

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 Xiquan, 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

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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?

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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

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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 seen or 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 Kumira 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 countrywide 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

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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 yet reality

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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?

Sunnydale 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, Viqarunnisa 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 say 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

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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

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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 Debidwer 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

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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

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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.