearly 100 crew members, including 30 scientists, who have been on scientific missions on board ocean research vessels have decided to stay put till the 21-day lockdown in India ends. They are on board four ships belonging to the Chennai-based National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) which set sail more than three weeks ago to map the seabed on the east and west coasts.

PUTIN WORKING REMOTELY

Russian leader Vladimir Putin has decided to handle his duties remotely, the Kremlin said yesterday, after the head of the country's main coronavirus hospital tested positive following a meeting with the president. Denis Protsenko, who met with Putin last week as the Russian leader visited the Kommunarka hospital in Moscow, said Tuesday he had been infected with the coronavirus but was feeling well.

WORLD FACES FOOD CRISIS: UN, WTO

The heads of three global agencies yesterday warned of the risk of a worldwide "food shortage" if authorities fail to manage the ongoing coronavirus crisis properly. Many governments around the world have put their populations on lockdown causing severe slow-downs in international trade and food supply chains.

VIRUS COULD SPREAD FASTER IN CAMPS THAN ON SHIPS: NGO

The coronavirus could spread faster in overcrowded refugee and displaced persons camps than it has anywhere else so far, including on cruise ships, an aid group warned yesterday. The International Rescue Committee said its analysis showed that transmission rates in some of the worst camps on the globe could outpace that witnessed during the quarantine of the Diamond Princess cruise ship off Japan.

SOURCE: AFP, TOI, REUTERS

Europe toll tops 30,000

UN chief says world faces 'worst crisis' since WW2

AFP, Madrid

The coronavirus pandemic has claimed more than 30,000 lives in Europe alone, a global tally showed yesterday, in what the head of the United Nations has described as humanity's worst crisis since World War II.

Italy and Spain bore the brunt of the crisis, accounting for three in every four deaths on the continent, as the grim tally hit another milestone even though half of the planet's population is already under some form of lockdown in a battle to halt contagion.

Spain reported a record 864 deaths in 24 hours, pushing the country's number of fatalities past 9,000.

The toll is only dwarfed by Italy's, where the virus has killed nearly 12,500 people. Italy yesterday reported 727 fresh deaths.

Britain reported 563 daily coronavirus deaths yesterday, the first time the national toll has exceeded 500, bringing the total fatalities to 2,352, according to official figures.

"As of 5pm (1600 GMT) on 31 March, of those hospitalised in the UK who tested positive for coronavirus, 2,352 have sadly died," the health ministry said on its official Twitter page.

Since emerging in China in December, Covid-19 has spread across the globe, claiming over 43,000 lives and infecting more than 860,000 people,

according to an AFP tally.

President Donald Trump has warned of a "very, very painful two weeks" as the United States registered its deadliest 24 hours of what he called a "plague".

In a scramble to halt the contagion, governments have shut schools, most shops, and ordered millions of people to work from home.

For UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the extraordinary upheaval spurred by the virus presents a real danger to the relative peace the world has seen over the last few decades.

The disease "represents a threat to everybody in the world and... an economic impact that will bring a recession that probably has no parallel in the recent past," he said.

"The combination of the two facts and the risk that it contributes to enhanced instability, enhanced unrest, and enhanced conflict are things that make us believe that this is the most challenging crisis we have faced since the Second World War."

In Italy, queues were lengthening at soup kitchens while some supermarkets were reportedly pillaged.

Half a million more people now need help to afford meals, Italy's biggest union for the agriculture sector Coldiretti said, adding to the 2.7 million already in need last year.

Use malaria drugs only for emergencies

Warns EU agency

AFP, Paris

Anti-malarial drugs chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine should only be used to treat Covid-19 in clinical trials or in case of "national emergency", the European Medicine Agency (EMA) warned yesterday.

Around the world, countries are expanding access to the two compounds, which are used to treat malaria and are known to have anti-viral properties.

The medicines have shown early promise against the Covid-19 illness in early studies in France and China.

But the EMA cautioned that the drugs should not be used to treat Covid-19 cases unless absolutely necessary.

Both drugs have a number of potentially serious side effects, especially when taken in high doses or administered in tandem with other medications.

TACKLING LOCKDOWN REBELS

Indian police play good cop, bad cop

AFP, New Delhi

One minute they're dancing in the street in comical coronavirus helmets, the next they're seen beating people for flouting a nationwide lockdown -- Indian police have played good cop, bad cop in a bid to halt the spread of coronavirus.

The streets of India's cities have been largely deserted for more than a week of the government's 21-day lockdown -- no mean feat in a country of 1.3 billion people famed for their flexible attitude towards authority.

Police admit it has been hard work to keep citizens in their homes, while one analyst said some degree of coercion was needed to enforce government orders.

India yesterday reported 376 fresh cases and three new deaths in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of confirmed cases to 1,637 and 38 deaths.

In Bangalore, traffic police are using humour to discourage drivers from venturing out.

Two officers wearing red and green coronavirus helmets regularly dance around miscreant road users after pulling them over.

Vijay Hadagil, inspector of police at the traffic department said the tableau aimed to raise awareness that "the notorious coronavirus is spreading like anything".

Despite the good cop routine, authorities have also been embarrassed by videos on social media from the early lockdown days showing Delhi police beating vegetable traders at a market that remained open after the shutdown was ordered.

Mass disinfections pose health hazard: experts

REUTERS, Surabaya

A drone dispersed clouds of disinfectant in the sky above Indonesia's second-largest city Surabaya on Tuesday, a response to the coronavirus pandemic which is catching on around the world despite warnings from health experts.

Mass disinfections, often by workers in protective gear resembling characters from the comedy film Ghostbusters, have become a common sight -- from Turkey's Grand Bazaar to bridges in Mexico and migrant workers in India.

But the visually impressive measures taken to contain the fast-spreading virus which has killed over 42,000 people globally, have been criticised by disease

specialists as a health hazard as well as a waste of time and resources.

"It's a ridiculous image seen in many countries," said Dale Fisher, an infectious diseases expert in Singapore who chairs the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network coordinated by the World Health Organization.

"I don't believe it adds anything to the response and could be toxic on people. The virus does not survive for long in the environment and people do not generally touch the ground."

A spokesman for Surabaya's mayor said the use of drones for disinfection was necessary in areas with confirmed cases because the virus "can be anywhere".

Virus having little impact on climate

Says UN climate agency

AFP, Geneva

Though factories have shut, planes have been grounded and cars left in the garage, the coronavirus pandemic is having very little impact on climate change, the World Meteorological Organization said yesterday.

Any reductions in pollution and carbon dioxide emissions are likely to be temporary, said Lars Peter Riishojgaard, from the infrastructure department of the WMO, a United Nations agency based in Geneva.

"It does not mean much for climate," he told a virtual press conference. Riishojgaard said there was a lot of media speculation about what impact the global pandemic might have on the climate, greenhouse gas emissions and longer-term global warming.

Talk to people

FROM PAGE 12

World Health Organisation Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus asked people to take care of their mental health during the lockdown.

"It's normal to feel stressed, confused and scared during a crisis. Talking to people you know and trust can help. Supporting other people in your community can help you as much as it does them," he said.

Eminent psychologist in the country Farida Akhtar told The Daily Star that people may face palpitation, breathing difficulties and an increase of blood pressure due to anxiety and stress.

She said what is most dangerous is that the anxiety can pass on to children from their parents and the situation can turn worse if it is not addressed immediately.

Getting involved in creative activities can be an effective means to manage stress, she said.

"Family members can cook together and can discuss the taste of the food in the dining table."

She said those who have a reading habit can read books. "People can listen to music. Music therapy is very good to overcome stress."

Farida Akhtar, chief executive of Inner force, a centre for psychological counselling, said people can perform religious rituals in the house as it cool peoples mind and bring peace in the mind.

"This is a good opportunity to spend some quality time with the kids and partners. In a busy life, we get a little time for them. So, we can utilise this properly to reduce the gaps."

She said, "Autosuggestion, meditation, relaxation and visualisation are the scientific methods to manage stress." As to autosuggestion, she said one might counsel himself or herself by thinking that everyone else is going through the same crisis.

For meditation, one can exercise deep breathing to get relief from the anxiety and stress, she said. The noted psychologist said when people suffer from anxiety and stress, their cognition does not function properly, and as a result, they make mistakes. "So, stress management is very crucial in this crisis period," she said.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Upazila Engineer
Belaichari, Rangamati
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.8421.000.14.001.65.20-63 Dated: 25.04.2020

e-Tender Notice No. 02/2019-2020

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of:

Sl. No.	Package No. & name of scheme	Tender ID	Last selling date & time	Closing/opening date & time	Tender method
1	INF-2018-19-(208429-01) INF-2018-19 Construction of water supply line in Tangkhohang village under Farua union upazila Belaichari district Rangamati	451311	Date: 21/04/2020 Time: 11:30am	Date: 21/04/2020 Time: 14:30pm	OTM
2	INF-2018-19-(208429-02) INF-2018-19 A. Replacement and extension of GI pipe line from Kalangchans Golcharpans under Farua union. B. Installation of deep tube-well in three GPS & C. Construction of wash block in Gaskalchans Non GPS under Belaichari upazila district Rangamati	451316	Date: 21/04/2020 Time: 11:30am	Date: 21/04/2020 Time: 14:30pm	OTM

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The e-Tender security submitted date & time from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks branches 21 April 2020 respectively. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (e-GP helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd) also from e-mail: ue-belaichari@lged.gov.bd. Interested persons can communicate with the undersigned during office hours.

S. M. Anwar Hossain
Upazila Engineer
Belaichari, Rangamati
ue-belaichari@lged.gov.bd

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Capacity Development and Strengthening Project

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is hereby invited in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for procurement of goods stated below:

Sl. No.	Tender ID	Name of work
1	448196	Procurement of Furniture & Office equipment

This is an online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in the e-GP Portal, no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP Portal have to be deposited online through any branches of registered bank. Tender documents will be available on 08/04/2020 at e-GP Portal. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP Portal and from e-GP help desk (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). The tender notice will be available on the website: www.moef.gov.bd.

Md. A. Razzaque Sarker
Deputy Secretary
& Project Director
Phone: 9540214

GD-706

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
College Education Development Project (CEDP)
Government B M College
Barishal

Corrigendum of Invitation for Tender

Reference No. bmc/cedp/otm/w-01/c-01 Date: 02-04-2020

The undersigned has to inform that due to unavoidable circumstances tender last selling, closing and opening dates & time of Package No. W-01 (Package Name: Renovation of Lab & Classrooms) are revised as follows:

Sl. No. in published IFT	Description	Original date & time	Revised date & time
17	Tender last selling date	April 1, 2020, Time: 5pm	April 12, 2020, Time: 5pm
18	Tender closing date and time	April 2, 2020, Time: 2pm	April 13, 2020, Time: 2pm
19	Tender opening date and time	April 2, 2020, Time: 2.30pm	April 13, 2020, Time: 2.30pm

Note: It is mentioned that if the tender closing and opening date is holiday in that case tenders will be closed and opened in next available working day at same place and same time.

All other things of published IFT (Reference No. bmc/cedp/otm/w-01, date: 16-03-2020) will remain unchanged.

Prof. Md. Shafiqur Rahman Sikder
Principal
Govt. B M College, Barishal

GD-714

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES				
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY	
Closed	Closed	\$1,597.00 (per ounce)	\$25.55 (per barrel)	4.08%	4.50%	1.65%	0.57%	83.95	89.67	98.12	11.69	
				28,265.31	18,065.41	2,440.27	2,734.52	BUY TK	84.95	93.47	101.92	12.29
								SELL TK				



আপনার নিরাপত্তাই আমাদের অগ্রাধিকার

ব্যাংকিং হোক ঘরে বসেই

- দ্রুত ট্রানজাকশন
- মোবাইল টপ-আপ
- ক্রেডিট কার্ডের বিল প্রদান
- ইন্সট্যান্ট বিল প্রদান
- ব্যাংক চেকটমেন্ট

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TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Should banks suspend dividends in preparation for stormy days ahead?

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN And AHSAN HABIB

The European Central Bank (ECB) has asked banks in the eurozone to not pay any dividend in order to boost their capacity to absorb losses that will invariably take place for the global coronavirus pandemic that has brought the world down on its knees.

This will support banks to widen lending capacity to households, small businesses and corporate entities during the ongoing financial crisis as well, according to a press release issued by the ECB, the central bank of the 19 countries of the EU.

