

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: STAR

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 Gulnagar, 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 Gulnagar, 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 by 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 Gulnagar 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

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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, leaving the bike.

Abdur Razzak, officer-in-charge of Jhikargacha 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 Pokkhokhal.

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 Matiur 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

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WB grants \$350m for Rohingyas and host communities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

World Bank yesterday approved \$350 million in grant financing for three projects to help Bangladesh address needs of the host communities and displaced Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar district for their health services, response to gender-based violence, social protection, basic services and infrastructure.

"Bangladesh has shown great leadership by providing shelter to around 1.1 million Rohingyas, which is about three times of the local population in Teknaf and Ukhia upazilas," said Mercy Tembon, World Bank country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan.

Naturally, the exodus has placed immense stress on existing infrastructure and social service delivery, and increased health and disaster risks, she said, adding that the three grants will cater to the needs of both host and Rohingya communities.

The \$150 million Health and Gender Support Project for Cox's Bazar District will enable 3.6 million people including the Rohingyas to have access to health, nutrition and family planning services as well as to address gender-based violence through preventive and response services.

The infant mortality rate and prevalence of stunting in Cox's Bazar is higher than national average. The project will renovate and upgrade health facilities in Cox's Bazar, including District Sadar Hospital and the Mother and Child Welfare Center in the

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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