Lenders of the eurozone should not pay dividends for the financial years 2019 and 2020 until at least October 1, it said.

In a similar move, the Bank of England (BoE), the central bank of the UK, also ordered lenders to cancel plans to offer dividend for shareholders and cash bonuses for executives as it asked financial institutions to boost their strength ahead of a likely recession.

Against the backdrop, the UK's largest lenders -- Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds, Royal Bank of Scotland and Standard Chartered -- confirmed on Tuesday that they would temporarily halt shareholder pay-outs for 2019 and throughout 2020.

Although the ECB and the BoE have almost implemented their plan, Bangladesh's central bank has yet to start any thinking to this end.

When the issue was raised to officials concerned of the central bank yesterday, they told The Daily Star that the Bangladesh Bank should take the same measure in the interest of the country's financial sector as a whole.

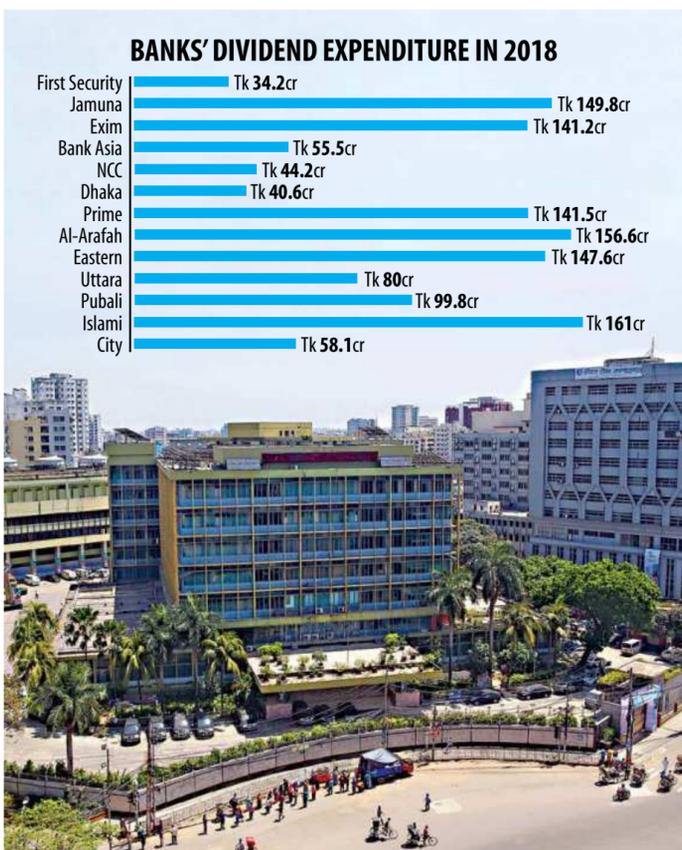
Banks and non-bank financial institutions will be able to set aside more than Tk 2,500 crore if they do not provide dividend to their directors and shareholders.

Some 30 banks and 23 NBFIs listed with the capital market provided cash dividend amounting Tk 1,670 crore in 2018.

There are 94 banks and NBFIs operating in Bangladesh.

A severe liquidity crunch is prevailing in the market as individuals and corporate entities have withdrawn a large volume of deposits from banks in recent days to tackle the impending financial crisis emerging from the coronavirus outbreak, they said.

Banks will get room to lend more if the central bank takes the measure barring



them from providing dividend.

Although the central bank cut cash reserve ratio by 50 basis points to 5 per cent in order to inject Tk 6,400 crore into the market, this is not enough given the gravity of the financial crisis, the officials said.

But they feared that the central bank would face different challenges in implementing the move as directors of private banks usually enjoy more than 50 per cent of the total lenders' dividends per year.

"And they have a strong political link, so they may oppose the decision," said a

central bank official requesting anonymity to speak candidly on the matter.

The government was earlier even forced to amend the Banking Companies Act 1991 to allow sponsors of private bank to hold directorship for nine years instead six and have four of their family members in the board in place of two.

The Daily Star yesterday spoke with six managing directors of banks on the issue. None agreed to speak on record given the sensitivity of the matter.

They said the proposal of scraping dividend for the time being is good as it

will help them give out loans to affected sectors.

"Besides, incentive bonus for top executive of banks should be scrapped as well," said a managing director of a listed bank.

He, however, said the retail investors of the capital market will face losses temporarily, but they should accept the proposal in the interest of the financial sector.

"If banks face significant losses in the days ahead, they will not give anything from them."

He, however, said the central bank should take a strict stance on the issue such that banks could use the dividends as loans.

Four banks have already proposed to offer dividend, but there is still room to backtrack from the stance as such decisions are finalised at the annual general meetings, which have been postponed for the coronavirus outbreak in Bangladesh, he said.

The central bank will take the decision promptly as other banks will declare their dividend within a week or two, said a high official of the financial sector regulator.

The BB has also cut the policy rate by 25 basis points to 5.75 per cent such that banks can avail funds at a cheaper rate, said a central bank official whose job is to monitor the money market.

"But we are apprehending that people will not deposit money in banks anytime soon as the coronavirus is likely to stay in the country for long."

This means the ongoing liquidity crunch may prolong, so banks will need more funds in the days to come to run their operations smoothly, the official said, adding that directors of banks should take the impending crisis into account.

Asked whether the central bank would take any measure to stop providing dividend, its spokesperson Md Serajul Islam said the BB would take a call on the matter once the lockdown is lifted.

With a view to containing the transmission of the highly contagious novel virus, the government on March 23 announced general holiday from March 26 to April 4. The holidays were extended by a week to April 11.

"We have to take the opinion from the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission to this end before taking such a decision," Islam added.

Factories can pay wages for 3 months from stimulus package

Finance ministry sends guideline to BB for implementation

REFWET ULLAH MIRDHA and REJAUl KARIM BYRON

The owners of export-oriented companies and factories can pay wages to their workers for up to three months from the Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package unveiled by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The finance ministry has formulated a guideline for disbursement of the stimulus package aimed at helping exporters tide over the economic fallout of the global coronavirus pandemic. It sent the guideline to the Bangladesh Bank yesterday.

Now the BB will publish a notice to this end, so that the owners can take out the soft loan.

The interest-free loan will carry 2 per cent service charge and has a repayment period of two years, including a grace period for six months.

As per the guideline, factory owners would have to submit the salary sheets of workers from December to February of 2019, the list of workers and their banking or mobile banking accounts to banks.

Once the verification is complete, banks will disburse salaries for the month of April to the workers' mobile banking or bank accounts, according to the guideline.

Factories that export at least 80 per cent of their products would be eligible for the loans.

The government has come up with the rescue package as the export sectors have been reeling from the impact of the global coronavirus pandemic, which has ground economic activities in its major export destinations such as the EU, the US and the UK to a screeching halt in recent weeks.

"If the government considers the stimulus package as a loan, it will not serve the real purpose," said Shahidul Haque Mukul, managing director of Adams Apparels.

Moreover, the 18-month repayment period is too short for the factories. It should be 10 years and there should be a one-year moratorium on the repayment.

"The factory owners are already in trouble because of the coronavirus, so they will not be able to take the burden of loans. The conditions should be relaxed," he added.

Many workers do not have any mobile financial service or bank account, said M Shahadat Hossain Sohel, chairman of the Bangladesh Terry Towel and Linen Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

"What will happen to them?" A functional mechanism should be devised soon so that workers can receive salaries without much hassle, he added.

"Our biggest concern is for the workers and we will use the funds to pay their wages. We take the responsibility of our workers," said Rubana Huq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

As of yesterday, \$2.95 billion worth of orders were cancelled by international retailers, according to data compiled by BGMEA.

But, a few more retailers including Primark, KappAhl, Benetton and Decathlon have agreed to take delivery of goods made under the current work orders, following the lead of H&M, Inditex, PVH, Target, Kiabi and Marks & Spencer.

StanChart lends helping hand to clients

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Standard Chartered Bangladesh has announced a set of measures to help its small- and medium-sized enterprises, corporate and retail clients tide over the economic fallout from the global coronavirus pandemic.

The British lender will provide a wide range of financial support to its SME clients such that they can run their business sidestepping the ongoing financial slowdown.

As part of the move, the SME clients can opt not to pay any loan instalment over the next three months.

Three types of products -- loan against property, finance against property (Saadiq customers) and mortgage loans for business-owners -- have been brought under the financial package.

The lender, which has been in Bangladesh since 1905, has extended the trade facilities of up to two months for its business banking working capital clients.

For instance, the bank will give an additional two months to its SME clients to adjust their letters of credit as they are now unable to manufacture or sell their products due to the ongoing shutdown.

The SME clients will also get short-term liquidity facility in the form of working capital to protect their business.

Besides, the Asia-focused lender will allow clients to enjoy more finance against their mortgages if they top up their loans during the crisis period.

Along with the SME clients, corporate customers of the lender will initially be allowed to enjoy one-month payment holiday while repaying their loans.

The lender operating its banking operation in more than 60 countries will extend the payment holidays for its corporate clients on a case-to-case basis.

Both the corporate and SME clients under the financial package will enjoy waiver of penal interest and late payment charges.

Entrepreneurs will also be given a waiver of late payment fee on their credit card charges.

"These are extraordinary times for Bangladesh. We know that more than ever, our clients with impeccable track records, will need support to face this challenge," said Naser Ezaz Bijoy, chief executive officer of Standard Chartered Bangladesh.

In another development, Standard Chartered has resolved to implementing the 9 per cent interest rate on lending rate from April 1 as per the central bank guidelines, which will ease the burden of clients as well, he added.

Ctg port running out of space

About 2,900 reefer containers pile up in yards

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Chattogram port is fast running out of storage space as reefer containers used to transport perishable goods are piling up due to limited delivery in the past few days amid the countrywide lockdown imposed to contain the spread of lethal coronavirus.

Importers who will take delivery of the goods such as fish, fruits, onion, garlic and ginger are also facing delays in getting the required documents from banks and different government offices for the movement control order.

The port can supply electricity to a maximum of 2,000 reefer containers but until yesterday afternoon a total of 2,900 such containers piled up in the port yard, forcing the authority to arrange alternative means of power.

Usually 400-450 reefer containers are delivered from the port a day but the number came down to only 100-150 in the last few days, said officials at the traffic department of the port.

At least three vessels with another 100 containers were waiting at the port jetties until yesterday and a delay in unloading the containers will increase the vessels' stay time and raise charges.

Although the arrival of vessels at the port as well as loading and unloading of goods and containers are going on, the limited delivery of the imported products is creating congestion in different yards of the port, the officials said.

Until yesterday, a total of 44,926 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of containers were lying at the port against its total storage space for 49,018 TEUs.

Officials of Sea Consortium, the local agent of a vessel named Express Kaburu, said the ship had a total of 87 reefer containers but only 50 were unloaded so far.

The vessel that berthed on March 30 was scheduled to leave the port today but it is

feared that the departure could be deferred.

OEL Delta carrying 367 import containers including 52 refrigerated ones got berthed at a port jetty on Tuesday but only eight reefer containers could be discharged until 1pm yesterday, said Muntasir Rubaiyat, head of operations of the ship's local agent GBX Logistics.

Another vessel, Delaware Trader, carrying 1,171 TEUs of containers including 31 reefers berthed at the port yesterday but it was uncertain when unloading of containers would begin, said Ajmir Hossain Chowdhury, assistant manager of the ship's operating firm Mediterranean Shipping.

Though the port has kept its operations up and running round the clock amid the lockdown, various other offices concerned are not offering services like the port, said Mohammad Zafar Alam, member (admin) of the Chattogram Port Authority.

Clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents that take delivery of the imported goods on behalf of the importers said they need to collect import-related documents from banks as well as quarantine and radiation certificates from the government's plant quarantine office and Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Masudur Rahman Bhuiyan, a Chattogram-based fruit and commodity

importer, said he imported 10 containers of onion and six containers of orange from Egypt that arrived at the port before the shutdown began.

But he could take delivery of only four containers of onion and two containers of orange in the last six days.

"I faced difficulties in getting LC-related documents from banks since they remain open only for a limited time while staffers in the foreign exchange department are not always present," Bhuiyan said.

However, Alam said the situation would improve in a few days as the customs authority has initiated a move to speed up the delivery of imported goods.



RAJIB RAHMAN

Another global player departs Bangladesh

Bharti Airtel to buy NTT DoCoMo's stake in Robi

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

Japan's largest mobile firm NTT DoCoMo is set to leave Bangladesh by selling its entire stake in Robi Axiata to Bharti International, raising questions about the country's telecom policies and regulatory regime.

Once it secures DoCoMo's stake, Bharti will hold 31.31 per cent of the second largest mobile phone carrier of Bangladesh. Axiata retains the controlling stake of 68.95 per cent.

With the departure, DoCoMo will join a list of telecom players such as Orascom Telecom Holding, SingTel and Dhobi Group (Warid Telecom) that wounded up operations in Bangladesh in the past.

The Japanese firm has been with Robi for 12 years after entering the country in 2008 by acquiring 30 per cent stake in the carrier, which was then called AkTel. At the time of exit, it had only 6.31 per cent shares.

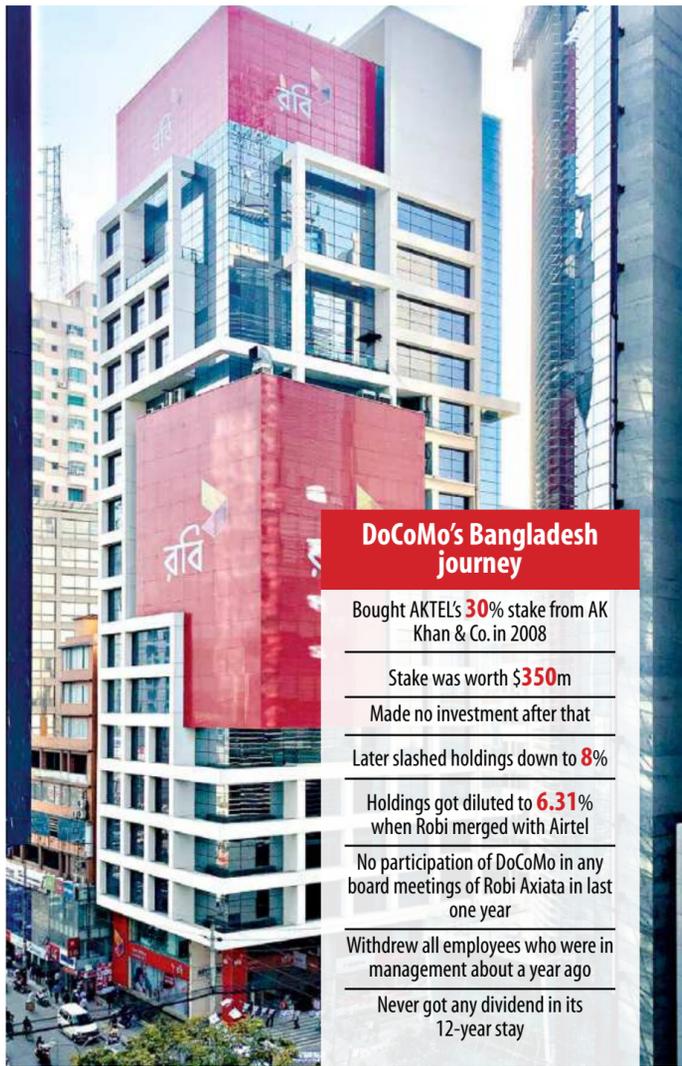
The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission has approved the proposal and sent its recommendation to the telecom ministry with a positive note for the government's final nod, said Md Jahurul Haque, chairman of the regulatory body.

The proposal, which did not mention anything about the value of the transaction, has been given the consent under the condition that the responsible company would have to assume the dues of DoCoMo, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Although the government is not getting anything from the transaction, there are regulations that 5 per cent of the total value of the transaction must be shared with the state.

DoCoMo had paid the sum when it acquired 30 per cent stakes from local investor AK Khan and Company for \$350 million in 2008.

Similarly, when Bharti International acquired Warid in 2013 and renamed it



DoCoMo's Bangladesh journey

- Bought AKTEL's 30% stake from AK Khan & Co. in 2008
- Stake was worth \$350m
- Made no investment after that
- Later slashed holdings down to 8%
- Holdings got diluted to 6.31% when Robi merged with Airtel
- No participation of DoCoMo in any board meetings of Robi Axiata in last one year
- Withdrew all employees who were in management about a year ago
- Never got any dividend in its 12-year stay



downsizing its stake, but the situation kept worsening.

"Now it is finally leaving Bangladesh at such a time when the world is nervously waiting for a severe economic downturn."

Not just that, any global player will rethink before entering Bangladesh due to the departure of NTT DoCoMo, said Khan, also a former secretary general of the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh.

The departure will also impact the 5G roadmap of Bangladesh as NTT DoCoMo is ranked the world's leading operator in terms of applications for candidate standard-essential patents and the number one in terms of 5G technical proposals in 2019, according to Khan.

However, the BTRC chairman begged to differ.

"Bangladesh is a huge market and all the top global players are running business here. You will never find so many customers in a very small cell like Bangladesh," Haque said.

For DoCoMo, it was a strategic investment, one that never yielded the company any returns of note, insiders say.

In the last one year, DoCoMo has not sat in the board of Robi Axiata and withdrawn all of its employees who were in the management team of Robi more than a year ago.

"We believe that global telecom giant Bharti Airtel's decision to increase its shareholding in Robi is reflective of its confidence in the future of the company as a leader in the digital era as well as the long-term prospect of the Bangladesh economy," Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer of Robi, told The Daily Star in a statement.

In February, Robi announced that it wants to get listed on the stock market and has applied to the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, in a testament of the operator's foreign owners' commitment to the market.

Once the issue becomes mature, the stakes of both Axiata and Bharti will be diluted and shareholding structure will change again. Robi has 4.96 crore active users as of February, trailing behind market leader Grameenphone.

More brokerage house licences on the way

AHSAN HABIB

The stock market regulator is set to award new licences for brokerage houses to any firms, including foreign ones, in order to attract more investors to the market.

But the move comes at a time when the existing brokerage houses are already struggling to stay afloat amid bearish markets and market concentration.

According to the Demutualisation Act 2013, the Dhaka Stock Exchange and the Chittagong Stock Exchange were not allowed to issue TREC (trading right entitlement certificate), or brokerage licence for five years.

On March 24, the draft of the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (Trading Right Entitlement Certificate) Rules, 2020 was published by the stock market regulator to get public opinion on issuing certificates.

It has sought feedback by April 15 although the country has been observing a lockdown from March 26 to April 11 to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

"If new stock brokers join the battle, they will bring new investors and this will benefit the market," said a top official of the BSEC.

Five years have passed since the demutualisation of the exchanges but the rules have not been put in place. Officials say they are committed to approving the rules very fast.

Presently, there are 250 TREC-holders in the DSE and 148 TREC-holders in the CSE. Of them, some are ineffective.

The existing TREC-holders are also the shareholders of stock exchanges. The fresh TREC holders, if allowed, will only be allowed to get licence to carry out trading operations in the capital market.

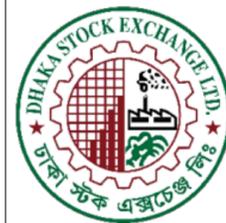
According to the draft rules, a firm with technical infrastructure and human resources, among others, should have a paid-up capital worth Tk 3 crore.

The firm will have to keep security money of at least Tk 2 crore, or any amount that will be fixed by the regulator in future.

The audited net asset value of the company must be 75 per cent of its paid-up capital. No directors of the firms can be loan defaulter.

The bourses will get Tk 6 lakh by issuing a new TREC, whereas the DSE sold the last 12 memberships for Tk 32 crore each.

But analysts and some brokers question the utility of awarding more brokerage licences and even on flexible terms and lower prices.



The average paid-up capital for the existing brokerage houses is more than Tk 30 crore, said a stock broker.

A firm can take the TREC by spending only Tk 6 lakh but this is not the real market value of the licence, he said.

The price should be fixed through auction, he said, adding that the new licence-holders will keep only Tk 2 crore in security deposit, which is too small.

"If they swindle investors, then how will they be held responsible with such a small amount of security deposit?"

The rules have been published at a time when the country has been locked down. "Then how will we express our opinion? So, the time should be extended," the broker added.

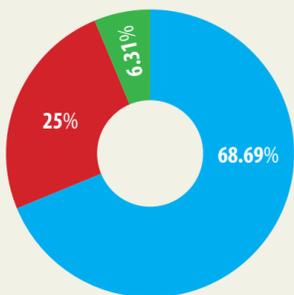
The bourse has been on the slide for the best part of the past six months now. Just when it was propping up -- be it organically or through intervention -- came the blow of coronavirus pandemic that is bringing the world down to its knees.

On March 18, DSEX, the benchmark index of the DSE, shed 168.60 points to end at 3,603, the lowest since May 12, 2013, as the fast-spreading coronavirus kept investors at bay.

Between March 11 and March 18, stocks lost 627 points, or 14.83 per cent.

The index ended at 4,008 on March 25, the last trading session before the closure.

Robi Axiata's current shareholding structure



AXIATA GROUP
BHARTI INTERNATIONAL
NTT DOCOMO

SOURCE: BTRC

as Airtel, it had to share 5 per cent of the transferred value, said industry insiders.

NTT DoCoMo's exodus from Bangladesh caps a frustrating 12 years for the Japanese telecom giant.

Soon after coming to Bangladesh, exasperation set in the operator about the policies on fibre optical cable, interconnections and telecommunication transmission.

Mobile operators are allowed to lay fibre optic in other countries. But in Bangladesh, they have to take the service from other companies.

Similarly, the carriers have to go through interconnection exchange operators and international gateway operators before connecting subscribers at home and abroad. Thus, apart from sharing revenues, mobile operators have to rely on others to provide service.

High tax is also another reason, say industry people. At 54 per cent, Bangladesh's mobile industry has one of the world's highest taxation rates.

As a result, after making the initial

investment, DoCoMo has not brought in any money to Bangladesh save for some requisite technological support, sources said.

In the first half of 2013, the predominant mobile operator of Japan decided to squeeze its stake to 8 per cent from 30 per cent -- a move that highlighted the unfriendly regulatory environment and business uncertainties in Bangladesh and possibly warding off potential investors.

And when Robi and Airtel merged in November 2016, DoCoMo's share was diluted and came down to 6.31 per cent.

"When NTT DoCoMo contracted its shareholding from 30 per cent to 8 per cent in 2013, the Bangladesh government should have taken it as a wakeup call," said Abu Saeed Khan, a senior policy fellow at LIRNEasia, an information and communication technology policy and regulation think-tank based in Colombo.

At that time, the Japanese behemoth had squarely blamed regulatory uncertainty for

Saudi company to invest in Ctg Port's Bay Terminal

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Red Sea Gateway Terminal (RSGT), one of the largest container terminal operators of Saudi Arabia, is keen on investing in the construction of Chattogram Port's Bay Terminal under the public-private partnership model.

The Saudi company has already submitted a proposal to the shipping ministry.

"RSGT knows that this terminal is an integral part of Bangladesh's future and that's why they have decided to invest here," said a senior official of the shipping ministry, adding that the company has already signed a letter of intent a few months back.

Chattogram Port is the largest in Bangladesh, handling more than 80 per cent of the seaborne cargo coming in and out of the country.

As a partner to RSGT for the development of Bay Terminal, the shipping ministry will provide land and bear the costs of dredging and water breaking for the project, according to the official.

RSGT is known internationally for its world-class port terminal services. The company recently help build a new flagship container terminal at the Jeddah Islamic Port.

A feasibility study is being conducted

to ascertain just how much expansion is required at Chattogram Port by 2030, he added.

In the meantime, RSGT will prepare plans for investment in multiple port-related infrastructure projects in Bangladesh while also sharing their operational expertise.

It is paramount for Bangladesh to expand its port facilities as the amount of import and export trade conducted by the country will only increase in the next decade.

More Saudi investment could follow as the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority is trying to attract large amounts of foreign investment, said its Executive Chairman Md Sirazul Islam.

In an article on Container Management, an online portal, RSGT Director of Global Investments Gagan Seksaria said Bangladesh's recent economic growth through trade proves that the country's ports and transport infrastructure are highly utilised.

"This makes Bangladesh an ideal market for investment in advanced port systems and technology," he added.

Foreign investment will definitely help improve the port's infrastructure, which needs expansion to accommodate the country's growing export and import activities, said Mohammed Zafar Alam, member of Chattogram Port Authority.



Freshly harvested watermelons have started to arrive at the wholesale market in Sadarghat, Dhaka. A hugely popular fruit during the blistering summer months, traders this time are dreading the produce would rot given the thin presence of customers in the market. FIROZ AHMED

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA THURSDAY APRIL 2, 2020, CHAITRA 19, 1426 BS

Extension of shutdown a good decision

But ensure vulnerable groups are not adversely affected

THE decision of the authorities to extend the country-wide shutdown for another week is a commendable one, and we express our full support for this timely pronouncement. It has been almost a month since the first case of coronavirus was detected in Bangladesh, and it is crucial that we enforce social distancing during this time to ensure that community transmission does not occur on a large scale. However, this will only be possible if a lockdown is enforced on the strictest possible terms. The gravity of the situation must be communicated to the general population. In this case, the government should have taken a step further and announced these few weeks as a "lockdown" — instead of a "general holiday". Using the latter term is bound to give the wrong impression, as we have seen from the crowds who left the cities to go home as soon as it was announced. But there is still time for the authorities to clarify that these measures are being implemented in order to avert a national crisis.

While we understand that an extension of the shutdown is crucial at this moment, we also worry about its impact on the vulnerable groups in our society, who are already facing financial hardship and food shortages. A report in this daily shed light on the plight of children living on the streets of the capital, many of whom beg or sell flowers and tidbits to get by, and are now struggling to find food. Multiple reports have also focused on the serious impacts of this shutdown on workers from the informal sector, particularly day labourers and rickshaw-pullers. Slum-dwellers, who are already at risk due to their cramped living spaces and lack of access to proper sanitation and hygiene facilities, now face the added risk of losing their sources of income. What will be done for them?

Although police and public administration have started distribution of food assistance in certain areas, and many NGOs, organisations and even private individuals have come forward to try and fill these gaps and provide assistance to the needy, these efforts are not adequate. We need the government to put forward a concrete plan for these vulnerable groups for the coming weeks that will not only provide food support but ensure financial help as well. We must ensure there is a safety net for those who are likely to be most adversely affected, and ensure that they do not slip through the cracks and fall into even further hardships during these difficult times.

Limited testing may propel pandemic

More tests will give the real picture

EVER though the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) says that there has been community transmission of the coronavirus on a limited scale, approximately only 1,606 individuals have been tested so far—and when that number is compared to the projected population of 164,283,529 in Bangladesh, such an evaluation by the IEDCR seems grossly inadequate, to say the least. However, such a claim can only prove valid after extensive testing has been carried out across the country.

We rank among countries with fairly low testing rates, given our restrictive policy which only allows those with recent travel history to affected countries, or those known to have come into contact with confirmed cases and have Covid-19 symptoms, to be tested while ignoring a lion's share of the citizens who remain vulnerable. This needs to change. Given the fact that many coronavirus patients can be asymptomatic, such a practice of limited testing during a pandemic allows carriers of the virus to infect more people over time, thereby increasing the risks of fatality. Also, it does not give us the real picture.

One of the major reasons behind limited testing is the lack of sample collectors, along with the inadequate supply of test kits. It would be relevant to mention that six other organisations recently got the government's approval to conduct tests for Covid-19, which were carried out solely by IEDCR earlier. Medical technologists of 130 healthcare organisations recently completed training arranged by the government, for collecting samples from suspected Covid-19 patients. Out of the 92,000 kits for Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) tests in the possession of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), they have distributed 21,000 kits to various laboratories. More labs are also being readied nationwide to conduct mass testing.

There seems to be a gap between our policy regarding coronavirus and its implementation. Furthermore, implementing those policies effectively is a matter of time and trial. We had the opportunity to learn from countries like South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan, which were able to tackle the spread of the virus on time by conducting widespread testing of suspected cases. Yes, steps are being taken to scale up our capacity to contain the contagion, but time is crucial. We can no longer afford delays as we already lag behind in our preparations to confront the crisis. When hours and minutes are so valuable, we cannot take a conservative approach to testing. Thus, the government must emphasise immediately on extensive testing to get the complete picture of the situation and proceed accordingly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Dhaka's improved air quality

Ever since the shutdown went into effect amidst the coronavirus scare, one good thing that happened to Dhaka is the drastic improvement of its air quality. As of March 29, Dhaka's Air Quality Index (AQI) stands at 91, a giant leap forward from the typical range of 260-319 recorded at the beginning of the year. According to experts, such an improvement has not been seen in a long time.

This also signals a marked difference from before when newspapers were almost always filled with news about the health hazards of air pollution. However, now that most citizens remain indoors, pollution has reduced significantly and it should serve as a lesson to us all that it is indeed possible. What is important is to maintain this quality of the air instead of poisoning it again.

Nafees Ahmed Noor, Dhaka

Why testing is paramount



MUHAMMAD SOUGATUL ISLAM

THE Covid-19 pandemic has touched almost every territory of the world and terrified its 8 billion population. As of this article going to print on Wednesday, some

876,782 people have been infected by the disease and the global death toll stands at 43,533 and counting. There are 648,284 active cases, many among them in critical conditions, while the number of patients who recovered are 184,965. Those who keep an eye on the day-to-day update of the outbreak can understand how quickly the virus is spreading. In many countries, the contagion has pushed their healthcare systems to the limit.

In this situation, the most important thing that a country can do is testing. Because, testing allows the infected people to know that they are infected. This can help them receive the care they need and let them take measures to reduce the probability of infecting others. Responsible agencies can take appropriate measures involving contact tracing, quarantine and isolation once the infected are identified. On the other hand, if an infected person goes unidentified, they risk infecting others. Even if they stay at home, they are likely to infect their family members and spread the infection in their neighbourhood. Therefore, testing is critical for an appropriate response to such a highly contagious disease. It allows us to understand the nature of the spread of the disease and take evidence-based steps to slow down the spread.

If we look at the infection figures of the Covid-19 globally, we can have some understanding as to why large numbers of testing are essential in a pandemic. The more tests a country has done, the more confirmed cases it has. Since we can only get a positive test if a test is carried out in the first place, countries that have performed more tests tend to have more confirmed cases. In other words, there is a positive correlation between tests performed and cases confirmed. That doesn't necessarily mean that countries that have done more tests really have more cases, although in many cases they might. However, the differences between countries can tell us important things. For instance, we can see that some countries have done more tests per confirmed case. For example, the UK has done more tests than other European countries with a similar number of confirmed cases. A look at a chart showing the number of tests performed in each country can also be quite revealing. For instance, South

Korea has done more tests than other countries. Inevitably, it can be expected that the number of confirmed cases or positive test results in South Korea is closer to the real number of infected people than it is in other countries.

For a contagion like Covid-19, per capita tests performed in a country is also another crucial factor. Just look at a chart that takes the size of the population into account and shows the total number of tests per million people against the total number of confirmed cases (per million people). The higher the dot, the more tests per million people have been carried out in that country. The further right it is, the more tests per million people have come back positive. Therefore, we see that countries with higher rates of confirmed cases tend to be also countries where a larger share of the total population has been tested.

However, again, there are important



Swabs for testing for the coronavirus are seen at a laboratory in Neuilly-sur-Seine near Paris, France, on March 24, 2020.

PHOTO: REUTERS/BENOIT TESSIER

differences between countries. Vietnam, for example, shows a much higher testing rate than Indonesia, although as of March 20, both have a similar number of confirmed cases per million people. From this perspective, it is clear that the US is lagging behind. The number of tests per million people in the US is almost 10 times lower than in Canada, and about 20 times lower than in South Korea. The US has been lagging behind these countries in terms of rolling out their testing strategy, although it seems to be fast catching up. Indeed, the number of a country's population and the capability of its health system are two main factors that determine how many tests a country can perform.

Unfortunately, the capacity for Covid-19 testing is still low in many

countries around the world. For this reason, we still do not have a good understanding of the spread of the pandemic. Bangladesh is not an exception and testing is still available only in Dhaka (although some measures to decentralise testing are underway). The number of tests carried out since the first Covid-19 patient was identified in Bangladesh has crossed 1,600 and, out of them, 54 positives have been identified so far. This number is not satisfactory. The tests should have been started earlier and by this time thousands of tests should have been done.

The reality is, we have never faced such a pandemic in the past and our capability to tackle this is not strong enough. But we got enough time to prepare for the outbreak since the disease originated in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. We had over two months' time to prepare several testing laboratories with trained

In two months' time, we could upgrade our existing laboratories to BSL2 and develop some new ones utilising our resources. However, it is heartening to know the ministry of health has taken the initiative to set up diagnostic facilities at the division and district levels. Some selected medical colleges will have the capability to test soon. Local experts from different institutes and universities should be coordinated and mobilised to quickly launch those facilities and keep them under safe operation. Test quality control is also very important. Generally, in RT-PCR, quality control is a challenging task and the quality of test results can be compromised in any step down the process like sample collection, viral RNA extraction, PCR mix preparation, running the PCR reaction, etc. Any possible contamination while handling RNA has to be strictly avoided and appropriate controls have to be put in place in every step. The process requires strict temperature control and an absolutely contamination-free environment, otherwise the specimens can show false negative/positive results.

These are the reasons why the tests should be performed under a uniform guideline or protocol that should be developed considering our context without any further delay. So far, the number of positive cases identified per tests performed in Bangladesh is quite different from that of other countries. It is imperative that we take extra measures to maintain the quality of our tests.

The government has taken some serious measures to contain the disease so far. People have also responded well and they seem to be quite aware of the danger. However, we have to keep in mind that a huge number of people entered Bangladesh from countries worst affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in February and March. An outbreak may start from any corner of the country at any moment. Therefore, the next few weeks are very important for us in tackling the spread of the disease. We know the limitations of our health system and hospitals, public or private. The system will be saturated early in a potential Covid-19 outbreak which causes patients to require critical care. It will also be a challenge to keep our healthcare professionals safe across the country. As well as addressing these challenges, our strategy should be centred on doing more and more tests of the suspected patients as well as subsequent isolation or quarantine of their contacts to prevent further transmission of the virus. Indeed, it is a tough time for all of us. Nevertheless, by undertaking pragmatic steps we can overcome the current crisis and prepare for the future challenges.

Muhammad Sougatul Islam, PhD, is a public health researcher and Director at BioTED.

West First policies expose myths

JOMO KWAME SUNDARAM and ANIS CHOWDHURY

AS the epicentre of the Covid-19 pandemic shifts from China to the developed West, all too many rich countries are acting selfishly, invoking the "national interest", by banning exports of vital medical supplies.

US President Donald Trump has reportedly gone further by seeking exclusive rights to a future coronavirus vaccine, although the report has been denied by a German drug company and some investors believed to be involved.

Europe first

Following France, Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland now also want to ban the export of certain types of protective equipment and gear, prompting Stella Kyriakides, the EU Health Commissioner, to contradict them, insisting instead that "Solidarity is key".

Dr Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, also appealed to EU governments to reconsider their export restrictions on medical supplies, including personal protective equipment for frontline health workers.

Nevertheless, the EU has since announced export restrictions on medical supplies needed for the Covid-19 pandemic to countries outside the European single market, ignoring earlier pledges when developing countries were reluctant to commit to EU-promoted "free trade".

This EU response may trigger export restrictions by non-EU countries which now have little reason not to turn to China and other "non-traditional" suppliers instead. After all, the EU imports USD 17.6 billion of medical products—the category it has now imposed export controls on.

Furthermore, supply chains for European medical equipment production, such as ventilation machines produced in Germany and Switzerland, use parts that cross the EU's external borders, sometimes more than once.

Meanwhile, some major developing countries have retaliated with similar measures, with India and China restricting medical equipment exports. Although India has reversed some restrictions on mask exports, allowing some to go to China, export bans remain on 26 pharmaceutical ingredients and some products made with them, such as

paracetamol.

Already, export bans have widened to some essential non-medical products, e.g., with Kazakhstan banning some key food exports since March 22. However, such moves are ultimately short-sighted and self-defeating as Covid-19 contagion knows no borders.

It is also in the rich world's self-interest to help poor countries, just as imperial powers were once very concerned about infectious diseases, such as malaria, in their colonies which threatened to damage their own interests in the longer term.

Solidarity, not isolation

Dangerously, such selfish moves are politically attractive, with Trump's



Much of Europe now wears a deserted look.

PHOTO: REUTERS

approval ratings hitting an all-time high. Much of the US public agrees with Trump blaming China for the Covid-19 outbreak, with some senior UK Tory politicians joining the chorus, warning that China will face "a reckoning" over it.

With the Western media seeing commercial and strategic considerations as behind all China's actions, much of the North views China's offers of help with great suspicion as "medical diplomacy". To the consternation of US and UK leaders, China's offers of cooperation have been welcomed by most of the developing world and many in the developed world as well.

As soon as available in early January,

China shared its findings on the genetic sequencing of the SARS-CoV-2 virus causing Covid-19. This has allowed researchers around the world to study how it makes people sick, and to quickly work on testing, tracing, treatment and prevention.

At last week's Saudi-convened virtual G20 emergency meeting, China announced it will increase its supplies to international markets of active pharmaceutical ingredients, daily necessities and other supplies to cope with the pandemic.

Other developing countries are also offering to help despite their own limited means. India has offered rapid response

is already challenging our assumptions about humanity, about society, about greed and selfishness, about the need to cooperate.

The pandemic has exposed fault lines in trust among humans, among groups, among countries, between citizens and governments, and faith in many of our assumptions about life, not only beliefs and humanity, but also knowledge itself.

Thankfully, many of us still recoil in disbelief, shock and despair when we learn of those already infected who put others at risk, who ruin, destroy and compromise society's already modest, inadequate existing health capacities through their selfish behaviour.

Meanwhile, as with global warming deniers, a number of leaders and others with influence see the Covid-19 crisis as a minor blip, a temporary interruption before returning to "business as usual", following a V-shaped recovery.

We are beginning to doubt social media and many other previously trusted sources of information and knowledge, as we slowly realise that we are inundated with fake news, information and advice, not least by those we have become accustomed to trust, including family and friends.

We are learning that purported "solutions" often ultimately come from those with agendas of their own, resulting in self-interested promotion of egos, influence or business opportunities, e.g., to sell medical supplies or some other really or purportedly needed "solutions", items and services.

After Covid-19?

We also need to begin to address and come to terms with what life is going to be like after we get past the lockdowns and other "inconveniences" imposed by the virus and its consequences. This time, it is different, really different. And we will not be able to simply revert to "business as usual" after we get over this crisis.

By beginning to think about the desirable, we must also consider the realm of the possible, and address the probable or the likely to strive to ensure that post-Covid-19 life will also be more secure, equitable, inclusive and sustainable.

Jomo Kwame Sundaram is a prominent Malaysian economist and academic. Anis Chowdhury is Adjunct Professor at Western Sydney University and the University of New South Wales, Australia. Courtesy: Inter Press Service (IPS)

Big data in the coronavirus battle plan

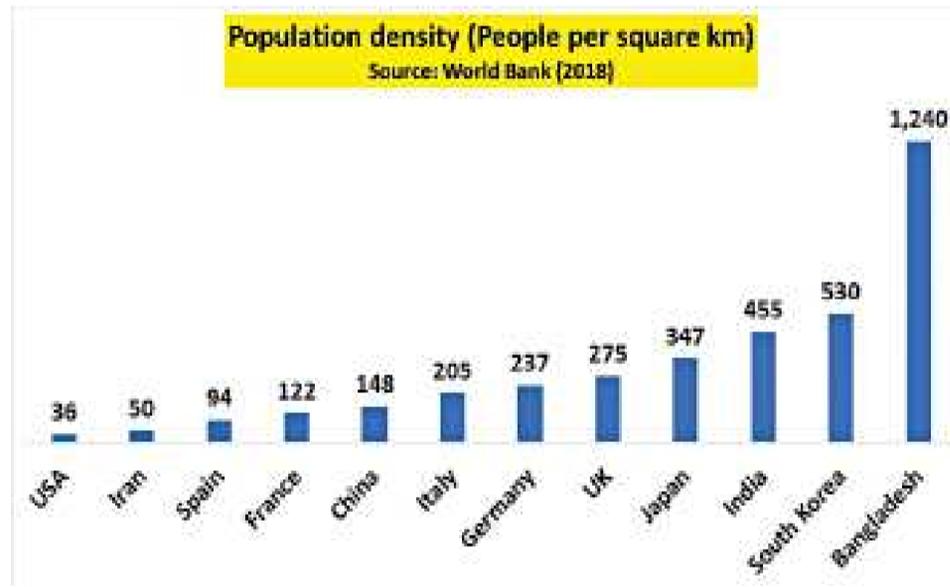
ABU SAEED KHAN

CORONAVIRUS (the virus causing the disease Covid-19) has two universal problems: no vaccine or drug has been developed as yet, and the diagnostic tools are scarce. This combination has dangerously multiplied the risk of infecting Bangladesh. Because, our population density is much higher than those countries that have been fatally hit by far (see the graph).

Our healthcare system reasonably functions up to the grassroots level. It is, however, historically incapacitated to fight any pandemic. Not the headcount of doctors and nurses, but standard procedure to contain a pandemic is the missing link. This is more of a structural, rather than a financial or technical, problem. Yet everyone is giving their best shot. The question is: for how long?

We have missed the bus
Bangladesh government has rightly allowed the *en masse* homecoming of expatriate citizens, especially the ones from Italy. But a series of missteps has eclipsed the government's humane gesture. Screening after disembarkation and tagging a local mobile phone number with each passenger's passport details at the immigration desk before temporarily caging the suspected cases in the notoriously mismanaged quarantine facilities have left them untraceable. Authorities are now clueless about the illness and wellness of the suspected returnees, who have been diluted into the ocean of nationwide rural population.

These living souls are the second only pillar, after garments, of our foreign currency reserve. And they, certainly, never get any subsidy. A free mobile connection to each of them



at immigration would not cost the exchequer an arm and a leg. In return, the government could easily track their location and movement by using the inputs from mobile operators. Thailand has strictly applied this simple method for incoming tourists. And multiple agencies with diverse portfolio are coordinating it. Unity in diversity within the administration is a government's strength for crisis management. It is missing in Bangladesh.

What we should do
Now the government has decided to apply big data analytics using

mobile phone users' information to contain the Covid-19 pandemic. "The government has initiated a process to draw a digital map to track coronavirus cases and find out areas susceptible to contamination by using mobile users' information—a move that may help portray the real picture of a possible outbreak. The operators will share the data with a national monitoring centre and the Access to Information (a2i) project under the ICT Division every six hours, and the two will then develop the map," according to a report by *The Daily Star* on March 29. There are points to ponder.

The National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC), an agency under the home ministry, is the only legal entity to analyse mobile user's data. The workforce of NTMC is composed of individuals from all security outfits. Ironically, it lacks functional coordination with those organisations from where its personnel come. It is largely reminiscent of the pre-9/11 America where intelligence agencies happily lived within respective walled gardens. The consequence was disastrous and interagency coordination is now central to the US national security blueprint.

Resource-constrained Bangladesh cannot afford to repeat the resourceful America's mistake. The archipelago of extrapolating mobile users' data should be exclusive to NTMC while other security agencies will have unfettered access to it. The non-security outfits like health, transport, local government, social welfare, etc. will receive customised data according to respective need. But the big data processing of more than 166 million mobile connections should be off-limits for individuals or entities lacking required security clearance. This is the reality in the context of Bangladesh.

Last words

Four years ago, Bill Gates warned about Covid-19 without naming it. The global leaders chose to ignore him. Now the Dutch King, Austrian Chancellor and "countless ministers from all kinds of countries" are frantically calling a leading German ventilator manufacturer. The Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg had already shouted at all of them six months ago. The politicians predictably remain unashamed.

Covid-19 is not the last pandemic virus. And nobody knows when the next one will attack, followed by another. Therefore, big data analytics using live mobile phone connections must not be a one-off affair in Bangladesh. It should be captured in our national security policy with paramount importance. That's why, the mobile big data should be processed only by the individuals having required security clearance. Competent data scientists with global experience reside in Bangladesh. Finding and engaging them is up to the government's political goodwill.

Abu Saeed Khan is Senior Policy Fellow at LRNEasia.

Conservation delayed is conservation missed



IN the middle of the devastating coronavirus crisis, we have come across some good news about the environment. China's polluted air is getting

better as industries are now closed; Venice's canals now have cleaner water as tourists have stopped going there; and the ever-increasing greenhouse gas emissions causing global warming may now see a significant drop after a long time. All these not only show how much we have changed our environment, but also how quickly nature can bounce back, if we stop disturbing it.

Compared with the rest of the world, the overall condition of Bangladesh's nature and biodiversity is not good. Last year, a United Nations (UN) report estimated that 12.5 percent of the world's eight million plant-animal species are now facing extinction. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), this biodiversity crisis is much higher in Bangladesh, since 24 percent of our 1,619 animal species might disappear from the country soon. Similarly, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the world lost about 1.4 percent of its forests during 2000-2015, whereas Bangladesh lost 2.6 percent forest tree cover over the same period.

On the ground level, many government agencies, UN bodies, and international and national NGOs have been implementing many conservation projects, with donors' as well as public money, to halt our biodiversity loss. Like any development project, the success, failure and sustainability of these environmental initiatives vary. But these relentless efforts with local communities—from the mangroves to the haors, from the hills to the floodplains—are highly praiseworthy.

On the policy and legislative level, however, Bangladesh is far from dynamic. In 1998, for example, the government drafted a Biodiversity and Community Knowledge Protection Act, which never got approved. A related piece of legislation, the Bangladesh Biodiversity Act, was mentioned in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) in 2004. It, however, took us another 13 years to get that law passed. A National Biodiversity Policy was also detailed in the NBSAP—16 years on, it is yet to be adopted. A government rule to manage Bangladesh's protected areas (PA Rule) was first thought of during the "Nishorgo Support Project" (2004-2009), whereas a rule to govern ecologically critical areas (ECAs) of the country (ECA Rule) was first drafted in 2010. These two rules were relatively quicker to come into force, in 2017 and 2016, respectively.

The National Conservation Strategy (NCS) is a classic example of delay till date. In light of the World Conservation Strategy of 1980, the government of Bangladesh drafted the NCS—for an

overarching conservation guidance—a few times till 1993, when it was placed before the Cabinet. Later on, the NCS was updated a few more times, but was never approved by the government. More than 22 years after the first proper draft, Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD) started updating and finalising the Bangladesh NCS in light of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework. That attempt was started on November 5, 2015 with technical support from IUCN and funding from the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF). Four years on, the Bangladesh NCS is yet to be completed and approved by the government.

So, what is the implication of such delays? Indeed, this is a waste of valuable time, money, and expertise. But, most importantly, a policy or a legal instrument loses its relevance due to these delays. It also misses the opportunity to make conservation effective. We have seen this in the case of the PA Rule and the ECA Rule, for example. If passed earlier, the PA Rule could result in better institutionalised co-management of the protected areas



A man walks along a bank of the Padma River in Dohar, an area on the outskirts of Dhaka, on August 12, 2016.

PHOTO: AFP

Like past conservation policies, strategies and legal instruments, Bangladesh cannot afford undue delay in completing the planned assessment. Once opened, the Padma Bridge will change the socio-economic landscape of the south-west region of Bangladesh.

under the "Climate Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods" (CREL, 2013-2018) project, by involving the forest-dependent communities and the BFD.

Similarly, the ECA Rules could not harness the opportunity to establish a strong governance system in the ECAs around the country. This is because the main phase of the "Community-Based Adaptation in ECA Project" (2011-2015) of the Department of Environment ended well before that rule was approved. And the Bangladesh NCS, in its 40-year history, is becoming obsolete once again.

Recently, the government assigned the Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) and Integra Consulting to conduct a strategic environmental assessment by June 2021 for the south-west region of Bangladesh, including the Sundarbans. The assessment will explore the current and future environmental and socio-economic

impacts of development at the landscape level in this region. With this, we now have a real opportunity before us to change our "culture of delay" in nature conservation.

Since July 2014, the UNESCO's World Heritage Committee (WHC) had been requesting Bangladesh to conduct a strategic environmental assessment for the region surrounding the Sundarbans. This got a big push in 2016, when the WHC and IUCN conducted a joint mission to the Sundarbans World Heritage Sites. After checking the mangrove's condition, the mission made many vital recommendations including relocating the Rampal power-plant elsewhere. The WHC-IUCN mission also suggested conducting a comprehensive strategic environmental assessment, which was included in the WHC's meeting decision in July 2017. It, however, took Bangladesh five and a half years to start that assessment.

Like past conservation policies, strategies and legal instruments, Bangladesh cannot afford undue delay in completing the planned assessment. Once opened, the Padma Bridge will change the socio-economic landscape of the south-west region of Bangladesh. At the same time, it could drastically change the environmental landscape of this region in an unimaginable manner, especially since this region has the Sundarbans.

The on-going strategic environmental assessment is, therefore, no longer important for us simply because the UNESCO-WHC wants us to do it. It is extremely crucial for the overall environmental sustainability of the climate-vulnerable, biodiversity-rich south-west region of the country.

Now the question is: will Bangladesh be able to complete the assessment on time and design a regional development plan accordingly? Or will it continue to overlook the urgency of strategic nature conservation like before?

Dr Haseeb Md Irfanullah is a biologist-turned-development practitioner with a keen interest in research and its communication. His Twitter handle is @hmirfanullah

QUOTABLE Quote

BRENÉ BROWN
(Born 1965)
American author

We're all so busy chasing the extraordinary that we forget to stop and be grateful for the ordinary.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Disgraced
- 7 Brighton brews
- 11 Soothing music style
- 12 Tabloid staple
- 13 Region of Spain
- 14 Major —
- 15 Skin features
- 16 Quarrel
- 17 Serpent's spot
- 18 Wolfish
- 19 Bulls or Bears
- 21 Last letter, in London
- 22 Spots with no bars
- 25 Junior, to senior
- 26 "Chicago" actor

DOWN

- 1 Professor at Hogwarts
- 2 Judean king
- 3 Not out of it
- 4 Red hue

27 Like some geraniums

29 Sweeping

33 Slip

34 Devilfish

35 Dutch cheese

36 Wolverine's cousin

37 Eat in style

38 Classroom item

39 Match parts

40 Landed folks

5 They may clash

6 Bear's lair

7 Make sense

8 Treat as a celebrity

9 White weasels

10 High

16 Grapevine item

18 Took it easy

20 Yard tool

22 Desperate

23 Contest hopeful

24 Sparks resident

25 Ignores the limit

28 Big books

30 Uneasy feeling

31 Take the wheel

32 Linger

34 Foal's mother

36 Implore

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

T	A	T	E	R	C	I	T	E	S
A	C	U	T	E	U	S	I	R	P
S	T	R	A	P	T	O	R	M	E
T	I	N	A	M	I	N	I	N	
E	V	E	P	A	N	E	N	D	
R	E	D	D	E	N	I	D	E	S
T	O	R	M	E	N	T			
A	S	H	E	A	N	T	H	E	M
N	E	E	A	D	D	E	L	I	
G	A	P	G	E	L	T	A	N	
O	R	A	T	E	L	I	T	E	
R	E	G	A	N	S	E	D	E	R
A	D	E	P	T	S	E	E	D	S

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

An uncertain future for students amidst Covid-19 outbreak

TASNIM ODRIKA

"I find it unfortunate that the University decided to take such a decision without even considering the opinions of the students who are paying hefty fees for the whole semester. We only finished our midterms, which meant we had a few quizzes and a final left. This means that many students who had the chance to recover their grades won't get to anymore," opines Nazifa Raidah, student of Independent University, Bangladesh, in response to the cancellation of all final examinations by the university.

The global outbreak of Covid-19 has not left a single sector unharmed and the educational sector has faced a significant chunk of its effect. In accordance with the government, all educational institutes closed down from March 17, 2020 -- the students all over the country left in a cloud of uncertainty and a lot of unanswered questions.

Universities that were more than half way through the semester decided that the best course of action was to end the term and give out grades based on prior assessments.

"This decision was taken by Brac University because a lot of the students could not cope with the pressures of attending online classes, giving presentations online, and meeting deadlines for the assignments. Some of the faculties were being inconsiderate of the situation and the students claimed that they were not in the right state of mind since we can't really ignore what is happening to the world. Hence, the students complained to the Vice Chancellor," claimed Leena Kabir*, a current student of the university.

For other universities which still had a major portion of their academic term left, moving classes online remained the only option. Now, with online classes, the common problems remain. The teaching cannot be as hands-on and for lab courses, online classes really cannot do much, leaving a gap in knowledge for a lot of students. Moreover, in context to Bangladesh, other problems also arise.

According to Nazmus Sakib Nafiz of the University of Dhaka, attending online classes might not be possible for everyone since a lot of students have returned to their hometowns after the closure of the institutes. In public universities, a lot of students come from rural areas where proper infrastructure and internet access might not be

present. These students might also have financial constraints holding them back from attending the classes, adds Maisha Tasnim Snea, another student of the same university.

For Bangladeshi students abroad, there are other issues to take into consideration.

"I work part-time at a supermarket and since supermarkets are essential, they haven't closed down yet. However, it drains you physically and emotionally when you have to undertake extra precautions for yourself as well as for the customers and you are constantly reminded of the virus and its impact by the local news. It demotivates you to study when you come home after work. International students who don't work in essential services have lost their jobs and might have a hard time paying rent and daily costs," says Zarin Rayhana, currently studying in Griffith University, Australia. She adds, "A lot of the international students at universities here are



going back home for a semester because of a lack of help by the government but not everyone can afford to go back and return again."

Some universities have been considerate enough in terms of housing for the international students but not everyone has been fortunate. Prachy Mahbub, who graduated in the middle of this pandemic from Mount Holyoke College, USA, shares, "It has been a rough couple of months. Our entire lives pretty much got upturned, especially for students whose homes are thousands of miles away. It has been especially difficult because we had to appeal to stay on-campus so we're not homeless."

For others, the plan might have been to return to Bangladesh but due to cancellation of flights or lockdown in their respective countries, they have been unable

to do so.

"I was supposed to leave Malaysia right after my convocation. Around March 14, the situation became grave as the cases of Covid-19 kept on increasing. Our convocation was postponed indefinitely and from March 18, Malaysia went into a national lockdown which was later extended to April 14," says Shehri Tabassum Odrri, finishing her graduation in Segi University and Colleges, Malaysia. Being unable to catch an early flight out of the country before the lockdown, all she can do now is wait.

Apart from the educational aspect, it has also been a difficult situation for students who had graduations/convocations, summer internships, or booked and paid-for flights back home. "I felt very disheartened because we worked for three whole years for this one day. Since it has been postponed indefinitely, there is no guarantee now that our convocation will take place," further

done in a University environment. Here, online classes or 'work from home' is not an option. My graduation will most likely be delayed, which will ruin my chances of catching the September sessions in the UK which I wanted to apply for," laments Farhan Rahman, a North South University student. Public universities in the country may also face the added issue of session jams.

Moving down to schools, students are facing a lot of similar concerns. For English medium students, cancellation of the O and A Level examinations poses a lot of unease among the students especially in regards to grading since it will now be provided based on prior mock tests taken by the school and performances of the students throughout the year.

"You might argue that mocks are a good representation but there are students who do not take mocks that seriously and end up performing better on the main exam. Dissatisfactory grades can make university applications look bad where you might need to retake the units, causing an unwanted gap year," says Osaman Bin Ahmed, a May 2020 A Level candidate.

HSC candidates on the other hand are left with a lot of uncertainty as no concrete announcements have been made yet (at the time of writing this) in regards to the dates of their examinations.

According to HSC candidate If-laj Nashita Taslim, "The whole situation has left the HSC examinees in a dilemma. Right now, all we can do is wait and keep preparing ourselves for the exam and hope that the government takes the right decision based on the situation."

"If the exams are cancelled and the students are judged based on their test results, many potential students might not even be able to sit for the admission tests of their dream universities. On the other hand, if the exams are held after the situation returns to normal, we might not get enough time to prepare for the admission tests. If the admissions are also delayed to give us more preparation time, it will result in the delay of all the later activities as well," she adds.

During these unpredictable times, it's important to try and look at the bigger picture. "It's a setback for all of us but I'm certain we will, collectively, bounce back from this," says Farhan, adding his two cents on the situation.

*Name has been changed for privacy

Send your queries to Tasnim Odrika at odrika_02@yahoo.com

Of Cancelled Matches and Empty Arenas

AAQIB HASIB

We are living in a strange time. I think for the first time in a while, people are promoting staying at home over going out and "carpe diem", or whatever is the general jazz most motivational speakers like to throw your way.

Now, staying at home isn't the worst thing in the world. You get to binge your favourite shows, catch up on some reading, play all those games you have been storing up in your Steam library and so much more.

This particular pandemic has been a hard time for us sports fans, who like to spend our Sunday nights watching the English Premier League (EPL) and have been anticipating the upcoming UEFA Euro 2020, which has now been postponed to 2021.

We did, however, get a short period of time when football matches were played in empty arenas because while mass gatherings had been essentially banned, the associations governing individual football leagues still decided to carry on with matches behind closed doors, as rescheduling the games would have been quite difficult to accommodate.

The sight of the empty arenas was haunting, and it was the first time I got to think about just how much of an impact crowds have on these games. It isn't just the empty seats either, but the reactions, chants, cheers and jeers that fans also bring into the stadiums.

Another sport -- or "sports entertainment" -- being a more accurate word -- that is still continuing in the empty-arena-style is professional wrestling. Both the WWE and AEW are carrying on their shows, with zero attendees and a minimum number of staff members.

But if anything, their shows are a confirmation of just how essential a crowd really is. With no fans present to chant the regular "this is awesome", "what?", "boom", etc. it no longer feels like a wrestling show.

So while we continue to remain indoors, I wanted to throw some suggestions out there which helped, if not quench, at least somewhat satisfy my need for some of my

favourite sports.

Football fans can seek comfort in playing FIFA with your friends -- online, of course -- or even in manager mode. Football Manager is another great alternative that is guaranteed to give you hours of entertainment.

Wrestling fans can resort to "watch parties" via Discord or Kast with their friends. Both the WWE and AEW YouTube channels have plenty of wrestling content to keep you occupied for weeks. If not, the WWE has promised to give fans access to a big chunk of their network to compensate for the lack of live wrestling content. Maybe



start career mode in one of the games 2K makes for WWE (would not recommend 2K20 though).

You may assume that cricket and Liverpool fans are doomed to an endless barrage of sadness. However, fans of cricket can try out the new Cricket 19. Liverpool fans can possibly take to photoshopping Klopp lifting the trophy along with his team? I don't know, whatever works.

If you're someone slightly more creative than me and have already come up with a more interesting way to satisfy your appetite for some of the above, hit me up. Help a brother out.

Aaqib is stuck in an existential crisis loop. Send help at aaqibhasib94@gmail.com

The Dos and Don'ts of a Video Call

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

It's another week of social distancing, and almost all of us are having to work or study from our homes. That being said, it's important to know what you should and shouldn't do when you find yourself in a video call. Here are some tips to help you out.

IS THE VIDEO CALL EVEN NEEDED?

If the purpose of the call can be fulfilled via text, email or a simple audio call, it's recommended that you don't opt for the video conference in the first place. That way, you'll be saving the other person a whole lot of time.

LET YOUR FAMILY KNOW

Take the call in a separate room. You wouldn't want people to barge in while you're pitching an idea. Inform your family or roommate/s that you'll be taking such a call and ask them to not bother you for the next couple of hours or so.

KNOWING WHAT TO WEAR

If you're in a video call for academic or professional purposes, you'd be better off wearing a slightly formal attire. Run a comb through your hair while you're at it. Just because you're home doesn't mean you get to do classes in your dirty pyjamas and bed hair.

MAKE SURE THE CALL WORKS

A few seconds into the call, do a quick check with everyone and ensure that all of them are able to both see and hear you. If the other participants are unable to do so, check your app or device settings. See if

your device has the permission to share live feed or not. If the settings look okay, maybe you could try fiddling with your webcam or mic. If all fails, and if others can confirm that everything is working fine from their end, you could leave the call and join again. And if this fails, you should politely message them explaining the situation and leave the call; at this stage, you're probably wasting everyone's time.

MUTE YOUR MIC WHEN NOT SPEAKING

Microphones can pick up minor background noises, like noise generated by the ceiling fan, or someone snoring in the next room. Turning off the mic when you're not speaking will prevent this additional noise from being added into the mix of the conversation.

HEADPHONES OVER SPEAKERS

Use of loudspeakers during the call can lead to unwanted noise and feedback for other participants. Use headphones, or earphones. Avoid playing music or watching videos with the sound on during the call.

CLEAR YOUR BACKGROUND

You don't need to clean the entire room, just the background which will be in direct view of the others. If you're not feeling up to it, just take whatever mess lies in front of your camera, and place it somewhere out of view.

JUST BECAUSE YOU CAN, DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULD

You're at home, meaning you have access to all the comforts you can ask for. But just because you can distract yourself, doesn't mean you should. Don't get up and leave during the call without asking for permission first. Avoid eating or using your phone during the conference, as well as scrolling your newsfeed or any other irrelevant website or page. At the end of the day, your virtual presence is still a resemblance of who you are in real life, so act the part.



FABLE FACTORY SCAR

KAZI SABITA EHSAN

Sometimes we lose ourselves in the music of the outside world to escape dealing with the lack of it within us.

Waking up from the light slumber I had fallen into, I put my headphones down and got out of bed. The coffee mug sat by my bed, half empty. I walked up to the window almost at a snail's pace and parted the drapes. The sky was lit up with a soft glow; soon the sun would hide behind a twilight horizon and then darkness would take over. There were birds to be seen.

So, what happens when the music stops?

No chirping of birds, no rustling of leaves. My gaze fell onto the streets. They seemed to be as devoid of life as the skies above; not a single soul was in sight. In just two week's time the city that I called home, the busiest city I had ever known, had been turned into a ghost town. A lonely rickshaw turned the corner and as I observed the old man on wheels my eyes began to sting. The man looked starved. How long has it been since he had a passenger? My gaze followed the rickshaw until it vanished out of



ILLUSTRATION: RIDWAN NOOR NAFIS

sight. It was as though the gloom that had taken the city by storm had also somehow seeped into the hearts of all its inhabitants and it was in no mood for mercy. "How much longer can I take this?" I wondered.

"HOW MUCH LONGER MAA?" my daughter's scream broke through my thoughts. "What?" I asked. "How much longer do I boil this egg before it's done?" I shook my head and ran to the kitchen to see what trouble she was cooking up now. To my horror, my nine-year-

old had the stove on and was trying to boil an egg.

"MOVE!" I shrieked. As I began to clean up around the kitchen she walked over to the counter and stood still, clearly waiting to ask something. "Maa?" she asked, "when can we leave the house again?" "When this virus goes away sweetheart," I said. "We're not the only ones, everyone's staying indoors you see?" She stared at me with a blank expression. I pointed at the single scar on her knees. "Remember when you fell off your bike and got that? How you had to stay in your room, be very patient and give it time to heal?" She nodded. "Well, the earth is sick sweetheart. It has seen enough. It needs to rest now, it needs time."

Running her fingers across her scar, she went silent. As I went back to cleaning the kitchen she looked up. "Maa, what happens when the earth gets a scar?" I smiled at her. "The music stops." I thought to myself.

Kazi Sabita Ehsan, a bibliophile with a penchant for overthinking about life. Find her at sabitaehsan@gmail.com



We should have our own mantra to be successful: Tamim

Tamim Iqbal has big shoes to fill after replacing Mashrafe Bin Mortaza as Bangladesh's ODI captain. With the coronavirus pandemic currently halting cricket, Tamim is quietly looking forward to better times. The opener spoke to The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi over phone on his batting role, struggles and his understanding of the challenges going forward. The excerpts of the exclusive interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (TDS): Spending time at home during coronavirus outbreak?

Tamim Iqbal (TI): Truth be told, I am not facing any big issues. I am not getting annoyed, bored or anything else. Normally I do my running in the morning and after that I spend time with the kids. Maybe I'll watch a movie and time passes. If you think about it from the perspective that first you are doing it for yourself as well as the safety of others, life becomes easier.

There is nothing bigger than life and to that end, if I have to spend time at home for one or two months, I should not be upset. I am not thinking about cricket at the moment given the situation that's prevailing. We can see how the situation is in various parts of the world. By Almighty's blessing the situation in Bangladesh is still okay, but if we face something like that, it will be a big disaster. Most important thing is to follow the directives that are coming to us and when it passes, we will have enough time to prepare for our professional life.

TDS: How difficult is it to bat for a side which has seen quite a few batting collapses when top-order doesn't click?

TI: It used to happen regularly four or five years ago, but compared to those times, it's happening lesser now. It was challenging at those times; somebody had to do something differently to stop that. I feel I started playing differently around that time so that we don't lose a flurry of wickets. Before 2015, you would notice that we used to lose two or three more wickets right after a wicket fell.

TDS: Tell us about your anchor role and how much do you enjoy it?

TI: I don't really see it as an anchor role. On days that I get out early, if another one from top three or four stays till the 35th over, it's an added advantage for the side. The thing about the anchor role is, when a set batsman is at the crease, it doesn't matter whether his strike rate is 120 or in the 75-to-80 percentage range. The thing is, with that player at the crease, you can play around him as a team. After all, it is a team sport. If Bangladesh reach 160 to 170 in 30 overs but lose six wickets, you have very little chance of winning the match even though your run rate is close to six. But if you reach 140-145 in 30 overs for only two wickets, you have a very good chance of scoring 280-300 and your chances of winning the match improve. The beauty of ODI cricket is that you will start in one way, build another way in the middle and finish it a different way.

Whether I like my role or not, what's



Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal and his family.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

more important is that someone is staying at the crease. It can be me or Liton Das or someone who bats at number three. Our team's objective is that someone bats till the 40th over.

There are some innings which people won't appreciate. Even in our team, I see it happens a lot with (Mahmudullah) Riyad bhai. Sometimes one might check stats and say that he hasn't scored a ton in three years, for example. But the 30- or 35-run knocks that he plays, while batting at number six, don't get appreciated. Sometimes those 30 runs are as good as 60 or 70 runs, but normally people only appreciate 100s or five-wicket hauls. If you think about it, if someone scores a hundred, the rest still need to score 200 for a good total.

Man-of-the-series in the 2019 World Cup was Kane Williamson and he scored his runs at a 70-odd run-rate because even for that run-rate, the runs he scored were very valuable.

TDS: You took a break after the Sri Lanka series and came back to hit form. Was the break helpful in exploring ways to improve?

TI: What I realise now is that I should have taken a break for the Sri Lanka tour. I didn't do well at the World Cup and I was so desper-

ate to score runs that I started training two days after I returned from that long tournament. I overruled and failed again in the Sri Lanka tour. I needed a break to mentally refresh myself.

During the break I didn't even touch the bat or ball. I decided that I will do things I don't like so I can become stronger mentally. I like to do running for fitness but I don't enjoy the gym. So I started doing gym. I went to Bangkok and hired a trainer and stayed there for 40 days and trained six days a week, two sessions each day, 12 in a week.

TDS: How difficult is it to take over from someone like Mashrafe Bin Mortaza as ODI captain?

TI: (Laughs) It would have been a big challenge not just for me but anyone since you are comparing to the most successful captain in Bangladesh's history. But if I concentrate on it and start comparing then I will not do justice to the team because those are very heavy shoes to fill. But Mashrafe Bin Mortaza did not become what he is in a year. He needed four or five years. To get to his level, I would need a lot of time. I would try my best and if I feel someone else is a better fit after a certain time, I would step down.

TDS: Do you have a vision for the

team culture? What does that entail?

TI: I will take a great dressing room environment and players enjoying each other's success, but not getting results over one dressing room environment that doesn't have those but are enjoying success. With a good culture, I know in time we will get better results but with the latter, the results will eventually stop.

TDS: As possibly the cricketer closest to Mashrafe with lots of adda sessions with him, what are the cultural aspects you want to take from Mashrafe? What are the leadership cues that you picked up?

TI: The biggest lesson I have learnt from Mashrafe bhai is that you can sometimes win the match the night before. If you have the right attitude and know what you have to do, you will have an extra edge. This is what I have learnt from him regarding how to keep everyone happy and positive. It happened in West Indies; we had a poor Test series and when he joined, the whole team's mood transformed in 24 hours.

TDS: What is the significance of the addas with seniors and juniors?

TI: In a team meeting, the environment is serious and intense. During an adda, maybe even at a tea stall, one can open up and say what's in his mind. You have to understand that we Bangladeshis are shy people and maybe we won't say something in front of 20 people but we might be able to do that in front of two people. That's how [through understanding and discussion] a team is built. We have different culture; we think differently and we should have our own mantra to be successful instead of following other teams. In 15 years, I want people to say that 'this is how the Bangladesh team thinks' or 'this is how a Bangladeshi thinks'. Like people do for Australia or current India side, I want people to see Bangladesh like that for our own way of doing things. We need to invest time on how we want to play our cricket.

TDS: During away tours, you are the person who makes most eating-out arrangements and makes sure the team has exposure to local culture, right?

TI: A young player may find himself at sea going to a restaurant in an away tour. Education comes in many forms. If that player can go and order food and know the scenario, he will feel good about himself. It's not going to make them better cricketers but they will get some self-confidence and they can adjust themselves better and go out on their own later. I like to try new cuisines and love grabbing a few people and going out to eat so I just do that normally.

Reminiscence: My first match

In these times of social distancing, we must be safe while remembering that we do not get too used to the world being at a standstill.

We were meant to go watch matches together, agree with a few of our neighbours and disagree with the rest. So, we are taking turns at The Daily Star Sport talking about our first live experience at a sports venue.

Atique Anam from Dhaka, 1988



The first match I watched live from a venue, unless my memory deceives me, was the India v Pakistan cricket match during the 1988 Wills Asia Cup in Dhaka.

It was probably one of the first international cricket tournaments to take place in Dhaka, and the excitement regarding the match and the tournament as a whole, was quite huge.

I have often wondered as to why that match in particular pops up in my memories so often whereas an Abahani v Mohammedan football match, which was as big in those days and would take place much more frequently, could have been my first memories of a match that I watched live.

Finding no logical answer, I have resigned myself to believe that such a high-voltage Dhaka derby might not have been deemed safe for me at that age.

But cricket, too, was a very popular game, and since international cricket was a once-in-a-lifetime sort of thing in those days, attending it was worth

people very early in the morning.

For me it felt like a picnic, except for the fact the weather was truly unforgiving. And except for the fact that there was a battle going on out in the middle -- a battle between men in whites from two neighbouring rivals, with bat and ball in their hands and pads and gloves for armour.

Sat on one of the upper tiers of the general gallery, with a sideways view of the pitch, we watched the game for long hours and immersed ourselves in the Mexican waves that made it round the galleries every now and then.

We were baked in the scorching heat for hours, which was only a small sacrifice for watching live sports in those days. People from that generation would surely remember the lengths they would go to get the grainiest of TV signals for matches played across the border.

There must have been good strokes played, great bowling and fielding efforts made during the course of that game, but I can hardly recall any of those as I was too overwhelmed by the whole atmosphere.

Now when asked about writing for



every penny. Digging memory cells, I realise how excited I was about the prospect of watching the biggest cricket stars of that time.

We had taken full-fledged preparations beforehand, tickets bought days ahead, food prepared for the outing, and last but not least, placards drawn showing our allegiance to a certain team, with one particular placard screaming about a top-order batsman who was in murderous form in those days.

I, along with my father, one elder brother and a cricket-crazy neighbour, made it into the Dhaka Stadium (the present day BNS) through throngs of

the column "Reminiscence: My first match," the first thing I did was look up on Google and go through the scorecard, finding to my amusement that the batsman I had carried a placard about, who had scored heavily throughout the tournament, just happened to have a rare failure on that very day.

I looked for pictures of that match on the internet to invoke memories of any passage of play or any single act -- a huge six, a fast yorker or a brilliant runout -- but in vain. But I do remember I went back home that day very satisfied; probably richer from that experience.

Wimbledon cancelled

AFP, London

Wimbledon chiefs on Wednesday cancelled the Grand Slam for the first time since World War II as the coronavirus wreaks further havoc on the global sporting calendar.

"It is with great regret that the main board of the All England Club (AELTC) and the committee of management have today decided that The Championships 2020 will be cancelled due to public health concerns linked to the coronavirus epidemic," the organisers said in a statement.

The cancellation of the only grasscourt Grand Slam tournament leaves the tennis season in disarray and also prompted the ATP and WTA to cancel the grasscourt swing in the build-up to Wimbledon meaning the tennis season will not now recommence until July 13 at the earliest.

'No chance of resuming BPL before July'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy sees no possibility of resuming the Bangladesh Premier League before July, that too subject to rapid improvement in the coronavirus situation.

Murshedy, also chairman of the professional football league committee, made the comment to The Daily Star yesterday, a day after the deadline of suspension of all types of sports activities following the youth and sports ministry's directives on March 16 ended. Even though there has not been any further directive in this regard from the ministry, it is understood that under the current circumstances the halt in sporting activities is likely to be extended for indefinite period.

"As per news I'm getting from media as a member of parliament and as a businessman involved internationally, I think no football competition can restart by June. The month of Ramadan will start in the latter part of this month with the thus Eid-ul-Fitr on May 25 or 26, which will also follow another seven-day holiday. Then we have to give at least one month's notice to the clubs for their

preparation because all clubs have released their players," Murshedy said while on his way back from a high-level meeting of the government yesterday.

"I think if the situation improves rapidly, the league can resume on the first week of July. If the situation improves slowly, then it won't be easy to get the ball rolling by that time," Murshedy added.

The former footballer even believes resuming the league amid slow improvement of the situation will not be wise. Even in the best-possible scenario, Murshedy wants to judge the situation across the country before allowing teams to go to their home venues to play home-and-away matches of the league, which has only had six out of 25 rounds of matches completed.

Before the postponement of the league, the clubs requested the game's local governing body to find a way about the payment of foreign players, who are supposed to get monthly salaries as per contract. However, Murshedy said that this issue depends primarily on the clubs. "If any club faces any problem and seek our help, then we can come forward to help settle the matter," said the BFF vice-president, who has been at the helm of the league committee for the last 12 years.



Homeless people have been afforded shelter at the Pretoria West Rugby Stadium in South Africa as part of the measures taken under a national lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus. But it is not all gloom there as people were spotted playing cricket on the field yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

PADMA BRIDGE RAIL LINK PROJECT IS BEING BUILT WITH BSRM

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SHAH CEMENT

SCHOOLS IN SHUTDOWN

Virtual classes not reality yet

Uneven access to technology obstacle to regular online learning while children at home

MOHUIDDIN ALAMGIR

The authorities are yet to introduce regular online classes for school students as educational institutions remain indefinitely closed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

However, the management of renowned Bangla and English medium schools and Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education officials, while speaking with The Daily Star, said the introduction of online education is under consideration in case the school shutdown lingers.

A section of educators, however, said uneven access to the internet and devices such as a desktop computer, laptop, or smartphone, are vital obstacles to introducing online learning.

Bangla medium school authorities said they have instructed all their students to follow the televised lessons broadcast by the Sangsad Bangladesh Television for secondary students enrolled in grade six to 10, since Sunday.

English medium schools are sending homework via



Children, mostly homeless ones, running towards a vehicle carrying relief materials for those in need in front of Kamalapur Railway Station in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

STAY HOME, STAY WELL

Talk to people you know, trust

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Amid the countrywide lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus, millions are working from home while children are off school.

Staying at home all day can be tiring, boring and stressful while it can have a serious impact on people's mental health if not addressed properly.

It is normal to feel anxious at a time when the coronavirus pandemic is taking its toll on almost every domain of people's lives by disrupting their everyday routine.

In an attempt to curb the coronavirus outbreak in the country, the government declared a 10-day general holiday from March 26 to April 4 and then extended it to April 11.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

Defer hajj plans this year

KSA urges countries; Dhaka says it will press ahead

RASHIDUL HASAN

Although the Saudi Arabian government yesterday urged different countries to delay making hajj plans this year, suggesting the pilgrimage could be cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, Bangladesh said it would go ahead with their preparation regarding hajj.

"We have heard the Royal Saudi government's appeal. But we will go on with our ongoing preparations centring this year's hajj. We will refund money to intended hajj pilgrims, if hajj isn't held this year finally," Nurul Islam, secretary, religious affairs ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday over telephone.

Saudi Hajj and Umrah Minister Muhammad Saleh bin Taher Bantem yesterday said on state television that the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is prepared to secure the safety of all Muslims and nationals, different media sources reported.

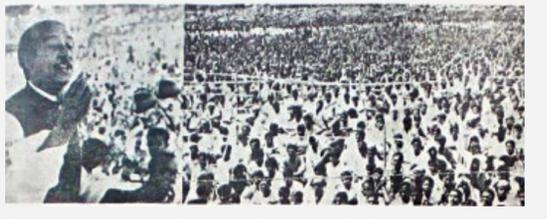
"That's why we have requested all Muslims around the world to hold any signing of agreements [with tour operators] until we have a clearer vision," he said.

In February, the kingdom took the extraordinary decision to close off the holy cities of Mecca and Medina to foreigners to stop the spread of the virus, a step which wasn't even taken during the 1918 flu epidemic that killed tens of millions worldwide.

Restrictions have been tightened in the kingdom as it grapples with over 1,500

FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

'Don't demand anything for three years'



Bangabandhu addressing a public meeting in Thakurgaon on April 2, 1972.

APRIL 2, 1972
SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

BANGABANDHU VISITS DINAJPUR AND THAKURGAON

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today says that conspiracy is going on, within and outside, against the new-born state of Bangladesh and urges the people to unite against the conspirators and resist them.

Addressing a huge public meeting in Dinajpur today, the prime minister appeals to the people to get themselves engaged in the task of national reconstruction. Bangabandhu reminds the people that the task of preservation and consolidation of independence is no less difficult than to achieve it.

Bangabandhu further says that he has started the task of reconstruction on debris and will not be able to deliver any substantial goods to the people for three years. He, however, assures that his government with the support and cooperation of the people will be able to bring back the pre-March 25 (1971) situation within three years. This task in usual cases would have taken at least 10 years, he adds.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

NY now a city of worries

Bangladeshi expatriates in fear, says journalist in interview with Star

PORIMOL PALMA

The glittering New York City, a bustling tourist destination, is now a land of worries. New York is the most affected state in the US, now the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic. Of the more than 188,000 people infected by the virus in the country, New York has reported nearly 76,000 infections and 1,714 deaths.

"If you call New York the epicentre of coronavirus in the US, Queens would be epicentre in New York," said Sultana Rahman, a Bangladeshi journalist based in Queens.

Queens, the birthplace of President Donald Trump, is also home to most of the nearly five lakh Bangladeshis living in New York, the most densely populated city in the US with some 8.5 million residents.

Sultana said she could confirm the deaths of at least 20 Bangladeshis there.

There is such a shortage of facilities that the Central Park has been turned into a makeshift hospital.

"Never in the American history, after the civil war some 200 years ago, this park was used for sheltering people the way it is being done now," said Sultana, who works for US-based TBN 24 television.

The hospitals and clinics in New York now have around 53,000 beds. Of them, ICU beds with ventilators are 3,000. However, there are projections

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Volunteers spraying sanitising liquid on a motorcycle to combat the spread of coronavirus in the capital's Moghbazar yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

2 sent to jail, one held over rape

STAR REPORT

Two men were sent to jail in Thakurgaon and Cumilla and another was arrested in Jashore yesterday on charges of rape and attempt to rape.

The accused are Rony, 21, Badiul Alam Munshi, 52, and Babu Sardar, 48, said police.

A Thakurgaon court yesterday sent Rony to jail for allegedly raping an 11-year-old physically challenged girl in Baliadangi upazila on Monday.

Khairuzzman, sub-inspector of Baliadangi Police Station, said locals

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

গণবিজ্ঞপ্তি

মুজিব বর্ষে স্বাস্থ্য সুরক্ষা এগিয়ে যাবে অনেক ধাপ

- আপনারা জ্বর, হাঁচি, কাশি, সর্দি, গলা ব্যথা, শ্বাসকষ্ট ইত্যাদি সমস্যা হলে নিকটস্থ হাসপাতালের মোবাইল নম্বরে কল করুন। সম্ভবহিসাবে করোনাকারীদের আক্রান্ত ব্যক্তির ব্যক্তিগত পরিচয় নমুনা সংগ্রহ করা হবে।
- ঘরে বসে চিকিৎসকের পরামর্শ নিতে কল করুন **১৬২৬৩৩ (স্বাস্থ্য বাতায়ন) বা ৩৩৩ নাম্বারে** অথবা IEDCR এর Hot Number **'10655'** বা **০১৯৪৪৩৩৩২২২** নাম্বারে।
- বিশেষ ফেরত ব্যক্তি অথবা জ্বর, হাঁচি-কাশি ও সর্দিতে আক্রান্ত ব্যক্তিদের মসজিদে না যেতে পরামর্শ প্রদান করেছে বাংলাদেশ ইসলামিক ফাউন্ডেশন (ইফা)।
- সামাজিক দূরত্ব বজায় রাখুন, পরস্পরের মধ্যে কমপক্ষে তিন (৩) ফুট দূরত্ব বজায় রেখে চলুন।
- মাস্ক পরার আগে ভালোভাবে হাত সাবান পানি দিয়ে পরিষ্কার করুন। মাস্ক হাত নিয়ে স্পর্শ করবেন না। মাস্ক খোলার সময় পিছল নিক থেকে মুখ এবং চাকলায়ুক্ত ডাস্টবিনে ফেলে দিন এবং সাবান পানি দিয়ে কমপক্ষে ২০ সেকেন্ড হাত পরিষ্কার করুন।
- মুখের লাশা দিয়ে ঢাকা শোনা ও বইয়ের পাতা উল্টানো বন্ধ করুন। ব্যক্তিগত অবস্থান কালে ধর্মীয় ঐতিহাসিক পাদন, শারীরিক ব্যায়াম করা, বই পড়া, গান শোনা, সঠিক বিশোদনমূলক কাজে নিজেদের ব্যস্ত রাখুন।
- বাচ্চাদের স্বাস্থ্য বিধি শিখান এবং তাদেরকে ঘরে রাখতে খেলাধুলা, গল্প, ছড়া, শিখা ও বিশোদনমূলক কাজের সাথে সঙ্গীত রাখুন।
- বিশেষ ফেরত ব্যক্তি বা ইতিমধ্যে কোভিড-১৯ এ আক্রান্ত ব্যক্তির সংস্পর্শে আসা সকলকে ১৪ দিন কোয়ারেন্টাইনে থাকা নিশ্চিত করুন এবং কোয়ারেন্টাইনমুক্ত ব্যক্তির সাথে স্বাভাবিক আচরণ করুন।
- বাহির থেকে এসে কোন কিছু স্পর্শ না করে সাবান পানি দিয়ে হাত ধৌত করুন এবং পরিধানের কাপড় সাবান পানিতে আধা ঘণ্টা ডিজিজে রেখে ধুয়ে দিন। সম্ভব হলে ঘরে ফিরে সাবান দিয়ে গোসল করে দিন।
- জ্বর, সর্দি, হাঁচি-কাশি, গলাব্যথা বা গা হ্যান্ডহায়াজ ডাব হলে এবং শ্বাসকষ্ট না থাকলে ব্যক্তিগত রাখুন। জ্বর কমানোর জন্য পারাসিটামল ও সর্দি-কাশির জন্য একিহিস্টামিন (যেমন ফেন্সোফেনাডিন, গ্লোরফেনিরাডিন ইত্যাদি) খেতে পারেন। গলা ব্যথায় কুমড় পরম পানি পান করুন। পরম পানি দিয়ে গড়গড়া করতে পারেন। ব্যক্তিতে অতিথিদের আসা বন্ধ করুন। ঘন ঘন সাবান পানি দিয়ে কমপক্ষে ২০ সেকেন্ড হাত ধুতে হবে। হাত নিয়ে নাক, চোখ, মুখ ছোঁবেন না।

আতঙ্কিত না হয়ে সতর্ক হ'উন ও ধৈর্য্য ধারণ করুন। নিজ গৃহে অবস্থান করুন। করোনা সংক্রমণ প্রতিরোধ করুন।

স্বাস্থ্য অধিদপ্তর

স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়

PRAYER TIMING APRIL 2

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4:40	12:45	4:45	6:21	7:45
JAMAAT 5:15	1:15	5:00	6:24	8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION