



# The Daily Star

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Your Right to Know

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BANGLADESH  
UPDATE

9

infected in 24 hours



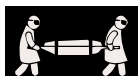
70

Total cases



30

Total recovery



8

Death

GLOBAL  
UPDATE

60,960

Total deaths



235,775

Total recoveries



1,141,190

Total cases

## Tests ramped up, but still not enough

Experts say as Covid-19 cases jump with higher number of daily tests; 2 more deaths

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

With multiple coronavirus testing facilities now detecting more cases, experts feel even more people from every region need to be tested immediately.

In the 24 hours before yesterday morning, the authorities tested 434 people and confirmed nine Covid-19 cases, the highest in a single day in the country. The previous day, the authorities reported five cases after 203 tests.

Experts recommend conducting more tests of symptomatic as well as asymptomatic individuals with and without travel history from every region of the country.

That is how the level of spread could be measured more correctly, they add.

Since January 28, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) reported 70 positive cases after 2,547 tests.

"People are volunteering for the tests, mainly by contacting officials over phone. This is a passive survey, not an active one," Prof Nazrul Islam, virologist and former vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University told The Daily Star.

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>> 2,547 tests in last 2 months; of them, 434 done yesterday  
>> 9 labs in Dhaka, 5 elsewhere; capacity 4,000 tests per day



Hundreds of people, mostly RMG workers, walking to Dhaka in flocks at Patgram of Mymensingh yesterday to resume work. Many RMG factories were operational. Masses were seen, *inset*, on ferries in Mawa, ignoring the government's guideline to maintain safe physical distance, as they travelled to the capital.

PHOTO:  
STAR

## Sudden influx

Many RMG workers head for Dhaka to join work; BGMEA urges factories to stay closed until April 11

STAR REPORT

Many were walking for miles, many travelled in crammed pickup vans and trucks meant for carrying goods. There was no scope for maintaining social distancing, which is crucial to contain the spread of coronavirus.

They were mostly garment workers, desperate to return to the capital and its adjacent areas from different other parts of the country as their employers had been calling upon them to join work.

They returned in their thousands yesterday, suffering a lot on the road as transport services remained suspended amid the nationwide shutdown. They travelled from Manikganj, Barishal, Mymensingh, Gazipur, Sherpur, Jamalpur, Netrakona and other districts, reported The Daily Star correspondents.

Later in the night, Rubana Huq, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), requested all factory owners to keep their units closed until April 11.

She urged them to take the current situation into consideration, shows a WhatsApp text sent to journalists.

The workers had left their workplaces and gone home after the government

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## Every breath was difficult

DMCH nurse opens up after surviving Covid-19

RAFIUL ISLAM

"No one can imagine how difficult just trying to breathe can be ... This experience can't be explained ... It felt like I returned from the jaws of death."

This is how a senior staff nurse at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, who recovered from Covid-19, described her ordeal while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

"Had anyone known the extent of this pain, they would not leave home and would definitely make sure their family is safe from the coronavirus."

Before being diagnosed with Covid-19, the nurse, 32, was taking care of patients, knowing that she might be infected as well.

On March 21, she first showed symptoms of the disease. She was finding it hard to speak on her return home from work that day. "I couldn't sleep that night, I was not being able to breathe properly."

On being informed, the IEDCR took

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## Hunger sets in at slums

Informal economy crumbles due to shutdown; thousands end up with no work, income source, food

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and ZYMA ISLAM

Never in recent history has Dhaka city been this hungry. Even when disaster struck elsewhere in the country -- when crops failed, homes washed away by rivers, villages flooded -- the city always had space to take in more.

It has not always been the kindest; one had to sweat blood for food, but there was work to be found and food to be had. With steady work, one could even rent a shack in the many informal settlements around the city. Not anymore.

As the lockdown is extended until mid-April, the informal economy has come crashing down. While the rich have gone indoors, throngs of hungry poor residents lining the sidewalks for alms has become a common sight in the city.

Even a month ago, Nurjahan Begum and her daughter Morjina could be found indulging in a plate of fuchka on Satmasjid Road after a long day of cleaning homes. They got paid by the hour, and this combined with Nurjahan's husband's earnings as a rickshaw puller and her son's wages as a construction worker, allowed them a home in Rayerbazar -- and some occasional delights like the tangy fuchka.

Last month, she had enough money to take a few days off work, and grab a bus to their village in Kishoreganj for a holiday. She came back with

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## Licences of hospitals, clinics could be revoked

Minister warns those refusing treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said the government will be forced to revoke the licence of private healthcare service providers who refuse to treat patients during the coronavirus crisis.

"The matter is very disappointing. People are now in danger. If they refrain from treating patients in this crisis, the government will be forced to take tougher action, including cancellation of their licence in the future," he said.

The minister made the comments while visiting the ward dedicated for

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## HELPING THE POOR IN SHUTDOWN

## Every MP still not on board

TUHIN SUBHRA ADHIKARY and  
PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

While organisations and individuals keep coming up with support for the poor amid the countrywide shutdown, many lawmakers are yet to be seen on the ground.

The civil administration and police, with the assistance of upazila and union parishad chairmen, have been distributing relief materials among the needy.

The army has also started assisting local administration in divisional cities and district towns in ensuring social distancing and implementing other protective measures.

But there are lawmakers who are still nowhere to be found, though Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked all local representatives, including MPs, to stand by the people in this time of crisis.

Some briefly visited their areas only to take part in "token" relief activities. A few lawmakers are, however, taking some initiatives in their localities.

Hasina, on Tuesday, exchanged views with public representatives and field-

level government officials through videoconferencing from the Gono Bhaban.

Besides, in her 31-point directive issued on Friday, she said, "Local public representatives, political leaders, people of all stages of the society will have to work together. The administration will have to work engaging all the people."

On March 23, the government announced the closure of all public and private offices from March 26 to April 4 -- later extending it till April 11. Operations of all public transport services were also suspended.

### GROUND REPORTS

Only one out of the five lawmakers in Sunamganj district visited their constituencies since the country reported the first three coronavirus cases on March 8, according to a local journalist of a Bangla daily.

Mouazzam Hossain Ratan, the lone MP to visit the district, however, drew criticism on social media as he was wearing PPE while distributing leaflets to create

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## BNP wants Tk 87,000cr coronavirus special fund

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday demanded that a special fund of Tk 87,000 crore should be allocated to tackle the impacts of coronavirus on the country's economy.

The party has proposed allocating Tk 61,000 crore for "short-term sector", Tk 18,000 crore for "medium-term sector" and Tk 8,000 crore for "unforeseen sector", said Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the BNP, said.

Addressing a press conference at the party chairperson's Gulshan office, Fakhrul presented a 27-point-package proposal.

"A special fund of Tk 87,000 with the three percent money of the GDP will have to be declared to implement some short-term and long-term initiatives to protect the economic sector," he said.

He also suggested that the government announced a revised financial package after the shutdown so that the economic activities can

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Underprivileged people maintaining physical distance while gathering on Dhaka's Solmaid High School playground to receive relief goods from members of Bhatara Police Station.

PHOTO:  
DMP

## India braces for an 'onslaught'

Says report as coronavirus cases, deaths begin to surge; infections doubled in south Asia last week

AGENCIES

India yesterday reported its biggest jump in number of new coronavirus cases as top doctors warned of an "onslaught" that could cripple the health system to levels far beyond what Europe and the United States are experiencing.

The warning came as global death toll from the coronavirus pandemic crossed 60,000 since it emerged in China in December.

In South Asia, which so far hasn't faced crisis like that of Europe and America, the number of cases neared 6,000 yesterday, even after the countries tightened restrictions on movement and warned lockdowns could be extended in a bid to rein in the pandemic.

The number of COVID-19 cases have more than doubled in South Asia in the last week. Health experts warn an epidemic in the region, home to a fifth of the world's population, could overwhelm its already weak public health systems.

But Muslim-majority Pakistan and Bangladesh, and India, home to the world's largest Muslim minority, have struggled to convince conservative religious groups to maintain social distancing.

On Friday, Pakistanis at a Karachi mosque clashed with baton-wielding police trying to enforce new curbs on gatherings to prevent Friday prayers and contain coronavirus infections, officials told Reuters.

India has been hardest hit by the disease in South Asia with some 3,072 cases, of which 75 have died, according to NDTV.

The country, which saw its first case on January 30, experienced an unprecedented surge in the number of COVID-19 cases over the last one week. From 900 cases

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# WB approves \$100m for Bangladesh to fight Covid-19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank has approved a fast-track \$100 million financing to help Bangladesh prevent, detect, and respond to the coronavirus pandemic and strengthen its national system for public health emergencies.

The Covid-19 Emergency Response and Pandemic Preparedness Project will be rolled out nationwide to help upgrade selected health facilities and laboratories to detect, manage and treat suspected and confirmed Covid-19 cases and support screening in Bangladesh's designated health facilities and entry points, said a release of the global lender on Friday.

The project will benefit people with suspected and confirmed infections, at-risk populations, medical and emergency personnel, as well as public and private service providers, medical and testing facilities, and the national health system.

"The World Bank is working closely with the government of Bangladesh to fight the spread of Covid-19," said Mercy Tembon, WB country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan.

She said the project would support the implementation of Bangladesh's national plan to respond to the pandemic. It would help strengthen the country's response by ensuring that effective surveillance and diagnostic systems were in place and that medical supplies, personal protective equipment, ventilators and isolation units were available in designated hospitals, she added.

The project will equip designated laboratories with Covid-19 trained staff as well as diagnostic equipment, test kits, and reagents, said the release.

It is mobilising resources for faster procurement to expedite the acquisition of critical items.

To deliver critical medical support and cope with the increased demand

for services, the project will rehabilitate district-level health facilities, selected medical college hospitals, the Infectious Diseases Hospital, and the Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases, among others.

It will help set up new isolation wards and ramp up intensive care units, provide personal protective equipment, medical equipment including ventilators, and medicines in designated hospitals.

The project will also help improve medical waste management and disposal, and water and sanitation systems in the designated health facilities.

The project is financed from the International Development Association (IDA), the WB's fund for the poorest countries. The credit has a 30-year maturity, including a five-year grace period.

**WB GROUP COVID-19 RESPONSE**  
The World Bank Group is rolling out a \$14 billion fast-track package to strengthen the Covid-19 response in developing countries and shorten the time to recovery, said another WB release on Thursday.

The immediate response includes financing, policy advice and technical assistance to help countries cope with the health and economic impacts of the pandemic.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) is providing \$8 billion in financing to help private companies affected by the pandemic and preserve jobs. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and IDA are making an initial \$6 billion available for the health-response.

As countries need broader support, the WB Group will deploy up to \$160 billion over 15 months to protect the poor and vulnerable, support businesses, and bolster economic recovery, said the release.

## Tests ramped

FROM PAGE 1

The number of phone calls and the number of tests in a day prove that "things are not being done correctly", he said.

"They received 70,000 calls [yesterday], but tested very few," Prof Nazrul said.

He said people who get tested should be selected in a planned manner so that the data can represent the entire country.

Of the latest 434 tests, the IEDCR conducted 136 and found 8 positive, and rest 13 laboratories across the country found one positive. Of the 13 laboratories, eight are in the capital and five outside.

### LABORATORY CAPACITIES

Real-Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test has proven to be the most dependable method of diagnosing Covid-19.

Invented in 1983 by the American biochemist Kary Mullis, the test involves a sophisticated procedure requiring trained personnel for collecting and transporting samples, and doing the examinations and analyses, experts said.

Rigorous tests have paved the way for controlling the Covid-19 outbreak in several countries.

Experts said maintaining the standard of tests is a challenge.

According to officials, the government is working to increase the number of tests by next week.

## Hunger sets in at slums

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bags full of fish to share with her neighbours.

Ever since the crisis struck, Nurjahan's son and daughter have been laid off, and her rickshaw puller husband cannot find passengers. And just like that, a family that used to have some spare change to enjoy the little pleasures of life, have no idea where the next meal will come from.

At Damalkote slum, two sisters -- also house-cleaners who work by the hour -- cannot bring themselves to run after relief trucks. The two sisters are both widows and live together alone.

"The trucks throw out food and we have to fight for the food with others. We are not beggars. We did not beg even when our husbands died. We work for our food," said Halima Begum.

She and her sister Rowshanara Begum bought a fistful of lentils with Tk 10 three days ago, and have been stretching that out by cooking the thinnest gruel possible.

Mariam Begum's 9-year-old twins Mukta and Saiful are constantly hungry and there is nothing to eat at home, so the mother brought them over to Bhashantek kitchen market to beg. The two children ran up to whoever they saw, crying for food. Mariam too is a domestic help whose services are no longer needed as the city's residents started social distancing.

"They ask for food all day long. There is none. If they can beg and

Of the 14 testing facilities, different laboratories have different capabilities.

"The laboratories are capable of conducting a total of around 5,000 Covid-19 tests every day," Prof Dr Khondoker Mahbuba Jamil, virologist at the Institute of Public Health told The Daily Star yesterday.

To collect samples from suspected Covid-19 patients in every upazila, the Directorate General of Health Services has assigned sample collectors and trained them. Employees of Surveillance and Immunization medical Officers Network (SIMO) and medical technologists in the upazila health complexes do the job.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) have been supplied to them, according to officials.

### THE CHALLENGES

If anybody wants to be tested, the only way to reach the authorities is to make phone calls to the hotline numbers of the IEDCR and the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

In the 24 hours until 10:00am yesterday, the IEDCR's 17 employees received 3,089 calls while DGHS's 2,118 and volunteering doctors received 63,714.

Of them, only 553 were suspected as potential Covid-19 patients.

Many people complained of failing to reach the IEDCR timely.

earn some money, I can buy food for them," said Mariam.

At home, a disabled husband and son along with three other small children were waiting for her to fill the pot. Her neighbour Safia Begum too waited by the roadside, hoping for alms to turn up.

"The shopkeepers are refusing to give groceries on credit anymore. The savings associations are not giving us loans. My husband worked in a factory in Jatrabari and they laid him off," she said. People of her slum are now selling off their household possessions to buy food, she added.

A crowd of people waited for relief in front of the Mirpur-14 slum on Thursday afternoon. A police car drove up to the people, and started handing out packs, but as hungry crowds pressed against the car, it quickly drove off leaving many empty-handed. One of those left with her hopes dashed was Sabina Khatun, a day labourer who breaks bricks into chips for a living. There has been no work for 20 days and her family consists of a sick husband and two children, all of whom are waiting with hungry stomachs.

"I have no work, no food and no fear of the coronavirus," she declared defiantly, sitting down on the sidewalk to wait for alms. That there is their predicament -- the city that had drawn the whole country to it like fireflies to a light, and given them hopes of a new life, has nothing to offer now.



An elderly woman being taken home from hospital in a rickshaw amid acute transport shortage in Chattogram. The photo was taken in Tiger Pass area yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## Every MP still not on board

FROM PAGE 1

awareness about COVID-19.

The prime minister issued a clear directive that only physicians, nurses, and attendants of patients will use personal protective equipment (PPE). There is reportedly a huge shortage of PPE in the country.

However, Shamima Akter Khanam, an AL lawmaker from reserved seat, has been working in the district.

In the last month, two Manikganj lawmakers -- AM Naimur Rahman Durjoy, a former national cricketer, and acclaimed singer Momtaz Begum -- visited their constituencies for the first time on Friday. The district, in Dhaka division, has three parliamentary seats.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque, a lawmaker from Manikganj-3, last visited the constituency on March 1. However, he is currently busy with issues related to the coronavirus outbreak.

In the northern district of Lalmonirhat, two out of its three MPs have not visited their constituencies since the outbreak began.

The two lawmakers -- Social Welfare Minister Nuruzzaman Ahmed and Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader -- did not go to their areas while the third MP, Motaahar Hossain, is now in his locality, reports our district correspondent.

However, Quader was seen distributing food in the capital.

In Kurigram, MP Panir Uddin Ahamed has been in his locality for many days now while Zakir Hossain, also state minister for primary and mass education, went to his constituency on Friday.

Neither of the two Jhalakathi MPs --

## Sudden influx

FROM PAGE 1

announced a 10-day shutdown from March 26, closing government and private offices, to stem the spread of coronavirus. The shutdown was later extended till April 11.

"I came from Faridpur. I had to board different vehicles to reach my office," said Jamal Hossain, 30, an operator at a garment factory in Savar on the outskirts of the capital. He said he was asked to join work from today.

Jamal said he was told that salaries might be disbursed within a couple of days. "So I did not make any delay. I need the money."

Many other readymade garments workers echoed the statement.

Amirul Haque Amin, president of National Garment Workers Federation, said factory workers were coming back to their workplaces mainly for two reasons -- they don't want to be terminated and they need their salaries.

Usually, the salaries are paid after the seventh of each month and those workers desperately need the money, especially to buy food and pay house rent.

He, however, said the safety of the workers must be given the top priority as the virus may spread fast among them as they would be working in close proximity.

Meanwhile, Nazma Akter, president of the Sammilito Garment Sramik Federation, said many factories were being laid off during this time, showing disregard for the labour law.

"So many workers are losing their jobs. No worker should become jobless," she told The Daily Star over phone.

She opined that the managements should shut down their units for the time being, but should continue paying their workers. "This will help maintain a healthy working environment in the sector."

In an audio message yesterday, Rubana Huq said the BGMEA wanted to ensure

Amir Hossain Amu and Bazlul Haque Haroon -- has recently visited their constituencies.

In Barishal, lawmaker Zahid Faruk Shamim, also state minister for water resources, went to his area for two days last week and visited Sher-E-Bangla Medical College Hospital to supervise treatment facilities.

Pankaj Debnath, another MP, distributed food among the poor for a brief period but three other MPs were not seen in their constituencies, reports our Barishal correspondent.

In Khulna, three lawmakers were in the field for one day; two other MPs are working in their localities, and the other MP is sick.

Another Khulna MP is staying at home and not allowing anyone near his residence in fear of the virus, reports our district correspondent.

In Dinajpur, two MPs -- Manoranjan Shil Gopal and Shibli Saddeeq -- are now in their areas and taking part in relief distribution while four others have not visited their localities so far.

Out of six Brahmanbaria MPs, only two -- Bodruddoza Md Farhad Hossain and AB Tajul Islam -- were seen in their constituencies.

### MORAL OBLIGATION

Transparency International Bangladesh's Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said time to prove their worth as public representatives is now more than ever.

"From both political and ethical points of view they are expected to take part in helping social distancing as well as distribution of supplies and other support that the people need most,

especially the most disadvantaged."

Public representatives have the capacity, authority and responsibility to take this role more than most others, he added.

"It is disappointing that many of them seem to have failed to lead by example which the people expect of them," he told The Daily Star on Thursday.

"Public representatives are also subject to health and safety risks in this extraordinary context, which may be suggested as a justification for their lesser than expected level of participation in support of respective communities."

However, he said, while it cannot be imposed on anyone, since they claim to be public representatives they should be aware that crises like this is the moment of test of their sense of responsibility to the people to whom they will go back to secure the mandate again, legitimately or not.

Contacted yesterday, Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said although there are risks, lawmakers should stand by people in their constituencies, taking the necessary health safety measures.

"As public representatives, it's our moral obligation to stand by people during any calamities," said Hanif, also a lawmaker from Kushtia, who is now in his constituency.

Asked whether the party would give any instructions to MPs who are not visiting their areas, Hanif said, "The prime minister is likely to issue directives from a press conference she is going to hold tomorrow [today]."

office.

On the Barishal-Dhaka highway, thousands were seen travelling in trucks and pickup vans. They were sitting close to each other, our Barishal correspondent reported. One of the passengers, Alamgir, 35, said he works at a factory in Dhaka and the factory would reopen today.

Barishal Metropolitan Police's Deputy Commissioner (Traffic) Khairul Hasan said they filed cases against the owners of 12 vehicles for violating traffic rules. "We are trying to make the passengers aware of the necessity of physical distancing."

At Gazipur's Maona intersection on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, hundreds of people were seen waiting for vehicles, reports our correspondent in the district.

Many, upon not being able to avail any transportation, started their journey to Dhaka on foot.

Additionally, hundreds of workers, including garments workers from different upazilas of Mymensingh and adjacent Sherpur and Kishoreganj districts, were seen heading towards Dhaka via Mymensingh.

They were seen travelling by auto-rickshaws and human hauliers, reports our Mymensingh correspondent.

Visiting the Dhaka-Aricha highway and the Nabinagar-Chandra highway, our Savar correspondent did not see any public transport. People were being carried in trucks and pickup vans.

Contacted, Tajawar Akram Sakapi Ibn Sajjad, assistant commissioner (Land) in Ashulia Circle, said action would be taken if any truck or pickup carried passengers.

Javed Masud, inspector (investigation) of Ashulia Police Station, said the workers had to return as some factories would reopen.

Police were trying to make everyone maintain social distancing, he said.

was essential that the public abide by the 21-day national lockdown that was imposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week.

"We are already seeing evidence of it (community transmission). How widespread it is, we don't know," said Trehan.

"My fear is that no matter how much preparation we do, if it peaks, we will not have even a fraction of what we need, by way of beds, by way of ventilators, by way of PPEs (personal protective gear), everything."

Worsening the situation, thousands of migrant workers, who fled India's largest cities to their homes, are left without jobs. Doctors say rural medical infrastructures are utterly inadequate to treat this high risk group.

## Licences

FROM PAGE 1

coronavirus-infected patients at Kurmitola General Hospital, according to a press release sent by Mayedul Islam Prodhhan, public relations officer of the ministry.

Stressing the need for maintaining physical distancing, the minister said there is no alternative to fighting the virus but to do so unitedly.

He reiterated that people should not to go out of their residences and urged them to wear masks if they are forced to go out for emergencies.

Regarding people still gathering together on occasions, he said it was being done despite repeated requests against it.

People are even gathering on the roads after Friday prayers, he said, adding it was very unexpected at a time when countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran have banned going to mosques.

The minister added that it will be very difficult to contain the spread of coronavirus if people continue to disobey government directives.

## Every breath

FROM PAGE 1

samples from her and she later tested positive for Covid-19.

"I'm not an elderly person and had no respiratory issues. Yet I suffered a lot. Now imagine how hard it is for the elderly people with respiratory and other problems," she said.

She kept herself isolated from her husband and two children -- one six-year-old and the other only two -- at their Hazaribagh home for the next two days.

As her condition deteriorated, she was taken to Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital.

After a week-long treatment there, the nurse tested negative and was released on March 31.

"Every single day felt like a year. My daughters used to call me over the phone and ask me to return home. The separation was painful. At times I cried, wondering when I'd be able to hold and adore them," she said.

The nurse is still physically weak and now staying home.

She said, "I will soon rejoin the hospital and serve people, especially patients with breathing problems, as I can now understand their pain."

It could not be known how she was infected. But her colleagues believed that she contracted the virus from one of the patients at the DMCH.

"The safety situation [at the hospital] was not satisfactory when she got infected. Many doctors, nurses and ward boys were not even provided with masks at that time. The situation, however, has improved now," said a staffer of the DMCH.

Talking to this correspondent, the nurse expressed her gratitude to her family members, colleagues, including DMCH Director Brig Gen AKM Nasir Uddin, and ambulance driver Pradip who supported her during the crisis.

She also thanked the doctors who treated her.

The nurse is among the 30 patients who have recovered from Covid-19. Of the 70 confirmed cases in the country, eight have died so far.

She urged all to maintain social and physical distancing and follow the other directives given by the government and health institutions to stay safe from coronavirus.

## BNP wants

FROM PAGE 1

be restored to where it was before the general holidays.

"The current corona crisis is not only a threat to life but also a disaster for the economy. The common and low-income people are the worst sufferers of it. That's why we propose taking short and long-term steps to overcome it," Fakhrul said.

He called upon the well-off section of society to come forward to stand beside the poor, homeless and destitute with food amid the stalemate in economic activities.

The BNP leader also stressed the need to adopt and implement coordinated plans based on a national consensus to overcome the crisis.

He said a specialised hospital should be established to treat the patients infected with contagious diseases like Ebola, Dengue and corona.

He praised the role of the doctors, nurses, journalists, armed forces, law enforcers and other emergency service providers who are working relentlessly to contain the spread of the virus.

Fakhrul said there has been an allegation that people could not get access to IEDCR by calling their hotline numbers.

"According to newspaper reports, some eight lakh people called the dedicated coronavirus hotline numbers in the last two months. IEDCR alone received more than 70,000 calls, but only 1,100 people were tested until March 28 and 48 were found positive."

He alleged that though the World Health Organisation repeatedly asking for testing more and more people, Bangladesh is still among the countries with the lowest test rate.

"On the other hand, if we look at the fatality rate, we see that our fatality rate is higher than devastated Italy," he said, adding that low test rate is the reason behind such figures.



# Torchbearers of Bangladesh

## Raba Khan, Esrat Karim share feelings on making it to Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia list

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Forbes recently announced its fifth annual 30 Under 30 Asia list, featuring entrepreneurs, leaders and changemakers across Asia under the age of 30.

Two Bangladeshis -- Raba Khan and Esrat Karim Eve -- were inducted in the categories of Media, Marketing & Advertising, and Social Entrepreneurship respectively.

The popular US-based business magazine chose this year's inductees from a list of over 3,500 nominations, surveyed by a group of industry veterans and experts.

Forbes says the inclusion of the young Bangladeshi women is a testament to the way they have disrupted their respective industries and inspired others to do the same.

### I'VE WORKED HARD TO GET WHERE I AM: RABA KHAN

Raba Khan is best known for her comedic stint in The Jhakanaka Project and influence in the Bangladeshi social media sphere. At only 20 years old, Raba has been involved in over 150 brand campaigns, multiple television and radio shows, as well as being the Youth Advocate for Unicef and an ActionAid ambassador.

The young entertainer's inclusion in the list is further elevated by the fact that she is the featured nominee of her category, which puts her on the cover of the Forbes Asia Magazine.

"Incidentally, Forbes is the only magazine that my father reads, and my family is ecstatic about this," said an elated Raba.

In recent years, the presence of Bangladeshis in the prestigious list has become something of a common occurrence, which has played a role in the induction of the duo. Raba says she was inspired to apply for the list after artist Morshed Mishu's inclusion in last year's edition.

"Morshed Mishu is a tremendous artist, he even did the cover for my book. It made me really happy to see his inclusion last year," she said. "At

that point, I wanted to give it [the list] a try."

After the initial selection of her online application, Forbes contacted Raba on February, after which she had to give multiple interviews to them. "Every claim that I had made on my application was researched and verified by them."

"I would be glad to see more Bangladeshi people applying and making the list," she added.



Raba Khan



Esrat Karim

Bangladesh.

Completing her master's degree in Social Entrepreneurship from the University of Colorado, Esrat returned to the country with the hopes of making a positive change in the lives of those less cared for by society.

AMAL Foundation is currently working with more than 52,000 people living in villages across Bangladesh.

The Foundation has centres across the country, which teach victims of rape and child marriage skills that can help them earn a livelihood.

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## ASA commits food assistance for 1.5 lakh families in need

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ASA, an NGO in Bangladesh, has decided to provide food assistance to 1.5 lakh poor families, which will be worth around Tk 12 crore, said a press release yesterday.

"ASA will donate food support to 20,000 families in Dhaka and 1.30 lakh families across the country who are suffering due to the ongoing coronavirus situation," said the communication department of ASA.

Each family will get 10kg of rice, 2kg of lentil, 2kg of potatoes, 1kg of salt and 1 litre of edible oil, said the release, adding that the money for all of those will come from the NGO's own fund.

Besides, 10 lakh leaflets will be distributed to make common people aware of the risk of coronavirus, it added.

## Create emergency fund for migrant workers

### Rights group urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government must create a fund to sanction grant for Bangladeshi migrant workers who are at the risk of losing jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic, demanded Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit yesterday.

In a statement, the migrants rights group said the government should also arrange interest-free loan schemes for migrant workers' family members back home.

The statement was issued during an online press conference arranged by the organisation, addressed by its founding chair Prof Tasneem Siddiqui.

Referring to media reports, Prof Tasneem said some 1.5 lakh Bangladeshi expatriates have been stranded in different Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Many of them who do not have valid visa were passing days in hardship, reads the statement.

The rights group also placed some short- and long-term proposals before the government for the protection of migrant workers and their family members.

It said some labour receiving Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia have already announced that they will bear Covid-19 related healthcare costs for both undocumented and regular migrant workers. The government should immediately call upon other countries yet to announce such facilities.

The organisation said, in many cases, migrant workers live in congested and unhygienic conditions. As a result, it is not possible for them to maintain "safe distance". The Bangladesh missions abroad have to make migrant workers aware of taking effective measures for their protection.

The rights group also urged Bangladesh Association of International

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

## Temporary court orders extended till April 11: SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday issued a circular saying that all the temporary orders granting bail, staying case proceedings and issuing status quo will be extended till reopening of courts.

The decision was taken yesterday at a meeting where Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, Law Minister Anisul Huq and judges of the appellate division were present, the SC circular said.

SC Registrar General Md Ali Akbar issued the circular saying that the decision has been taken as the government extended nationwide shutdown till April 9 due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The courts will also remain closed on weekly holiday -- April 10 and 11. Therefore, they are scheduled to resume on April 12.

Appeals can be filed without certified copy on the reopening day but the copy will be needed during hearing on the appeal in the cases filed under the special laws, the SC authorities said in its circular.

The SC authorities also said one or more magistrates are on duty to deal with urgent cases in every district and metropolitan area across the country.

## Masked men on empty roads worry shopowners

### Groceries, pharmacies in capital weary of robberies; DMP says it's alert

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Empty streets and people everywhere walking around in masks have made business owners in the capital weary, as a number of recent reports suggest that some criminals are looking at the countrywide shutdown as an opportunity.

Half past midnight on Wednesday, a pickup van stopped in front of Billal Pharmacy at College Gate in Mohammadpur. Three youths wearing masks got down from the pickup and entered the pharmacy, and pulled out knives and machete, as seen on the CCTV footage.

While the employees took shelter in the backroom of the shop, the masked youths swiftly cleaned out the cash register and took away cell phones before vanishing into the night.

On March 28 around 2am, a group of robbers took away 40 tola of gold and valuables after breaking the grille of a four-storied building in Green Road area of the capital, claimed victims.

While visiting the capital's Wari, Narinda, Ray Shaheb Bazar, Laxmibazar and Motijheel areas on Friday evening, this newspaper found most grocery shops closed within 8pm. Some medicine shops were found open but they also locked collapsible gates from inside in fear of being robbed.

"Who will ensure our security when no one around? The robber will disappear from the spot before police comes with support. So we are now operating businesses closing the collapsible gate; we hand over medicine to customers from inside," Mahmudul Hasan, a staff of Khan Medical Shop in Narinda, told The Daily Star.

Shopkeepers in the capital's Mirpur and Mohammadpur area were also requested by law enforcers to close their shops within 8pm for the sake of security, according to sources.

Not only business entities, but security guards of ATM booths are also feeling the lack of security.

Abdul Gani, a security guard of an ATM booth in Jatrabari, said, "Yes, there is fear of coronavirus. Different kinds of people come here. But what I'm more concerned about is security."

"If robbers attack, it would be difficult for me to resist. I have no weapon," Gani told this newspaper last week.

However, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Shafiqul Islam said there was nothing to worry about, as regular police patrolling was continuing.

"There is no one on the streets, as we are not allowing anyone to move around unless it's urgent," he told The Daily Star recently.

A deputy commissioner-ranked official of DMP headquarters, seeking anonymity, said they are witnessing a change in crime patterns in the city over the last seven days, but it was not reflected properly in their monthly data, as the shutdown began after March 25.

"If the situation continues in April, then we would be able to give a complete picture," he added.

There are 50 police stations in Dhaka, and only 12 to 14 people are now being arrested and produced at courts every day, on charges of various crimes, mostly for their alleged involvement in theft or domestic violence, court sources said.

According to court police officials, just seven days back, police used to

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### CONSERVATION OF SAGARLATA ON COX'S BAZAR BEACHES

## Star report prompts action



PHOTO: COLLECTED

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

News is considered to be the first draft of history; it also happens to be a catalyst for action. At least in this case.

On March 31, The Daily Star ran a report on the return of sagarlata, also known as beach morning glory, on the beaches of Cox's Bazar -- owing to a fall in human movement in the area.

Tourists have entirely stopped going to the beach following a government-enforced shutdown in the country, from March 26, to control the spread of novel coronavirus.

Thanks to the halt in human activity, nature responded in kind. The beach morning glory started to return and this newspaper ran the report highlighting its

ecological benefits, and how it is considered to be a key component of the ecosystem.

The report, which was heavily shared on social media, eventually prompted action from the authorities concerned.

Just three days after it was published, local authorities have kicked off a process to launch a pilot project to conserve sagarlata, a natural barrier against waves and a protector (from erosion) of the seashore.

Md Kamal Hossen, deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar, visited the area at Dorianagar on Friday to determine further plans.

Authorities intend to conserve a one kilometre stretch of the beachside -- from

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

## Stalled dev works raise concerns

### Shutdown could result in waterlogging, mosquito attack in Dhaka

MATHEWS CHIRAN

With the shutdown in place to contain the spread of coronavirus, many ongoing development works of the two Dhaka city corporations have come to a standstill.

But more importantly, failure to carry out the pre-monsoon sewerage and drainage systems cleaning drive due to the shutdown may end up resulting in serious waterlogging in many areas as well as rise in mosquito population, feared engineers and contractors.

At present, they are not even sure when they will be able to resume the works, let alone finishing those.

Last month, while writing a story about the condition of the city's footpaths, this correspondent spoke to Ejajul Islam Ansari, assistant engineer of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC zone-5), who has been looking after the drainage and median work on Manik Mia Avenue.

A confident Ansari had assured this newspaper then that the work would be over within two months.

But talking to him recently painted a different picture.

"We stopped all the development works around March 26 because of the recent crisis. We don't even know when we will be able to resume," he said.

Saidur Rahman, executive engineer



PHOTO: STAR

Road and drainage development works on this road in Badda remain halted due to the government-enforced shutdown to stop the spread of coronavirus.

of DNCC (zone 3), is facing a similar predicament. He said drainage, footpath and road development works were going on in Banasree, Niketon, Baridhara, Badda, Gulshan and Banani areas but they had to stop those due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

"We may need to wait for a while before resuming work. Due to the pandemic, work period for the projects might have to be extended, however the budget will remain the same," he said.

Not just the city corporation

officials, but contractors assigned to do the job are also in a fix. Due to the pandemic, they had to leave the work halfway through.

Some said even if they wanted, they would not be able to do the work as most labourers have left the city.

Abdul Hai, a contractor working in DNCC projects at areas including Niketan, Mohammadpur and Uttara, said "We always try to finish the projects before the rainy season starts, which won't be possible this time."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

### মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়

### নারী নির্যাতন প্রতিরোধকল্পে মাল্টিসেন্ট্রাল প্রোগ্রাম

### করোনাভাইরাস পরিস্থিতিতে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সেবা

মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়ের ন্যাশনাল ট্রমা কাউন্সেলিং সেন্টার এবং রিজিওনাল ট্রমা কাউন্সেলিং সেন্টারের চিকিৎসা মনোবিজ্ঞানীদের সাথে নিম্নোক্ত নাম্বার/ই-মেইল এ যোগাযোগ করুন।

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# Three killed in truck accidents

STAR REPORT

Three people were killed in separate road accidents yesterday -- both involving goods-laden trucks -- in two districts, report our correspondents.

In Mymensingh, two garment workers were killed and three passengers of a CNG-run auto-rickshaw were injured in a road accident at Shambhuganj Bazar area on Mymensingh-Netrakona road in Sadar upazila yesterday noon.

The victims were identified as Nazma Akter (16) and Momen Mia alias Saiful Islam (23).

Quoting locals, Officer-in-Charge of Kotwali Police Station Md Mahmudul Islam said the accident took place when a sand-laden truck collided head-on with the Mymensingh bound CNG-run auto-rickshaw, killing Momen on the spot and injuring four around 2pm.

Locals rushed the injured to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) where on-duty doctors declared Nazma dead, said the OC. The condition of the other injured are critical, the official confirmed.

On information, police recovered the bodies and took them to MMCH morgue for autopsy.

Police seized the truck but its driver managed to flee the scene. A case was lodged in this regard.

In another accident in Jhenaidah, a biker was killed and his pillion rider injured on Maheshpur-Bhairab road under Maheshpur upazila yesterday morning.

The victim was identified as Mamun Mondol (35), a painter. Pillion Shawan (25) received injuries and is undergoing treatment at a local health complex.

Officer-in-Charge Morshed Hossain Khan of Maheshpur Police Station told our Jhenaidah correspondent that the duo were going to Bhairab Bazar when a cement-laden truck hit their bike from the opposite direction after they reached Bamongacha area.

Injured, they were rushed to the health complex where on-duty doctors declared Mamun dead.

His body has been sent to Jhenaidah Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

# Stalled dev works raise concerns

FROM PAGE 3

The proprietor of Asif Traders said the drainage development works were not yet completed and the upcoming monsoon will spell trouble for both residents and contractors.

“Due to monsoon, the work will slow down. Also, on a regular day we need around 40-50 labourers but during the rainy season we need over 100 workers to get the job done. This will also make the cost go up,” he added.

Besides, they had kept piles of sand, bricks and rods on roadsides, he said, fearing those might get damaged or stolen.

Another contractor, Khairul Hasan, whose company Opal International was working on a Dhaka South City Corporation project to solve the waterlogging problem in the secretariat area at Topkhana (zone-1). As per agreement, his company was scheduled to finish the work within June.

“We have completed 80 percent of our work. We just needed a couple of days

more but we had to abandon our work due to the virus outbreak,” he told this correspondent.

“We have installed drainage pipes underneath the footpath, surrounding the secretariat. However, we did not get enough time to cover up the pipes and carpet it with cement,” he said, adding that they did fill the gaps so that people can walk over it.

Khairul also said most of his labourers have left the city. He said since most of the work has been done, he is hopeful that they will be able to finish the work quickly once the situation improves.

“We cannot ask for extra money from the city corporation as we already signed a contract to finish the work within the decided budget. But there’s a chance that construction materials may get pricier given the situation,” he added.

Meanwhile, city dwellers are also concerned. They said once the present crisis passes, they will have to worry about

waterlogging, unfinished roads, footpaths and mosquito attacks.

“In our area, drainage work has been going on for months. Now, the work is left half done... there are craters at many places... when monsoon starts and the situation does not improve, there will not only be waterlogging but also mosquito problem,” said a worried Sabuj Alam, a resident of Badda.

Sanjidul Hasan of Shahjampur said, “Usually the city corporation is to blame for a patch up job or leaving the work untended, but it’s different now... it’s not in their control.”

Saiful Alam, executive engineer of DSCC (zone-1), seemed to agree with residents.

“It’s a situation we had no control over. However, we are still on duty and doing the emergency work from our engineering department,” he said. “For example, if any particular road gets damaged and ambulance cannot go through, we repair it right away with our limited manpower.”

# Create emergency fund

FROM PAGE 3

Recruiting Agencies (Baira) to prepare separate lists of aspirant migrant workers. One list should be comprised of workers who paid money partially and are yet to get necessary documents while the other will be of those who are all set to travel abroad for jobs.

Baira should create an immediate fund to financially support families of workers who were set to travel as well as those who made full payment for their recruitment. Besides, Baira should arrange return of money to those workers whose visa process have not started yet, it said.

Once the coronavirus crisis ends, migrant workers -- whose recruitment

process was completed -- should be given the chance to go overseas on a priority basis and without adding any new fee, it added.

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit also urged the authorities concerned to develop a database of returning migrant workers and ensure protection of female migrant workers abroad amid Covid-19 outbreak.

Due to economic impact of coronavirus, there is a chance that international human trafficking syndicates will become active as many Bangladeshi migrant workers who are now losing their jobs will try for overseas jobs again. As long-term

measure, the organisation called upon the government to take precautionary measures to tackle such human trafficking syndicates.

In the statement, it also raised concern that in some areas of the country returning expatriates faced harassment and were blamed for spreading coronavirus.

Expatriates also faced harassment when they went for medical treatment, said the organisation, urging all to have a positive outlook towards them.

The migrant rights group also urged all to observe a one-minute silence on April 12 morning in remembrance of those Bangladeshis died of the disease so far.

# Star report prompts action

FROM PAGE 3

Dorianagar to Inani Beach -- so that sagarlata and red crabs, which are often seen around the vines, can thrive without any human interruption, the DC said.

“We will form a conservation committee

led by local conservationists and journalists to oversee the conservation guidelines. A placard and signboard will be put up highlighting the importance of the two species to raise awareness,” he added. The DC also spoke of further plans to involve

locals in conservation activities along the beach.

Ahmad Gias, a local journalist who also focuses on conservation and protection of local ecology, will be leading the proposed conservation committee.

# US recognition

FROM PAGE 12

In a statement issued today, the Prime Minister says, “I take this opportunity to thank the people of the US and the press for their support to our legitimate aspirations during our war of liberation.”

Earlier on April 2, 1972, the US envoy to the UN, George Bush, on behalf of his government handed over a cheque of 31 million dollars to the UN Secretary General for Bangladesh as part of their donation committed earlier. The donation was meant for purchasing trucks to carry foodstuff within Bangladesh. Two days later, the US accorded recognition to Bangladesh.

## SURRENDER ARMS

Addressing a mammoth public gathering in Mymensingh yesterday, Bangabandhu advised all unauthorised possessors of arms to surrender their weapons before it is too late. The Prime Minister said that those “who had taken up arms at his call surrendered their arms responding to his call. But there are others who retain arms with them. These people are creating a law and order situation and committing theft, dacoity and robbery.” Bangabandhu warned that these anti-social elements will be shot if found engaged in acts of dacoity and robbery. He appealed to the people to hand over to the police the anti-social

elements. He also appealed to the police to behave like peoples’ police.

## DHAKA AGAIN BATTERED

Dhaka city and its suburbs are battered again by the cyclonic storm for the second time in 24 hours today evening, making recovery more painful for those unfortunate ones, who were affected by the first onslaught. It is reported that the death toll of yesterday’s storm rose to over 40 in Dhaka and Narayanganj, while the number of the injured would exceed 150. Bangabandhu today flies over the affected areas by an Air Force helicopter to see for himself the extent of damage caused by the cyclonic storm. He meets the government officials about the measures to be taken to help the people in distress.

## BANGLADESH-YUGOSLAV TRADE PACT SIGNED

A general trade and economic cooperation agreement providing for exchange of goods worth 3.5 crore taka each way and a cooperation in economic development of Bangladesh was signed yesterday between the government of Bangladesh and Yugoslavia.

**SOURCES:** April 6, 1972 issues of Ittefaq, The Bangladesh Observer, Azad, Morning News, Dainik Bangla and Purbodosh.

# Wearing masks

FROM PAGE 12

handwashing and social distancing.

“So we can certainly see circumstances in which the use of masks, both homemade or cloth masks, at community level may help in an overall comprehensive response to this disease,” he said.

Ryan, citing data from Italy, said that there did not appear to be a link between people taking drugs against hypertension known as ace inhibitors and getting the disease or developing severe disease.

Exhausted staff in some overwhelmed health care systems could be a factor in mortality rates, Ryan said, adding: “We need to reduce the tsunamis of patients coming through the door to give doctors, nurses and other carers the opportunity to save more lives.”

Dr. Maria van Kerkhove, a WHO epidemiologist, cautioned against comparing mortality rates between

countries, noting that some may be missing mild infections as they focus on patients in severe condition.

“What we really need to be focusing on right now is what is the age profile of people who are in ICU (intensive care units),” she said.

“We are seeing more and more individuals who are of the younger age group - in their 30s, in their 40s, in their 50s - who are in ICU and who are dying,” she said, citing Italy and China.

Generally older people or those with underlying medical conditions will have more advanced disease and a higher risk of death, van Kerkhove said.

“But we have some time to go before we can really understand what mortality looks like across different countries so I would urge you to take those mortality rates with caution when comparing across countries,” she said.

# Admissions

FROM PAGE 12

primarily to reduce students’ anxiety over coursework and grades in this stressful time. There will be no finals. Given the extraordinary circumstances of this term, faculty members are asked to be lenient and understanding of the situation when assigning grades,” said the order.

Vice Chancellor Professor Vincent Chang was not available for comment as he was abroad. Brac University Pro-Vice Chancellor Professor Mohammad Tamim confirmed the matter to The Daily Star.

A section of teachers, however, alleged Vice Chancellor Vincent Chang alone took the decision. Students who did not perform well in class tests usually gets a chance to make up their grades in the final exams, but there will be no such option now, one teacher pointed out.

Pro-VC Tamim said that Brac University is getting feedback from teachers. “I think there is scope for reviewing the decision,” he said.

The IUB authorities have asked all course instructors to assign grades based on the available semester assessments -- the midterm, quizzes, presentations, assignments -- and inform students via email or social media.

Students who would like to improve the assigned results are requested to contact their respective course faculty members for additional assignments; the nature of the assignment is at the discretion of the faculty member, said IUB registrar Brig Gen (Retd) Md Anwarul Islam.

He said the University Grants Commission (UGC) do not have any set rules on assessment.

Fakhrul Islam, UGC private university division director, said the universities have taken these decisions based on the current

situation and the closure of educational institutions.

All educational institutions were ordered shut from March 17 to 31; this has since been extended to April 9.

Top DSHE officials said that 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.

## NO ADMISSIONS TESTS

The IUB authorities have cancelled admission test-2 of the summer semester, scheduled for April 18, said registrar Anwarul Islam.

He said that students will be enrolled based on their GPA in SSC, HSC or O-level and A-level results and an online or phone interview if necessary.

Abu Sadat, UIU deputy director of PR, said the university has also cancelled their admissions test for the summer semester. “We will enroll students based on the results of their SSC and HSC exams.”

Zamal Uddin Bhuiyan, deputy registrar (admissions) at ULAB, confirmed the same for the upcoming semester.

Authorities of North South University, Brac University, East West University, and the University of Asia Pacific have also deferred admission tests.

Public universities enroll students in three semesters -- spring (January to April), summer (May to August) and fall (September to December). Every year, about 25 percent of students enroll in the summer semester.

There are 105 private universities in the country; of these, 97 are licensed to carry out academic activities.

# Get things delivered

FROM PAGE 12

as quickly as possible.”

He said it is safe to receive parcels if it is properly handled, which means the delivery people and those who are involved with the process are not infected with coronavirus.

“However, if community transmission begins, then it is better to avoid [receiving parcels], because 80 percent of [infected] people might only have mild or moderate symptoms or no symptoms at all,” he suggested.

He said that currently there is no evidence that Covid-19 can be transmitted through food or food packaging, though

the virus is known to live on surfaces for up to several days.

“The potential problem is transmitting the coronavirus from delivery person to customer, or vice versa,” he said.

He suggested that people can ask the online deliverymen to drop off the parcel at the door or on the ground floor of the respective building, from where the buyer will collect the parcel.

Kaoser also suggested that, for better safety, one can wash hands with soap for at least 20 seconds and avoid touching their own or anyone else’s face after bringing the parcel home.

# Woman raped

FROM PAGE 12

arrested the duo.

The victim then filed a case with the police station in this connection, said the OC, adding that she has been admitted to the One-Stop Crisis Centre of Cox’s Bazar General Hospital for medical test.

Meanwhile, a 60-year-old man was arrested in Tangail’s Basail upazila yesterday on charge of trying to rape a minor schoolgirl, reports our correspondent.

The arrestee is Sohrab Miah, father of three children at Tenguriapara village in Habla union.

The girl’s father, driver of a three-wheeler, filed a case with Basail Police Station on

Friday night under Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

According to the case statement, Sohrab took the girl, a class II student of a local school, to an abandoned house luring her of giving money while she was playing at an orchard adjacent her house on Thursday.

The girl screamed when Sohrab tried to rape her. Hearing screams, locals rushed to the spot and rescued the girl. However, Sohrab managed to flee the scene.

Sub-inspector Mahmudul Hasan of Basail Police Station said yesterday noon, the arrestee was produced before a Tangail court that later sent him to jail.

# Torchbearers

FROM PAGE 3

However, the path to making the list was not smooth. For Esrat, the glory comes after a long journey through not only challenges from her field of work, but also family pressures.

“When I came back home and started doing social work, I faced a lot of hurdles from my communities, and even my own family,” Esrat said.

“They did not want to accept that I would dedicate my life to being a social reformer.”

The validation only arrived after accolades did.

For her endeavours, Esrat has earned the Youth Icon 2018, YSSE Social Impact Award, GITA Global Award and the Jolkona Catalyst Fellowship Award.

However, she considers this the peak of her achievements. “After my inclusion in the Forbes list, they [her family] are stunned,” she said in a celebratory mood.

Esrat dedicates this achievement to the 5,000-plus volunteers who work for AMAL Foundation.

She doesn’t want to stop here. “My goal is to make Bangladesh a healthy and happy place for everyone. I would go on with my work, irrespective of whether I get awarded or not.”

Esrat believes social activism should be centred more on empowerment than charity or token donations, something many from her industry still believe. For her work, she prioritises creating more inclusive and enabling environments for women, children, and refugees.

“Empowerment is much more important than charity. We believe in sustainable social reforms when we are helping a marginalised community,” she said.

# Masked men

FROM PAGE 3

produce around 150 to 200 accused at the courts for hearing on a daily basis.

“Presently, we are getting some complaints about woman and child repression and petty crimes like theft in residential houses and shops,” Mahbub Alam, joint commissioner of detective branch (DB) of DMP, told The Daily Star on Thursday.

Between March 27 and April 2, DMP arrested 76 people for carrying or selling narcotics in Dhaka, and 55 cases were filed against them.

Mahmuda Afroz Lucky, additional deputy commissioner of Darussalam zone, said mugging and dope gang activities have declined in the city as people are not coming out of their homes, but there were some incidents of domestic violence and theft in residential houses and shops.

On March 31, a home ministry coordination cell in a directive instructed Bangladesh Police to take necessary steps to stop theft, robbery and mugging during the countrywide shutdown.

# Starmer

FROM PAGE 12

of his life and vowed to “engage constructively” with Johnson’s Conservative government.

Johnson immediately offered his congratulations and the pair spoke, with Starmer accepting an invitation to a government briefing on COVID-19 next week.

“Keir offered to work constructively with the government on how best to respond to the coronavirus outbreak,” his spokesman said.

Starmer himself vowed to reunite Labour, after deep rifts between supporters of socialist Corbyn’s hard-left ideals and centrists, and wrangling over its Brexit strategy.

He immediately addressed the issue of anti-Semitism that Corbyn was accused of failing to tackle, which tarnished the party’s reputation and caused Jewish members to leave in droves.

“Anti-Semitism has been a stain on our party. I have seen the grief that it’s brought to so many Jewish communities,” Starmer said.

“On behalf of the Labour Party, I am sorry.

“And I will tear out this poison by its roots and judge success by the return of Jewish members and those who felt that they could no longer support us.”

Starmer, who won a resounding 56.2 percent of the vote of Labour members, acknowledged the party had “a mountain to climb”, after four straight general election defeats -- two under Corbyn.

# 7 die showing

FROM PAGE 12

assume the victim was not infected with coronavirus but died of a cardiac arrest. We have still requested locals to avoid a public gathering during the burial.”

In Netrokona, a 60-year-old man died in Khaliajury upazila yesterday after suffering from fever, cold and respiratory problems. He died yesterday morning, said Khaliajury UNO AHM Ariful Islam.

Samples of the victims have been sent to different hospitals for tests.

In Laxmipur, a two-year-old boy of Kamalnagar upazila’s Torabganj village died yesterday, while another four-year-old boy of the upazila’s Charmartin village died on Friday night. Both suffered from corona-like symptoms.

Local administrations have locked down four houses following the deaths, said Md Mobarak Hossain, Kamalnagar UNO, adding that the victims’ samples were sent to the Institute of Public Health in Chattogram for tests.

In Shariatpur, a 25-year-old woman died at Shariatpur Sadar Hospital around 10:30am yesterday, around an hour after she was admitted to the hospital. The victim’s family had taken her body back home. Health officials went to the house and collected samples, said Shariatpur Sadar UNO Md Mahabur Rahman Sheikh.

In Jashore, five out of 35 Bangladeshis, who returned yesterday from India through the Benapole border under special arrangement, were sent into institutional quarantine

The five sent to the quarantine ward of Jashore General Hospital had high temperatures, said Dr Zahidul Islam, a health official at Benapole Immigration Office.

The rest were sent into 14-day home quarantine, he said. In Chattogram, three doctors and 15 staffers of a private hospital were sent into home quarantine on Friday evening after they came into contact with the first Covid-19 patient in the port city, said Chattogram Civil Surgeon Sheikh Fazle Rabbi.


The patient was a 67-year-old man.

In Rangpur, the home of a family in Sadar upazila’s Janki-Dhaperhat village was locked down yesterday after a man there tested positive for Covid-19, said Hirambo Kumar Roy, the district’s civil surgeon.

In Cox’s Bazar, the local administration on Friday night locked down seven houses, eight shops and one pathology centre in Teknaf upazila’s Old Pallanpara area as a person in the area showed Covid-19 symptoms.

In Rajshahi, a private hospital nurse was admitted to the coronavirus unit of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital yesterday with Covid-19 symptoms.

(Our Moulvibazar, Natore, Narayanganj, Mymensingh, Jashore, Noakhali, Chattogram, Dinaipur, Cox’s Bazar and Rajshahi correspondents contributed to the story.)



**INVITATION TO BID**  
**ITB No. UNFPA/BGD/ITB/2020/001**

**SUPPLY OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)**

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Bangladesh seeks bids from qualified supplier for supplying of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The qualified and experienced bidders are encouraged to download the ITB documents through the following link from UNGM:

**https://www.ungm.org/Public/Notice/106410**

Please note that, the Bid must reach at UNFPA's secured email inbox **procurement.bangladesh@unfpa.org** no later than **7 April 2020, 14:00 hours** Bangladesh standard time."



Korea extends intensive social distancing

South Korea yesterday said it will extend its intensive social distancing campaign scheduled to end on Monday by two weeks in a bid to curb the rate of coronavirus infections to around 50 a day.

The country has largely managed to bring under control Asia's largest epidemic outside China with around 100 or fewer new daily cases. But smaller outbreaks in churches, hospitals and nursing homes, as well as infections among travellers, continue to emerge.

This week, the government has been gauging whether it should extend a 15-day intensive social distancing policy it implemented on March 21, under which high-risk facilities were urged to close and religious, sports and entertainment gatherings were banned.

But it is "too early to be at ease," Health Minister Park Neung-hoo said, citing a recent spike in imported cases and small cluster infections which also prompted the government to cancel the re-opening of schools next week.

The Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) reported 94 new cases on Saturday, taking the national tally to 10,156. The death toll rose by three to 177.

Social distancing played a role in restraining domestic group transmissions by some 70% during the first 11 days compared with the last 11 days before it took effect, Park said.

But there are signs that people restarted going out and socialising as fatigue about isolation grew, he said.

"We are well aware that many citizens are feeling exhausted and lethargic under continued social distancing," Park said. "But if we get loose, the strenuous efforts that the government and the people have made so far might come to nothing."



People observe 3-minute silence to mourn patients and medical staff killed by coronavirus pandemic in Beijing, yesterday.

SOURCE: AFP

Europe sees ray of hope

Drop in cases in European hotspots indicate pandemic might have peaked

AGENCIES

Americans yesterday came to grips with recommendations to wear masks against the coronavirus, while Spain added to hopes that Europe could be turning a corner in the pandemic with a second daily drop in deaths.

China meanwhile came to a standstill as the nation where the virus first appeared held three minutes of silence to mourn the patients and medical staff killed by the outbreak.

Since COVID-19 emerged late last year, more than 1.1 million people have fallen ill. More than 60,000 people have died.

China, where over 3,000 people have died from the virus, appears to be over the worst of its outbreak and there are signs of normality returning.

But large swathes of the world remain in crisis mode.

Europe accounts for the lion's share of virus fatalities, but America logged

China pauses in memory of victims and 'martyrs'

Americans told to wear masks

UK COVID-19 deaths climb by new high of 708

Spain to extend lockdown until April 25



another rise in its death toll to bring the total to just over 7,100.

President Donald Trump's administration on Friday suggested widespread use of simple masks or scarves might help slow the spread.

In Europe, Italy and Spain continue to bear the brunt of a pandemic that has kept millions of citizens confined to their homes, closed schools and businesses and overwhelmed

healthcare systems.

But official figures suggested unprecedented measures to restrict people's movements were working and that the peak may have hit on the continent.

Spain, which is under a near-total lockdown, on Saturday recorded a second successive daily fall in coronavirus-related deaths with 809 fatalities. The total number of deaths

Four acquitted in Pearl murder rearrested

Four men acquitted in the kidnapping and killing of American journalist Daniel Pearl in Pakistan have been rearrested and will stay in jail while prosecutors appeal the ruling, officials said. A Pakistani court sparked US outrage on Thursday after it quashed the murder conviction of British-born militant Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh who had been on death row over the 2002 killing. Three alleged accomplices also had their convictions overturned. But Pakistan's interior ministry said late Friday the four would remain in jail while prosecutors appeal their acquittals in the country's Supreme Court. Pearl, 38, was the South Asia bureau chief for The Wall Street Journal when he was abducted in Karachi in January 2002 while researching a story about Islamist militants. A graphic video showing his decapitation was delivered to the US consulate in the city nearly a month later.

Trump fires intel official who set his impeachment

President Donald Trump announced Friday he was firing a senior intelligence official who had a central role in the complaint last August that sparked the impeachment trial of the US leader. In a letter to the Senate Intelligence Committee, Trump said he had lost confidence in Michael Atkinson, the independent inspector general of the broad US intelligence community. Atkinson reviewed and transmitted an anonymous whistle-blower's complaint in August that alleged that Trump had sought personal political favors from Ukraine in violation of US law. The complaint became the basis for Trump's impeachment, which saw him put through a historic trial for removal in the Senate in January. Ultimately Trump was voted not guilty by the Republican-controlled Senate in early February.

G77, China demand end to sanctions in pandemic

The Group of 77 and China called Friday for an end to unilateral sanctions against developing countries during the coronavirus crisis, warning they could hinder efforts to tackle the pandemic. In a statement implicitly aimed at the United States, which has tough sanctions against Iran and Venezuela. It warned that such measures would affect targeted countries' acquisition of medical equipment and supplies "to adequately treat their populations in the face of this pandemic." China takes part in G77 business but does not consider itself to be a member of the 134-member coalition, meaning official statements are issued by the "G77 and China." The grouping represents three quarters of United Nations members and some 80 percent of the world's population, according to the UN.

SOURCE: AFP



A drone used by police to monitor activities of people and spread awareness announcements is seen during a nationwide lockdown in Chennai, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pandemic is making Earth vibrate less

CNN ONLINE

Once-crowded city streets are now empty. Highway traffic has slowed to a minimum. And fewer and fewer people can be found milling about outside.

Global containment measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus have seemingly made the world much quieter. Scientists are noticing it, too.

Around the world, seismologists are observing a lot less ambient seismic noise -- meaning, the vibrations generated by cars, trains, buses and people going about their daily lives. And in the absence of that noise, Earth's upper crust is moving just a little less.

Thomas Lecocq, a geologist and seismologist at the Royal Observatory in Belgium, first pointed out this phenomenon in Brussels.

Brussels is seeing about a 30% to 50% reduction in ambient seismic noise since mid-March, around the time the country started implementing school and business closures and other social distancing measures, according to Lecocq.

Seismologists in other cities are seeing similar effects in their own cities. Lecocq said the graphs charting human noise are evidence that people are listening to authorities' warnings to stay inside and minimize outside activity as much as possible.

"From the seismological point of view, we can motivate people to say, 'OK look, people. You feel like you're alone at home, but we can tell you that everyone is home. Everyone is doing the same. Everyone is respecting the rules,'" he said.

The data can also be used to identify where containment measures might not be as effective, said Raphael De Plaen, a postdoctoral researcher at Universidad Nacional Aut3noma de M3xico.

Virus may spread through air via normal breathing

AFP, Washington

The new coronavirus might spread through the air via normal breathing and speaking, a top US scientist said Friday as the government recommended the use of face masks for everyone.

Anthony Fauci, head of infectious diseases at the National Institutes of Health, told Fox News the guidance on masks would be changed "because of some recent information that the virus can actually be spread even when people just speak, as opposed to coughing and sneezing."

As it stands, the official advice is that only sick people need to cover their faces, as well as those caring for them at home.

Fauci's comments come after the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) sent a letter to the White House on April 1 that summarized recent research on the subject.

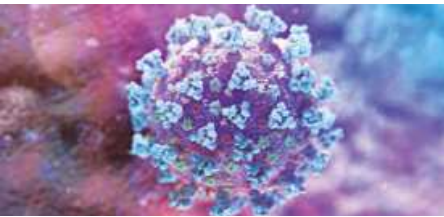
It said that though the research isn't yet conclusive, "the results of available studies are consistent with aerosolization of virus from normal breathing."

Until now, US health agencies have said that the primary pathway of transmission is respiratory

droplets, about one millimeter in diameter, expelled by sick people when they sneeze or cough.

These quickly fall to the ground around a meter away.

But if the virus can be suspended in the ultrafine mist we expel when we exhale, in other words an aerosol, it becomes much harder to prevent its spread, which in turn is an argument in favor of everyone covering their faces.



because the team behind the study used a medical device called a nebulizer to deliberately create a viral mist and argued this would not occur naturally.

So far, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been more cautious on the airborne threat.

In an analysis published on March 29, it wrote that aerosol transmission was only known to occur during particular medical treatments that required assisted breathing.

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TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

# Inflation up in March

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Inflation edged up slightly in March owing to the rise in prices of non-food items although coronavirus-induced panic-buying before the country was placed on a lockdown made some food items expensive.

General inflation rose by only two basis points to 5.48 per cent from 5.46 per cent last month, according to data released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) yesterday.

Food inflation dropped 10 basis points to 4.87 per cent, while non-food inflation went up 22 basis points to 6.45 per cent.

In rural areas, inflation was up three basis points to 5.47 per cent. Food inflation fell by three basis points to 5.06 per cent and non-food inflation edged to 6.27 per cent, up 15 basis points from February.

In urban areas, food inflation fell from 4.7 per cent to 4.44 per cent and non-food inflation from 6.36 per cent to 6.69 per cent in March, increasing the inflation by one basis point to 5.49 per cent, BBS data showed.

Although food inflation declined across the country last month, the prices of some items rose in Dhaka city due to panic-buying before the lockdown began March 26.



For example, the prices of two varieties of rice, potato, lentil, salt, garlic and ginger rose in March compared with February, BBS data showed.

The price of onion fell from Tk 120 a kg to Tk 82 owing to a supply glut.

The prices of wheat, fish, egg, brinjal and green papaya remained unchanged from February.

The government has targeted a 5.5 per cent inflation rate this fiscal year. It was able to contain it at 5.48 per cent last fiscal year, which is comfortably below the target of 5.6 per cent.

In a report in late February, before the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Bangladesh, the finance ministry said the crash in oil prices might help the country keep its current account deficit and inflation lower.

For computation of the Consumer Price Index, two consumer baskets are used: urban basket and rural basket. In the urban consumer basket, 422 commodities are included and in the rural one 318 food and non-food items.

The BBS collects price data from 140 main markets -- 64 from urban, 64 from rural and 12 from Dhaka city corporations -- across the country.

## Qatar Airways helps thousands of Germans reach home

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Qatar Airways has helped thousands of Germans reach home from different countries amid the worldwide flight cancellations and travel restrictions enforced after the novel coronavirus outbreak.

"While the government has restricted entry in Germany since March 18, the airline continued to operate flights for German nationals and their family members, as well as other nationals residing in Germany," the airline said in a statement recently.

These flights include triple daily service to Frankfurt and daily service to Munich.

The move was discussed in a meeting between Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Akbar al-Baker and German Ambassador to Doha Hans-Udo Muzel.

Muzel expressed his gratitude to Qatar Airways for flying thousands of Germans from all over Asia to their homes in Germany at this crucial time, in spite of the challenges faced in the aviation industry posed by the global pandemic, flight cancellations and various airport closures, the statement added.

Qatar Airways recently launched a new commercial policy to allow all passengers the flexibility to alter travel plans up to three days prior to departure for flights booked till September 30.

This flexibility enables passengers to change their travel plans free of charge by altering the dates of their booking or exchanging their ticket for a travel voucher valid for one year.

# Barvida seeks port rental waiver until Dec

The association prepared a set of demands to recover losses due to Covid-19

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Reconditioned vehicle businesses have sought waiver on port rent charges until December from the government for the vehicles they brought in through Mongla and Chattogram ports.

They also demanded a halt in the car auction process until December, which the customs authorities organise in ports.

Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicles Importers and Dealers Association (Barvida) made the call at a time when import and marketing of vehicles have come to a close because of the Covid-19 outbreak.

Barvida is a big source of revenue for the government and they pay thousands of crores of taka a year to the government exchequer as tax,

the association said in a statement yesterday.

The members of the platform now fear massive losses, as their imported vehicles have got stuck in ports due to the government's restriction on people's movement amid the coronavirus outbreak, it added.

"Covid-19 will leave a huge impact on the economy and it is an unavoidable situation," Mohammed Shahidul Islam, secretary general of Barvida, said in the statement.

"It will be tough for the Barvida members to survive if the situation continues for a long time."

The association has prepared a list of demands, which will soon be sent to Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, he said.

The platform thanked Bangladesh Bank for introducing a loan instalment facility so that

businesses do not become defaulters because of financial losses due to the coronavirus.

However, it demanded extension of the facility until December to help them recover the losses.

The association also wanted interest-free or low-cost loans from the banking regulator based on the annual turnover of the businesses.

Cash incentives should be provided to the reconditioned vehicle businesses, as they are struggling to pay staff salaries at a time when imports have come to a halt, it said.

A recommendation was also placed where the association wanted the utility and all other related bills to be suspended until June so that they can concentrate on other fields to do business and recover the losses.



Officials of KDS Group hand over personal protective equipment and masks to the officials of Chattogram Medical College Hospital at the hospital recently. The group also donated similar items to six more hospitals in the port city and Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

KDS GROUP

ROUNDTABLE



The Daily Star



# Making finance resilient to the smallholder farmers

Brig Gen Shahedal Anam Khan *ret.*, psc (Retd), Moderator of the session

We are still a heavily agro-based society and economy. Perhaps the most neglected are those that are feeding this economy -- the farmers. Because of the absence of available facilities from the financial organisations, farmers suffer. We hope that we can bring out some pointers today to help achieve the goals of today's discussion.

Prabodh Dakota, Assistant Country Director, CARE Bangladesh  
Smallholder farmers are usually skeptical about loans due to factors such as unpredictable prices, frequency of natural disasters, etc., that put their crops at risk. However, they are also aware that though repaying schemes are difficult, many farmers can still benefit from such schemes.

We need to look into how the government, private sector, and the development partners can, through their collective efforts, transform the lives of smallholder farmers.

Maruf Azam, General Manager, Krishi Utsah, CARE Bangladesh  
The smallholder farmers don't have proper access to capital, the capital doesn't reach them in a systematic way and the capital that they obtain is too costly. Natural calamities affect crop production. Quality inputs -- for example, fertilisers, seeds, insecticides, food for domestic animals -- that they use are adulterated. The transaction cost is very high making it quite impossible for them to reach a certain level using their own distribution channels. Moreover, they lack information and knowledge about mechanisation and modern technologies that can help to efficiently cultivate crops.

To tackle these challenges, in 2016, CARE Bangladesh launched "Krishi Utsah". It aims to make quality agricultural resource available for the marginal smallholder farmers.

There are informal intermediaries who are the market actors and cannot be removed from the whole process. So, we thought of transforming these intermediaries. In that way, they can provide good quality inputs without having to increase the price, while maintaining the quality of life they hope to achieve along with a good profit. We monitor a network for the agricultural input sellers or smallholder shop owners of the rural areas and provide them with adequate training and help them identify the right products. If we accommodate female-friendly schemes, it would benefit the society of marginal farmers a lot.

Ahsan Habib, Professor and Director (Training), Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM)

When farmers harvest their crops and store it, it becomes risky for the people, as they might start feeding themselves from the portion stored for the people. So we are forcing them systematically, to sell the crops, and repay the loan as soon as possible. Bangladesh Bank extended the loan repayment period for farmers to six months. But the risk for me increases as the goods are still with the farmer. We are taking the money from farmers, giving it to the middlemen who are buying those crops, and storing it in their warehouse. The intermediaries are benefiting from all those institutional finances. Warehouse Receipt System can be introduced to overcome this problem. A commodity market is also required at the same time though that will be difficult to implement.

Promoting farmers' cooperatives is required besides proper cluster financing. However, cluster financing has still not been properly identified. Moreover, the smallholder farmers' services should be considered as public goods because they are producing 80 percent of the food.

Dr Swapan Kumar Bala, Commissioner, Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC)

The primary requirement for commodity exchange has not been fulfilled yet. There are insufficient numbers of warehouses for this. Quality testing is required, which will ensure its



CARE Bangladesh and The Daily Star jointly organised a roundtable titled "Making finance resilient to the smallholder farmers" on March 9, 2020. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

securitisation. This security will then become tradeable in the secondary market. It is delivered from the warehouse when the final consumer decides to take it. However, securitisation can cause maturity mismatch. Mass awareness is required about this process. Agreements like collateral management agreement or storage monitoring agreement need to be securitised, to make the exit easy. Introducing Warehouse Receipt System may enhance transparency within the process. A separate regulation for commodity exchange should be authorised.

Md Ahsan Ul Alam, SVP and Head-Agent Banking, Bank Asia  
The agricultural input market is good, but the problem lies in the output market, due to which the farmers are not receiving fair pricing. A formal chain should be there which the government, private, and development organisations can help create.

The need for monitoring causes costs to increase when financing farmers. If banks are forced to stay within single digit interest rates even after these costs, they will not be able to compete with informal banking, and will no longer be sustainable.

Milton Roy, Head-Agent Banking, NRB Bank

Easy access to banks has been provided to farmers and ordinary people through the introduction of agent banking, since the agents are locals. However, this makes it difficult to identify the real farmers. Insurance helps mitigate risks concerning weather and climate, but if a strong market monitoring facility in Bangladesh is not implemented, insurance will become useless.

Using advanced technology can increase production but our farmers are still not receiving this technology. Farmers' skills development programmes are also necessary.

Ali Tareque Parvez, SVP, Agriculture Insurance Team, Green Delta Insurance Company Ltd

There is a 15 percent VAT on every insurance product, which should be reduced for the agricultural sector. This VAT causes premium rates to increase from two percent to three percent, which is unreasonably high for farmers.

Everything related to resilience financing and climate change issues is insurable. The entire supply chain can also

be insured, but the issue is with pricing index. This would require a benchmark, since these matters are controlled by the government. The government can also provide back-end support to the financial institutions through funds or common pools.

Md Nazmul Hasan, Head-Agent Banking, BRAC Bank Ltd  
Small-ticket loans already have an interest rate below 10, so banks don't earn here. Hence, agricultural financing is done through MFIs. The lack of distribution channels is another obstacle. The introduction of agent banking has opened up a channel and access.

A digital lending approach is required in loan processing, through which on-time loan delivery will be possible. When giving out loans, banks are worried about the certainty of repayment within the specified period, and also require assurance that the given loan is being used properly. A comprehensive policy is required for this.

Shahnaz Akter Shabin, AVP and Head-ACD, Bank Asia  
Banks are now coming forward to reduce transaction costs. They have developed some special products for the SMEs which have reduced their transaction costs significantly. Banks also have some additional or hidden charges which they are no longer implementing for the smallholders or the agricultural borrowers. Smallholder loans have also been digitised to ensure the loan reaches the farmer within 24 hours.

Sajadul Haque, Head-ADC, Pragati Life Insurance Ltd  
There is no scope for corporate social responsibility (CSR) in life insurance, since this uses public money. The biggest challenge in selling insurance products is the lack of trust and awareness. People search for insurance only after falling ill, but no policy allows selling insurance to an ill person.

S M Ziaul Hoque, CEO, Chartered Life Insurance Co. Ltd  
The primary problem in insurance for farmers is ensuring collateral loans, or setting up a cooperative model. Alternatively, banks and insurance companies can create embedded product insurance, where the loan will be secured by the insurance company. Then, there will be no need to buy insurance

separately. Loans targeting farmers for their products can be insured through bundling. The product will receive insurance coverage from non-life insurance companies, while we will provide coverage for the credit.

S M Saiful Islam, Head-Agri Finance, BRAC Bank Ltd  
It takes months to obtain permission from Bangladesh Bank for piloting projects because they perceive insurance as a cost, not risk coverage. BB mentioned it was not possible for them to give insurance to farmers that incurs more than nine percent costs, since they only provide agricultural loans of nine percent. Therefore, bundle products are out of the picture. Since BB kept denying permission, we decided to carry out a pilot so that BB could change their decision on the basis of the pilot's results.

Ahmed Aslam Al Ferdous, Head-Agent Banking, Dutch Bangla Bank Ltd (DBBL)  
Commercial bankers don't have the expertise to manage agricultural loans, but recently, we were able to send agricultural products to rural areas with the help of agent banking and MFI channels. However, the infrastructural cost is very high as MFI lending interest rate in rural areas goes up to 30 percent cost. At this scale, banks have to bear high costs. Even if liquid MFIs are used, there is still a high interest rate for the agricultural farmers. Banks should individually bring out products specifically for agricultural loans, not influenced by the government only.

Aamanur Rahman, Director-ERPP, CARE Bangladesh  
Pre-harvest and post-harvest processes, which are dominated by female workers, are not considered part of farming, which means these processes don't get insurance coverage. If the entire supply chain is covered, gender integration will be possible.

There is pressure on reducing the agricultural loan interest rate from nine percent but even a five percent interest rate is too high for farmers. The government could share risks with the insurance companies.

After approval from BB, we recruit the agents. Some of them are creating farmers' organisations and providing farmers with financial literacy. They are also attempting to change people's attitude towards savings and working to mitigate the challenges farmers face in the market when trying to get good prices for their products. They are also maintaining the output price in the market so that farmers can repay the loan.

Mohammed Shaikat Ali, Chief Risk Officer (Acting), NRB Bank  
We are financing the farmers, and ensuring insurance for them as a risk management tool, but we don't have a process for ensuring price. The proposed model has to have a selling perspective to determine sales after the monitoring process. If big companies and supermarkets can prepare a dashboard to monitor the kind of products that are being produced and the expected date of harvesting, further development could help the process reach a level of future contracting.

Saifuddin Ahmed, Adviser-Social Services, CARE Bangladesh  
We have to understand the potential capacity that agent banking can reach since it is being used as a vehicle to reach out to farmers or consumers. What are we, the commercial banks, doing to maximise the capacity of the agents?

Kohinoor Akhter, Senior Technical Manager, CARE Bangladesh  
Bank agents are entangled in many problems which render it impossible for them to work successfully. No scope is being created for banks to be benefitted by the agents.

Mahfuz Anam, Editor and Publisher, The Daily Star  
There are a range of issues involved in helping the smallholder farmers, through insurance, bank loans, and the formula and implementation of those initiatives. We wish to report all these issues, including all the regulatory problems that you face.



The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SUNDAY APRIL 5, 2020, CHAITRA 22, 1426 BS

## PM’s 31 directives

*Easier said than done, but do we must*

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina has issued a set of very comprehensive directives. But, as we know, with all directives, there are three phases to it—its issuance, its speedy, efficient and systemic implementation and finally, its strict monitoring. As for the directives, they are comprehensive, insightful and highly relevant. Here, our suggestion is that related directives should be grouped into clusters with specific time frames, within which each cluster will have to be implemented. Without any time frames, they will be limited in their effect.

However, implementation of these directives will be very challenging, since many of them require massive organisational capacity and resources. The test will be in putting the huge infrastructure of the government into action, which we know to be cumbersome, full of inertia, and hierarchical to the extent of being dysfunctional. Our world-recognised experience with disaster management should prove to be useful; remembering however, that traditional disaster management involves only a section of our bureaucracy, whereas now we need the totality of it to come into gear.

Directive 9 calls upon city corporations, municipalities and upazila parishads to undertake cleanliness drives. Since there is a general shutdown, we think now is an ideal opportunity to clean our cities—there will never be such a time of sparse traffic and limited garbage. Will the relevant leaders and institutions rise to the occasion?

Directives 16 and 17 say “supply systems should be maintained” and “general activities will continue and prices of essentials will have to be kept under control”. Both are most important and will need efficient planning, execution and monitoring to achieve.

Directive 21 tasks the public representatives and the upazila administration to “distribute food among the distressed people by preparing a ward-based list”. This is a very important directive whose success will greatly depend on the authenticity of the list. Food is what people need most in the beginning and food is where a great amount of corruption takes place. The PM has warned against it, but will this warning be enough? We have already seen several cases of local leaders hoarding rice meant for distribution.

In her final two directives, the PM has asked the media to keep watchful eyes on preventing the spread of rumours. This we are happy to commit to it as it is a part of our professional duty. However, we suggest the setting up of an inter-ministerial monitoring body without which the PM’s directives will not achieve the desired results.

## The kids are not alright

*We need to keep them engaged*

WITH educational institutions closed for the foreseeable future to curb the spread of coronavirus, children are increasingly becoming restless in their homes, cut off from the outside world, their friends, physical activities and instructions from teachers. Across the country, 3.68 crore students are now stuck at home, unable to complete their lesson plans. Many students, especially younger ones, are finding it difficult to focus on their textbooks, and parents, too, are struggling to home school children given that many don’t have the necessary education, expertise or time to keep them engaged throughout the day. Experts believe that prolonged exposure to stress and boredom can have detrimental impacts on the mental health and productivity of students. It is thus imperative that we find mechanisms to engage and encourage students to make use of their free time in productive ways.

Researchers have suggested that parents establish a predictable, consistent routine at home which replicates the school schedule, to give children a sense of stability as well as enable them to structure and utilise their time more effectively. Children should be engaged in domestic chores which, in addition to teaching them practical life skills, will also instill a sense of responsibility. Parents who have access to the internet can make use of free online resources.

The government has introduced TV education through Sangsad Bangladesh Television for students of sixth to tenth grades to help them complete lesson plans, but similar arrangements have not yet been made for primary and secondary school students. Apart from class lessons, BTV should develop and revive entertainment programmes targeted towards children, which can also be educational. The Ministry of Education could work with BTV and private channels to develop and air programmes for children during school hours, replicating successful models developed by digital learning platforms like the Khan Academy. Schools that have the capacity should develop remote learning programmes and/or provide specific instructions to parents and students on completing lesson plans.

The Ministry of Education should coordinate with specialists to come up with a comprehensive plan on how to address the long-term repercussions of the ongoing crisis, as well as on how to reach students who may not have access to TV and digital programming. The ministry should also take a decision as soon as possible about pending exams to ease the uncertainty and anxieties faced by students.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

#### Combatting coronavirus and dengue

I am hopeful that with all the preparations for mass testing underway, we will now be able to get the actual picture of the situation of coronavirus in our country. However, amidst this crisis, there is another fear that’s lurking—dengue. We have seen last year the horrific situation suffered by so many due to the spread of aedes mosquitoes. Therefore, we must all be extra careful this time not to repeat the mistakes we made earlier. I know these are difficult times, but we must all act right and responsibly for our collective wellbeing. I just hope that we will not be stubborn and wait for the last minute to deal with the situation. Right timing can make all the difference between life and death.

Malik Muntasir Reza, Dhaka

# Stimulus for Bangladesh’s export-oriented enterprises

*Can this be made more sustainable and equitable?*



MIZANUR RAHMAN

ON March 25, 2020, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced, in her address to the nation, that the government would provide an incentive package of Taka 5,000 crore for export-oriented industries. She explicitly mentioned the basic terms of reference, that the fund could only be used to pay the salaries and allowances of workers and staff. An assumption was that as export orders were possibly cancelled or deferred, entrepreneurs would face a mounting liquidity crisis for meeting the payment of wages and other short-term obligations. Industry stakeholders welcomed this scheme. The Prime Minister also announced a series of other incentives and measures for mitigating the economic effects of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. It is true that Covid-19 has disrupted the global apparel value chain. Some global buyers have either cancelled or suspended their export orders. Sourcing raw materials has also proved almost impossible, as China and other major economies are *de facto* closed from the rest of the world. After coronavirus infections began to surface in Bangladesh, the Government of Bangladesh imposed a voluntary lockdown of its citizens, effectively causing every industry to shut down their production.

A government notification came out on March 31, 2020 outlining the basic terms of reference of the incentive package. The regulation stipulates that a budgetary allocation would be given to Bangladesh Bank, which would in turn lend to commercial banks at zero interest rate. The commercial banks would extend the loan facility to exporters at a two percent simple interest rate. A few conditions—like only export-oriented and active industrial units are eligible for these loans and that the money could only be used for payment of salaries and allowances—are further imposed. Repayment terms are also simple, including a six-month grace period, to be followed by an amortisation of the loan over 18 monthly equal installments.

The internal control mechanism of the scheme is also proactive. Lending banks shall review salary sheets of a potential borrower for the three months preceding the outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020. Banks will directly pay to

the bank accounts of eligible workers or by a mobile cash transfer mechanism. No payment to a worker shall exceed an average gross payout over the last three months. Finally, any manufacturer exporting at least 80 percent of manufactured goods would be eligible under this scheme. It implies that the scheme does not discriminate between direct and deemed exporters.

Overall, the incentive scheme announced by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is timely, pragmatic and forward thinking. The actual design of it is

opportunity costs. Note that apparel exporters demanded short-term liquidity, not subsidies. This indicates that the inherent design of the scheme whereby a borrower can borrow free of costs would encourage every exporter to apply for the incentive scheme. This design is flawed and may lead to excess demand for funds. The flawed design may also cause corruption, where exporters who are politically powerful or control bank management will abuse fake salary sheets for getting the maximum amount of loans. This possibility of corruption could be eliminated just by a simple rule—that

leave the Ministry of Finance with this money to help the most disadvantaged or meet more pressing needs in public health.

Finally, any government intervention should be based on the principle of neutrality. What will happen to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and/or large ones that are not export-oriented but employ millions of workers? What will happen to the self-employed in the agriculture sector? The government should offer them windows of access to finance in these hard times. As of the latest labour force survey, agriculture



PHOTO: AFP

The government explicitly stated that its Tk 5000 crore stimulus package can only be used to pay wages and staff allowances.

also reasonably well-articulated. It is not a grant and not a pure subsidy to private entrepreneurs. The only subsidy is the borrowing cost from the sale of government securities used to finance the scheme. A few more considerations would make this scheme even more sustainable and equitable.

Firstly, an eligible borrowing firm could be charged at least at the bank rate plus a two percent spread so that the government would not be required to pay the interest amounts. Secondly, every apparel manufacturer might not have a liquidity crisis and would be unwilling to apply for this incentive if the actual borrowing cost was consistent with the

access to liquidity is guaranteed at the bank rate plus a two percent spread. It is noteworthy that the provision of direct payment to the bank account (or bKash account) of a worker will help minimise the risk of corruption in the planned scheme.

Thirdly, this incentive will produce credit risks. Some borrowers will default and be unable to pay back. In its present form, it will be a cost for the lending bank and this is unacceptable. Fourthly, instead of a budgetary allocation via Bangladesh Bank, the financing scheme could be floated by Bangladesh Bank itself under the existing Export Development Fund (EDF) or a similar initiative. That would

alone employs 24.7 million workers. Service industries, including wholesale and retail trade, transportation, construction and others, account for 27.2 million workers. A staggering number of more than 50 million workers are also facing job loss, income loss and the prospect of transient poverty. We expect that the government of Bangladesh will also consider rolling out innovative financial schemes in order to supply liquidity to the self-employed, MSMEs and local industries and help them navigate the Covid-19 crisis.

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# Protect human rights during the pandemic

SULTAN MOHAMMED ZAKARIA

IN a situation where the covid-19 virus has overwhelmed some of the world’s best resourced healthcare systems, Bangladesh—like other developing countries—must brace for the worst. Any hopes that the country may somehow avoid the crisis have been dispelled by the confirmation of 70 cases and eight deaths. One report written by Bangladeshi epidemiologists and public health academics estimates that half the country could ultimately be infected, and the final death toll could rise to as high as half a million. As leaders around the world are discovering, their quick and timely response to this crisis is crucial, and given people’s lives and healthcare are at stake, it’s all the more important that human rights are at the centre of the response.

Everyone has the right to “the highest standards of physical and mental health,” as guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Bangladesh is a state party. The state’s obligations include efforts to prevent, treat and control the effects of the covid-19 pandemic in the country. The WHO has said they have “a simple message for all countries: test, test, test”. However, despite having had time to prepare, testing in Bangladesh is still rare—which risks concealing the true scale of the outbreak. While there was initially only one testing centre in Bangladesh, there are now finally nine Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) laboratories in Dhaka and another five outside of the city.

From late January until April 2, around 1,900 people have been tested, which amounts to approximately 11 people per million. There have been reports of many people who said they are showing symptoms and wanted to test but were not allowed to do so. More recently, private donors have donated testing kits and masks to Bangladesh (for example, The Jack Ma Foundation has dispatched 30,000 testing kits and 300,000 masks), which while positive, won’t make up for Bangladesh’s shortfall.

There are similar shortages in personal protective equipment (PPE), increasing the hazards faced by health workers on the frontlines of this crisis. While some of the wealthiest countries are also facing shortages, the situation in Bangladesh is especially dire. Health workers have no choice but to risk their health and lives, and those of their families, to save others. At Sir Salimullah Medical College and Mitford Hospital in Dhaka, medical staff were blithely told to buy their own facemasks. In Sylhet, staff at one hospital went on strike because of the lack of PPE. At least 10 physicians have self-isolated after exhibiting symptoms associated with

access to the refugee settlements. In the camps, sanitation is a constant challenge, health facilities are rare, and emergency facilities can be non-existent. The only way to protect the refugees is to relocate them to areas where social distancing is possible, where water, soap and sanitisers are in adequate supply, and with suitable medical facilities nearby. However, any relocation and redesign of camps must be done after ensuring meaningful participation of those affected.

In recent weeks, Rohingya refugees have been startled by rumours that they could be put to death if they contract the virus. Or they worry they have been

livelihoods are imperilled by the current crisis. Because of their inability to make ends meet during the lockdown and access affordable and timely healthcare, they are at high risk of both infection and starvation—harrowing prospects that neither the government’s public health nor economic response appear prepared for.

Bangladesh has the most crowded prisons anywhere in South Asia. On average, there are more than twice as many prisoners as detention facilities. There is only one doctor for every 10,000 prisoners. The authorities have taken the welcome step of releasing the leader of the opposition for six months, but they are yet to implement measures that several other South Asian states have taken to reduce overcrowding. About 70 percent of the country’s prison population is still awaiting trial (pre-trial detention is meant to be used as a restrictive measure of last resort) and there should be a presumption of release in such cases. They should also consider early or conditional release for those most vulnerable to the infection, including older detainees, or those who have already served a portion of their prison sentence and those who qualify for early parole, if they no longer pose a threat to public safety. Prisoners who remain in detention must also have access to the same standards of health care that are available in the community, including when it comes to testing, prevention and treatment of covid-19.

We don’t know what the true impact of the covid-19 crisis will be. What we do know, however, is that the wealthiest countries are struggling to cope. For Bangladesh, which has neither the economic means nor the public health resources needed, there is even less room for failure. This makes it all the more important that its response protects everyone, including those who are at the greatest risk.

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*On average, there are more than twice as many prisoners as detention facilities. There is only one doctor for every 10,000 prisoners. The authorities have taken the welcome step of releasing the leader of the opposition for six months, but they are yet to implement measures that several other South Asian states have taken to reduce overcrowding.*

covid-19. Two teachers, who decried the shortage of PPE in Facebook posts, have been suspended by the government in a further assault on freedom of expression online. It eventually fell to the High Court to order the government to acquire and provide PPE.

Bangladesh is one of the world’s most densely populated countries, and that density is most evident in refugee camps, urban slums and prisons. The people living in these places are at higher risk given the highly transmissible nature of the virus, coupled with lack of adequate facilities such as sufficient water and sanitation. Last week, Cox’s Bazar reported its first case, raising fears for over a million Rohingyas who languish in flimsy tents tightly squeezed together

stigmatised as carriers of it. In this crisis, the authorities have a responsibility to provide accessible, accurate, evidence-based information that counters this sinister misinformation campaign. Instead, a telecommunications blackout still hangs over the area.

There are an estimated two million people living in 14,000 slums across Bangladesh who have similar reasons to be fearful. According to one study, more than 40 percent of slum dwellers have no choice but to use unhygienic and unsafe toilets. Many also lack access to sufficient and safe water that is essential for protection against covid-19. The informal settlements are home to many low-wage garment workers, street vendors and rickshaw-pullers on daily wages whose



# Financial mobility in an immobile world

Strengthening the footprint of mobile financial services in Bangladesh



THE recent outbreak of Covid-19 is an unprecedented global issue, leading many to contemplate difficult questions that are plaguing all of humanity. With rising numbers of cases being identified and related deaths, Bangladeshis are collectively bracing themselves for the worst. Granted, the primary concerns now are more existential than economic, but it is not something we should ignore altogether. For a country like Bangladesh where 24.3 percent live under the national poverty line, with a large proportion involved in low skilled wage labour, the implications of the lockdown will be far reaching. During crises such as these, liquidity becomes an increasing source of concern—particularly when the “quarantine” of bank notes receives serious consideration to curb transmission of the virus. A possible way to work around this concern is the use of Mobile Financial Services (MFS). With 81.9 million registered clients across the country (including formal and informal workers, businesses and service industries), MFS are well placed to serve their collective needs. There are many instances during this crisis where MFS may have played a significant role. Take the recently observed exodus for instance. Over the last few weeks, nearly a million people have made their way out of Dhaka. The media reported long queues for tickets that could have been easily purchased using MFS—a facility made available since late last year. Had our policymakers been farsighted enough to anticipate this rush ahead of the “holiday” declaration and had done a better job of making it known that such facilities are available, the travelers may have had a much lower likelihood of exposure than they did waiting in

line for tickets. However, the benefits of MFS can still be reaped by those who remained. For example, a live-in domestic worker who has stayed back in the city in order to work is still in a position to send money home instantaneously through MFS, like any other month. As social isolationism takes hold, startups and online retailers are taking advantage of MFS. Take Prakriti Farming for example, which provides fresh organic products through their app and website. Their orders have nearly doubled since the crisis hit, along with the request to pay through MFS. According to its CEO, as some of the staff have decided to move back to their village homes for the time being, she is fully utilising MFS to pay their arrear salaries. Larger online platforms are similarly following suit—Pathao for example, now offers contactless

deliveries where the buyer pays through MFS and the delivery person leaves the packages at a requested location. Lastly, a number of pharmacies (such as Ousud) are providing medicine delivery services much like Pathao and Prakriti. These services could also be beneficial to large companies, such as in the readymade garments industry, where paying salaries through MFS can greatly reduce exposure on payday. While many RMGs have adopted this technology, full immersion is still a

to you personally for testing. Once completed, the results can be shared via electronic means. The payment can easily be done via MSE. Take Praava for example. They are providing online consultation with patients to keep people at home, with the added provision of dropping off and picking up medical samples. If the government takes into consideration the benefits of such public-private partnerships, it can go a long way to flatten the curve. Since I am touting the benefits of MFS, I want to point out some of the weaknesses as well. First, any withdrawal of cash imposes prohibitive costs on the account holder and is regressively discriminatory towards the poor. The government should, at least for the time being, consider a reduction or cancellation of all taxes imposed on these services. They must also

take steps to ensure inter and intra-operability among MFS providers and other financial institutions to reduce bottlenecks so as to benefit customers in these times of need. How exactly this pandemic will alter our world remains to be seen, but the impression it leaves will be indelible. The way we look at the world around us will have to adjust as we settle into the new normal, and mobile financial services can play a small but significant part. But for it to do so, some issues need to be kept in mind. Many in our country are still reluctant to make the switch from “tangible cash” to mobile money due to inertia—MFS can take this opportunity to propagate this behavioural change and take us forward towards a cashless society. In addition to increasing the accessibility to MFS, the government should also maximise its adoption of electronic payment services for payouts such as social security payments, salaries of government employees etc. Lastly, MFS organisations must ensure the safety of their agents. They are the backbone of the network and often serve as the sole point of access to MFS for the poor. It is not clear at this stage what protection mechanisms are being put into place for these workers. In the event of an absence or unavailability of agents, the MFS organisations should have a detailed contingency strategy. Keeping this in mind, MFS organisations should invest enough time and resources to update their clients in detail on how to adapt to the crisis without interrupting their services. Mobile phones were named so because they are portable and are able to receive radio frequencies while on the move. Though we are rendered immobile for the time being, they are now allowing our money to travel freely as well. The onus of whether we are able to maximise the benefits of these services rests in our hands.

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PHOTO: COLLECTED

# Isolation and solitude

Life in the time of corona



SHIFTING IMAGES  
IT has only been a month of isolation, yet it feels like “One hundred years of solitude”. Of course, there are no commonalities between Garcia Marquez’s magical fantasy and the harsh times we are living through. For what has happened to our lives is neither fantasy nor magical. It’s too real and too horrific. After the initial shock of how the Covid-19 pandemic literally pushed our lives to a standstill, I started reflecting on the many ways it has affected our psyche, and how it could change us in the future. Whether we believe in a higher power or the laws of Mother Nature, the truth is that we have destroyed the balance of our universe. We pushed its limits to a breaking point. Be it climate change, economic inequity or social injustice, we humans have pushed the parameters of these indicators to unacceptable levels. Nature has retaliated through a virus—the smallest of all organisms, yet so fierce and deadly! It has not only attacked the human race with a lethal disease but has resulted in stock

markets tumbling, businesses becoming bankrupt and millions losing their jobs and income. One of the most serious consequences has been social isolation. Now that we are barred from direct contact, we are beginning to appreciate the importance of touching and feeling the warmth of our dear ones. The experience has given many of us a different perspective on love. When I was advised that as a member of the vulnerable age group, I shouldn’t touch my grandchildren, I was filled with regrets about all the precious time I spent inquiring about their school progress, the status of their piano lessons and disciplining their behaviour. All I want now is to give each one a kiss and tell them how much I love them. Living through the harsh reality of terms like social distancing, self quarantine and total lockdown, I am gradually beginning to fathom how meaningless life becomes without the laughter and chatter of friends, the moments of sharing our joy and the close proximity of family. Despite all the fear, panic and the damage caused by coronavirus, it has taught us the most important truth about life: that it matters little whether you are rich or poor, what colour or race you are or if you are the most powerful person in the country. The virus has been an equaliser shattering

Whether we believe in a higher power or the laws of Mother Nature, the truth is that we have destroyed the balance of our universe. We pushed its limits to a breaking point. Be it climate change, economic inequity or social injustice, we humans have pushed the parameters of these indicators to unacceptable levels.

artificial borders of income, class, religion, ethnicity and nationality. At the blink of an eye it has leveled humanity to a common denominator—the healthy vs those who are infected. At a personal level, the outbreak has reminded me once more of the fragility and unpredictability of life. It is so easy to be swept away by material comforts and become callous toward the less fortunate and we tend to forget that we cannot take anything for granted. When I was locked up under a curfew and

then confined to becoming a refugee in Kolkata during the Bangladesh Liberation War, I promised myself that if life returned to a “normal” pace, I would spend more time with my loved ones, show more compassion to the less fortunate and consciously involve myself in activities to help the sick, the poor and the desolate. Sadly, my resolution lasted only a few years and here I am surrounded by material comforts and rarely do I devote time to change the lives of those who need nurturing and care. Such is human nature—we are hardwired to lose our perspective amid the daily glitter and glamour of life. Hence, like many, I am once again faced with the reality of making some hard decisions about my future, only if I survive this scourge. Millions who have lost their livelihoods are feeling the sting of not knowing how they will survive without an income and for some, even the next meal for their families has become an uncertainty. Will I rise to the challenge and learn to share and care this time? Only time will tell. Let us take a cue from the people who are making great sacrifices even as I write this column. Yes, I mean the scores of healthcare professionals who are working tirelessly in the face of grave personal risk and without proper protective equipment to treat the sick in overflowing hospitals. And

the brave young women and men who have volunteered to be guinea pigs for “untested” vaccines, risking their lives. There are also those who are delivering food and medicine to the elderly and other vulnerable groups. In an era when thinking about oneself is the norm, the pandemic sends us a resounding message: we are all interconnected. One sick person means that all of mankind could be affected physically and even emotionally. Interestingly, spiritual leaders—like Buddha or the Sufis—emphasised this aspect of our existence. That each one of us is but a small part of the whole and there is but one life source. Whatever our religious beliefs, we are gradually beginning to understand that the only way to get out of this is to think of ourselves as a part of something greater. This is the defining moment when we can rise together or sink together. An individual’s action can affect the entire community. It is only love, compassion and respect for each other that will sustain us through these hard times. It may in fact be the only recourse for the future of mankind. I began my column with a reference to Garcia Marquez. Let me end with his famous quote: “The only regret I will have in dying is if it is not for love.”

Milia Ali is a Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

QUOTABLE Quote

**FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE**  
(1820-1910)  
British nurse, statistician, and social reformer.  
*So never lose an opportunity of urging a practical beginning, however small, for it is wonderful how often in such matters the mustard-seed germinates and roots itself.*

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Foolish

5 Like some tea

11 Clarinet’s cousin

12 Compare

13 Brightly colored

14 Made a quick thrust

15 Building wing

16 Move like a moth

17 One masted sailboat

19 G-man’s org.

22 Energy

24 Arose

26 Sneaker problem

27 Seep

28 Fuses

30 Recital highlights

31 Feeling down

32 Plumbing

problems

34 Source of bad luck

35 Small rug

38 Major effect

41 Flight cost

42 Corporate shark

43 Article

44 Swift

45 Harvest

DOWN

1 Finished

2 Cain’s brother

3 Iron pyrites

4 Top rating

5 Phone greeting

6 Rigs

7 Litter’s littlest

8 Sack

9 Stopped fasting

10 Was a pioneer

16 Gift tag word

18 Lady’s man

19 Two-move chess outcome

20 Doofus

21 Midmonth day

22 Wedding words

23 Notion

25 Grabbed

29 Like most bread

30 Getz’s instrument

33 Contest form

34 Green gem

36 Region

37 Office worker

38 Schedule C org.

39 Guidebook feature

40 Diner dessert

41 Fragrant tree

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO [dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com).

YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

N	A	P	I	S		P	A	U	S	E
I	D	I	O	M		U	N	T	I	L
C	O	R	N	E	R	S	T	O	N	E
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A	L	L	I	E		S	O	L	I	D
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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott



# Accelerating research on the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 in low- and middle-income countries

STAR HEALTH DESK

The uncharted coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis calls for universality and adherence to public health principles which include messaging, testing, isolation, treatment and access to a robust health system.

In Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC) the greatest challenges will be the lack of infrastructure and resources, whether those resources are natural, human constructed, or long-standing inequities. Such challenges will be magnified when resources are limited. It places even more need for effective prevention strategies.

A group of scientists, physicians, funders, and policy makers from over 70 institutions from over 30 countries have launched an international coalition to respond to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in resource-poor settings.

According to the Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi), the COVID-19 Clinical Research Coalition aims to accelerate desperately needed COVID-19 research in those areas where the virus could wreak havoc on already-fragile health systems and cause the greatest health impact on vulnerable populations.

In a Comment published recently in *The Lancet* recently, the members of the coalition argue that international research collaboration and coordination is needed urgently to support African, Latin American, Eastern European, and certain



Asian countries to respond effectively to the worsening pandemic and speed up research adapted to resource-limited settings.

The coalition brings together an unprecedented array of health experts, including public-sector research institutes, ministries of health, academia, not-for-profit research and development organisations, NGOs, international organisations, and funders all committed to finding COVID-19 solutions for resource-poor settings.

One important research response to

COVID-19 has been launched already, the World Health Organisation (WHO)-led SOLIDARITY trial, an unprecedented global effort. But the authors found that out of almost 600 COVID-19 clinical trials registered, very few trials are planned in resource-poor settings. The authors commit to sharing their technical expertise and clinical trial capability to accelerate COVID-19 research in these settings.

The scale of the challenge is clearly beyond the scope of any single organisation. The coalition will facilitate

a coordinated approach, so that all data from all regions can be collected in a similar fashion, pooled and shared in real-time. This will help countries and the WHO to make rapid evidence-based decisions on policies and practice.

"We welcome the launch of this coalition, which takes advantage of existing multinational and multidisciplinary expertise in running clinical trials in resource poor settings, and will help the World Health Organisation (WHO) in its coordinating role in the global response to COVID-19," said Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist, World Health Organisation. "Although the epicentre is today elsewhere, we must prepare now for the consequences of this pandemic in more resource-constrained settings or we stand to lose many more lives."

Members of the Coalition call for specific commitments to ensure access, so that effective new treatments are made available as soon as possible in resource-poor settings and are affordable and readily accessible.

So far more than 70 organisations have joined this coalition, with a call made to other organisations ready to contribute existing capacity to join. The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh, currently known as icddr, is the only signatory of the coalition from Bangladesh. Information about the COVID-19 Clinical Research Coalition can be found at: covid19crc.org.

## PHYSIOTHERAPY

### Respiratory physiotherapy in COVID-19 perspective

K M AMRAN HOSSAIN and MOHAMMAD SHAHADAT HOSSAIN

The World Health Organisation (WHO) emphasised to initiate effective preparedness and response for the patients with Coronavirus infection. Research says the persons with low respiratory fitness are at a higher risk of morbidity. Cardiorespiratory fitness is evident to be strongly associated with a reduced risk of adverse health outcomes and mortality in respiratory disease, this should be an integral part of preparedness along with a concern about diabetes, heart disease or elderly issues.

Scientific evidence suggests deep breathing exercise, breathing control exercise and aerobic exercise improves respiratory fitness to battle the impact of viral pneumonia. Breathing exercises and relaxation also helps to elevate the level of anxiety or depression in the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation.

Respiratory physiotherapy can help both prophylaxis and recovery from respiratory illness. Physiotherapist guided respiratory interventions and rehabilitation measures are indicated in the cases with copious respiratory secretions that can be life-threatening unless treated. The patients with comorbidity and increasing age require airway clearance techniques, proper positioning, optimisation of oxygenation, use of proper ventilation and prevention of intensive care unit (ICU) induced physical weakness.

In case of acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), physiotherapists have a role in relaxation, early mobilisation and rehabilitation even for the management of antepartum pneumonia. Proper physiotherapy management improves the chance of quicker cardio-respiratory recovery in critical care.

It is imperative to reflect upon the importance of physiotherapy and integrate physiotherapists with the emergency pandemic response system to tackle the situation effectively.

The writers are physiotherapists. E-mail: amranphysio@gmail.com

## HEALTH bulletin



### Novel imaging technique outperforms standard CT for staging high-risk prostate cancer

A novel imaging technique using prostate-specific membrane antigen (PSMA) is superior to conventional imaging for staging men with high-risk prostate cancer, according to a phase 3 trial conducted in Australia and published in the *Lancet*.

PSMA is overexpressed on prostate cancer cells; positron emission tomography-computed tomography (PET-CT) using PSMA allows tumour-specific imaging of the entire body.

Some 300 men with high-risk prostate cancer who were being considered for either radical prostatectomy or radiotherapy with curative intent were randomised to undergo PSMA PET-CT or standard CT with bone scanning. The primary outcome — accuracy for identifying pelvic nodal or distant metastatic disease — favoured PSMA PET-CT. In particular, such imaging had higher sensitivity than conventional imaging (85% vs. 38%) and higher specificity (98% vs. 91%).

The researchers say their study shows "unequivocal superiority" of PSMA PET-CT. They note that the effects on patient survival are unknown, but "improving accuracy is desirable because the detection of metastatic disease can prevent futile attempts at cure or better direct locoregional therapies."

## Dietary supplements may help fight novel coronavirus infection

DR MUHAMMAD TOREQUL ISLAM

The novel coronavirus has caused infection to over millions of individuals and more than thousands of deaths in hundreds of countries across the world. Unfortunately, there is no single vaccine and specific treatment(s) for it. Protective measures like isolation, quarantine, social distancing, avoidance of large gatherings, frequent hand-washing etc. have been suggested by the public health experts. However, along with the protection and treatment strategies, dietary supplements and nutritional behaviour may help us to manage the novel coronavirus infection in humans.

Natural antioxidants such as quercetin and alliin are evident to increase the presence of Firmicutes genera, while a decrease in Bacteroidetes and Proteobacteria in the intestine, therefore, reduces the incidence of inflammatory bowel disease. Diets containing a high amount of unsaturated fatty acids, omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids found in large quantities in fish and nuts, as well as low glycemic index carbohydrates, are evident to promote healthy metabolic profiles in human. Generally, foods containing high carbohydrate and fat, and low fibre have profound effects on the regulation of our immune system.

Food supplements may be a potential source to manage the infection of the novel coronavirus. In a study, feed additives such as phosphoric acid, citric acid, or fumaric acid were found to reduce porcine delta coronavirus in infected pigs. In another study, chick embryo

tracheal organ cultures showed increased resistance to infection by a coronavirus after exposure to ascorbate (also called vitamin C). The vitamins of the B group play important roles in immune system homeostasis and functions. Thiamine (vitamin B1) promotes the accumulation of naïve B cells in intestinal Peyer's patches and induces immunoglobulin A (IgA) production in the intestinal mucosa. Niacin

system. Vitamin E enhances antibody production, secretion of cytokines and also enhances the antibacterial activity of neutrophils and inhibits oxidative damage.

The human angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) receptor serves as the main entry point into cells for the novel coronavirus. Therefore, ACE2 inhibitors and angiotensin II receptor blockers (ARBs) that are used to treat high blood pressure may upregulate



(vitamin B3) has anti-inflammatory properties. Pyridoxal phosphate (vitamin B6) has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects.

Vitamin C is evident to manage common cold in experimental animals. The deficiency of this vitamin causes immune system dysfunction and increased susceptibility to infections. On the other hand, vitamin D regulates several important functions within the host. It maintains epithelial homeostasis and absorption of phosphate and calcium in the intestine and helps in the development and proper functioning of the immune

ACE2 receptor expression, hence may affect the severity of the novel coronavirus infection.

To sum up, diets containing natural antioxidants and vitamins may be helpful to fight against viral infections. These types of components can stimulate and strengthen the immune system that may help us to act directly against the novel coronavirus infection.

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## Molecularly matched treatment for Pancreatic cancer

Molecular profiling is emerging as a part of standard treatment to identify targetable abnormalities in patients with pancreatic cancer. To further assess the benefit of this approach, investigators conducted the industry-sponsored Know Your Tumour registry trial, in which patients with pancreatic cancer underwent commercially available genomic profiling and were followed for treatment outcome.

Of 1,082 patients who received genomic profiling reports, 677 had follow-up for treatment and overall survival (OS). Of these patients, 189 (28%) had actionable mutations, of whom 46 (24%) received target-matched treatment and 143 (76%) received unmatched treatment. OS was superior for the actionable patients receiving matched versus unmatched therapy (2.58 vs. 1.51 years; hazard ratio, 0.42; P=0.0004). OS was similar between unmatched targetable patients and nontargetable patients (1.32 years). This prospective trial evaluating the use of genomic profiling in pancreatic cancer indicates a potential survival benefit if eligible patients receive target-directed therapy. However, only 2% of all patients enrolled received matched therapy, introducing the possible risk of patient selection bias.



  /StarHealthBD

# HOW TO HOME QUARANTINE

The home quarantined person should:



Stay in a well-ventilated single-room preferably with an attached toilet



Needs to stay away from elderly people, pregnant women, children



Restrict his/her movement within the house



Under no circumstances attend any social/religious gathering



Wash hand frequently with soap and water or with alcohol-based sanitizer



Avoid sharing household items like dishes, glasses, cups, utensils, towels, bedding



Wear a surgical mask at all time. The mask should be changed every 8-8 hours



Dispose off used mask in a closed bin and bin should also be handled responsibly



If symptoms appear, he/she should immediately inform the nearest health centre

## COVID-19 OUTBREAK



In Search of Excellence



# Parenting: the upside of downtime for cricketers

Mazhar Uddin

The coronavirus pandemic has forced everyone to remain at home with the hope of avoiding the spread of the deadly virus, which had already accounted for thousands of lives worldwide, with the number of fatalities growing by thousands every day.

Much like every other field, the sporting arena has been hit hard as all sporting events have been suspended.

Normally cricketers remain busy with their international and domestic commitments round-the-year, not getting much time to spend with their families. However, despite it not being an ideal situation, the downtime from the coronavirus outbreak has allowed national cricketers like Tamim Iqbal, Mahmudullah Riyad and Taijul Islam concentrate more on parenting.

Bangladesh's ODI skipper Tamim, who recently became father for the second time, informed that staying at home is allowing the bond with his family get firmer.

"Being a professional cricketer, we have to sacrifice a lot, especially in issues related to family. When things were normal, I personally did not have enough time to spend with the kids and others at home. Though the situation now [due to coronavirus] is not ideal, staying at home is giving me enough time to spend with the family and allowing the bond to get firmer," Tamim told The Daily Star.

"The day starts with running on the treadmill and then spending



**Although they are staying at home, cricketers such as Mahmudullah Riyad (T), Mushfiqur Rahim and Taijul Islam are making the most of the unexpected break by spending time with their families, something that they rarely have a chance to do during their hectic daily routines and tours away from home.**

PHOTO: COLLECTED

the rest of the day with family. A lot of time is also being spent watching Netflix. But having said that, this is not a normal life for any of us and I hope that the situation normalises soon and we

can get back to our usual life," the left-handed opener added.

T20 captain Mahmudullah is utilising the time by helping his son Raeed with homework and other creative things.

"We are going through a very critical situation due to the coronavirus as we have to remain very careful and follow safety instructions strictly. But still life has been good in a sense that I am getting to spend a lot of time with my family, especially with my kid, doing a lot of things with him. I'm helping him with his homework and studies.

"I have not spent enough time since he started going to school. His mother always looks after those things, but now since I am home I am trying to look after those things. Drawing, painting are the other things that I am keeping my son busy with. I'm also playing games with my family members," said Mahmudullah, who also suggested everyone to read books during this idle time at home.

Taijul, too, has taken his parenting responsibilities very seriously. The left-arm spinner now plays the role of a teacher when is he not busy changing nappies of his two-year-old son Taif Zawad Bin Islam.

"To be honest I have never spent so much time with my family and kid before, so I am enjoying every bit of it. Obviously, the situation is not normal and we have to be very careful about our health and safety. But during my stay at home these days, I have decided to help my wife by looking after my son.

"Normally she is the one who looks after my child and everything else at home when I am away for cricket. My new responsibility is to look after my son's studies and also have to be a horse as my son loves to ride one. I have just started changing nappies of my son, something which I have never done before," said Taijul.

## FIFA cancels all June fixtures

AFP, Paris

All international football matches scheduled for June were postponed on Friday following the first meeting of FIFA's coronavirus working group.

It was also decided to hold discussions with confederations to draw up a revised schedule for the 2022 World Cup qualifiers which have been shelved.

"The FIFA-Confederations working group... has unanimously approved a series of recommendations following its first meeting, which was organised via conference call today," said a FIFA statement.

It was also decided by the group to postpone all planned women's internationals in June.

In the aftermath of the decision to postpone the Tokyo Olympics by a year, the FIFA group proposed keeping the age eligibility rule of players born on or after January 1, 1997 and three additional players.

## Lara recalls Tendulkar's 241

AGENCIES



Former West Indies batsman Brian Lara said that Sachin Tendulkar's unbeaten 241-run knock against Australia was the most disciplined and determined innings of

his Test career.

Tendulkar, who made his debut in the longest format of the game as a 16-year-old, finished his 24-year-long career as Test cricket's highest-run scorer.

"Can you imagine playing Test cricket at the age of 16 until the next 24 years. That is just unbelievable. Sachin has played some amazing innings throughout his career but none with more discipline and determination like his 241 not out against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG)," Lara said in an Instagram post.

Citing the example of Tendulkar's innings, Lara asked everyone to show discipline as the world battles COVID-19.

Sachin Tendulkar's unbeaten 241 off 436 balls at the Sydney Cricket Ground in 2004, which enabled India to post a mammoth score of 705 for seven in their first innings, was a testimony to what's another great mentioned above.

The match ended in a draw but the concentration and dedication Tendulkar showed will remain alive in the minds of the cricketing fans. In that series, Tendulkar



was struggling for form, and he decided to not play cover drive in the final Test of the series.

Sachin was determined that he won't play a single cover drive during the Sydney Test. Moreover, the Aussies had identified Sachin's shortcoming too. The bowlers tried to bowl outside the off-stump consistently to get Tendulkar. So he decided to leave all those deliveries.

The then Australia captain Steve Waugh, his bowlers, and even the commentators were left stunned as Sachin's innings displayed immense mental strength.

"To me, it was a show of incredible fortitude, mental strength discipline," Waugh said last year in an interview.

"He actually followed through and didn't play a cover-drive although he scored a double hundred," Waugh added.

## Sporting activities to remain suspended

SPORTS REPORTER

State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel yesterday issued a directive to keep the country's sporting activities suspended until the situation improves in view of the evolving coronavirus pandemic.

This directive indefinitely extends the suspension which was initially issued on March 16 with the deadline of March 31.

Following the initial directive, sporting events including top-tier football league, the Bangladesh Premier League, women's football league and cricket's 50-over domestic event, Dhaka Premier League, were suspended.

The latest directive also requested everyone to abide by the preventive measures that are being followed in Bangladesh as well as the rest of the world as the outbreak continues unabated.

## 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.*

Sabbir Hossain from Mirpur, 2010



Once I sat myself down to write, I was a bit perplexed to realise I could not recall any memories of the day I watched a match live from the stadium for the very first time!

Interestingly, I grew up within the three-kilometre-radius of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. I did go to watch matches -- both ODIs and Tests, but for some mysterious reason, I could not recollect any of those memories even going deep down the memory lane. Or maybe I just cannot pull out any of those memories buried so deep down under a huge pile of dust in my mind!

However, I do remember, vividly, the memories of catching a live match on TV for the first time even though I was just a five-year-old kid at that time.



We (my family) had just moved to Dhaka, thanks to my father's job transfer. We had bought a brand new black and white TV to watch the 1998 FIFA World Cup, which was taking place in France. The match in question was between Brazil and Morocco. My father woke me up at midnight and it was then that I was first introduced to Ronaldo, 'the phenomenon'. The legendary Number 9 scored a goal at the very beginning of that game. That part is so vivid in my memory that I can still see it every time I close my eyes. It was also that night that I fell in love with sports.

Going back to what I had intended to write -- my experience of catching a live match from a sports venue. I went to watch many matches but maybe nothing extraordinary happened in those matches that could leave a lasting print in my memory. But let me share the story of the match that had increased my eagerness tenfold to keep going to the stadium repeatedly.

The year was 2010 and I was a college student back then. New Zealand were touring Bangladesh.

Rubel Hossain, in particular, was in magnificent form.

The Kiwis required eight from the final over and the Tigers needed to scalp the visitors' final wicket. You could cut the tension with a knife seeing Rubel stepping up to bowl the final over, with Kyle Mills on strike. My friends and I were silent, just praying for Bangladesh to win.

It did not take long for the Almighty to heed to our prayers. Rubel uprooted Mills' stumps with an inch-perfect yorker off the third delivery of the over and the whole stadium erupted with joy. Only one word could be heard -- 'Banglawash' -- as well all joined in the chants.

What I witnessed that day was something indescribable. I remember how we jumped with joy the moment Mills was dismissed. Everyone in the crowd, who had just seen each other for the first time and spent a day watching the game, hugged one another and celebrated the victory. On my way back, I found myself to be a part of the celebratory procession. Such a scenic celebration it was!

## Tajikistan's season starts despite fears

AFP, Dushanbe



Tajikistan's domestic football season kicked off Saturday, as leagues around the world remained suspended to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The Super Cup game heralding the beginning of the football season took place behind closed doors, and saw perennial domestic champions FC Istiklol come from behind to beat FC Khujand 2-1 in the capital Dushanbe.

Tajikistan, a poor Central Asian state of 9 million people, has yet to declare a single infection from COVID-19.

Strongman leader Emomali Rakhmon was seen posing with dozens of young women clad in traditional garb at a time when leaders the world over were advocating social distancing.

Belarus, another ex-Soviet country, remains the outlier in Europe, and its league

has attracted unprecedented international attention since it began with fans attending games last month.

The game itself threatened to return an upset before Istiklol, a club founded by Rakhmon's son Rustam Emomali, the current mayor of the capital Dushanbe, converted their dominance into goals and overturned an early Khujand lead.

It ended in hugs and handshakes all round as FC Istiklol players collected their winners' medals and lifted the Super Cup trophy in an otherwise empty stadium.

Tajikistan is one of just two former Soviet countries that have not reported a single case of the coronavirus.

The other, reclusive Turkmenistan, has already announced the suspension of its domestic league.

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov made his first mention of the coronavirus in comments reported Saturday by state media.



**Tajikistan began its domestic season with the Super Cup yesterday despite concerns about coronavirus and domestic champions FC Istiklol came from behind to beat FC Khujand 2-1 in a closed-doors encounter in Dushanbe.**

PHOTO: TWITTER

## Women booters make COVID-19 appeal

SPORTS REPORTER

Three star players of the Bangladesh women's national team -- Sabina Khatun, Maria Manda and Akhi Khatun -- yesterday urged people worldwide to take measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 through video messages. The messages are supposed to be put on media platform of Asian Football Confederation.

In her message, Sabina, the long-serving captain and prolific striker of the national team, said: "Please join us on our mission to break the chain."

Coronavirus is spreading around the world and we must stop this together. The steps are simple: wash your hands, maintain social distance, and if necessary, stay at home. Let's do this to keep our family and friends safe and healthy."

Maria, captain of the under-16 team and a key midfielder of the senior team, and Akhi, another important player of both teams, made the same appeal through different video messages.





# Admissions, grades without tests

*Pvt universities take desperate measures in trying times*

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Many private universities have decided to assign students grades without holding semester finals and enroll new students sans admission tests, due to the evolving novel coronavirus situation.

Two reputed private universities -- Brac University and Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) -- have decided they will not be holding final exams for the spring semester and asked faculty members to complete grading based on coursework completed so far.

Three private universities -- IUB, United International University (UIU), and the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) -- have also decided to enroll students for the summer semester without an admissions test, based only on their SSC and HSC results.

The authorities of at least eight private universities said the closure of educational institutions due to the coronavirus outbreak is taking a heavy toll on future admissions, as entry tests have been indefinitely deferred.

## COURSE GRADES WITHOUT SEMESTER FINALS

Several teachers of Brac University said the university will remain closed until April 9, as per the registrar's office.

"There will be no more classes of Spring 2020 (online or otherwise). Faculty members are requested to complete grading based on coursework completed thus far."

"The above decision to conclude the semester was taken

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



A doctor at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University's Fever Clinic recording details of a patient yesterday. Many people visited the clinic at Betar Bhaban in Shahbagh to test if they had coronavirus.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# Buses, trains to stay put till April 11

*Emergency vehicles, goods-laden trucks out of purview*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday extended the suspension on movement of public transport until April 11 to slow down the spread of coronavirus.

The Road Transport and Highways Division made the decision yesterday, said a press release of the road transport and bridges ministry.

However, all goods-laden vehicles and those used in emergency services, including transportation of fuel, medicine, relief and perishable goods, would remain out of the purview of the suspension, it said.

No goods-laden vehicle will be allowed to carry passengers.

On March 24, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader announced that buses, minibuses, CNG-run auto-rickshaws and human hauliers would remain off the roads from March 26 to April 4.

Besides, services of all passenger trains, launches and domestic flights would remain suspended until further notice.

Meanwhile, many people are traveling to and from Dhaka on goods-laden vehicles ignoring the government directives, putting themselves and others at risk of getting coronavirus, according to media reports.

The government on April 1 extended the countrywide shutdown until April 11. The shutdown was initially declared for 10 days (March 26 to April 4).

Services of train, bus and other transport would resume gradually for the sake of people's livelihood, read a circular issued on April 1.



## PRAYER TIMING APRIL 5

Fazr 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

# 7 die showing coronavirus-like symptoms

*Homes isolated in 6 districts*

STAR REPORT

At least seven people, including two children, died of Covid-19-like symptoms in six districts since Friday night.

Besides, multiple houses were locked down and many families were home-quarantined to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

In Moulvibazar, a 45-year-old man died from a fever and cough yesterday in Akua village of Rajnagar upazila's Tengra Union.

The victim's family was sent into home quarantine, said Urmi Roy, acting upazila nirbahi officer.

In Natore, an elderly man died in his home in Sadar upazila's Kafuria village early yesterday, after suffering from similar symptoms, at 3:00am yesterday, said Dr Mahbubur Rahman, upazila health and family planning officer.

In Narayanganj, a 46-year-old man died in his home at Baburail area in the district town early yesterday from similar symptoms. He died on the way to hospital, said Afsana Afroz Biva, Narayanganj City Corporation (NCC) councillor.

Contacted, NCC's Chief Health Officer Dr Sheikh Mostafa Ali said, "We

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## FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

**'US recognition will open up a new chapter'**



A school teacher in Mymensingh presenting a cheque of Tk 23,000, raised by teachers, to Bangabandhu as donation to the Prime Minister's relief fund on April 4, 1972.

April 5, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

## BANGABANDHU WELCOMES US RECOGNITION

Bangabandhu today expresses his confidence that the formal recognition to Bangladesh by the US will open up a new chapter in the development of friendly cooperation and understanding between the people of the two countries for their mutual benefit.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



# Woman raped after kidnap in Cox's Bazar

*60-yr-old held for rape attempt in Tangail*

STAR REPORT

A woman has been allegedly raped after abduction in Chakarai upazila of Cox's Bazar, reports our correspondent.

Police on Friday arrested one Mozammel, 40, and Zafar Alam, 25, in connection with the incident, said Md Habibur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Chakarai Police Station.

On Thursday night, Mozammel and Zafar abducted the woman when she was on her way to the upazila health complex from her house.

They later took the woman to a house in sawmill area of Lakkharchar union and raped her.

On information, police rushed to the spot and rescued the woman and

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## STAY HOME, STAY WELL

*Get things delivered safely*

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Since the country went into shutdown, people have had to adapt themselves to spending days cooped up in their homes.

Adjusting to this temporary way of life has meant having to give up almost all everyday activities, such as going to office, school, meeting friends, or going shopping -- even for groceries.

In recent years in Bangladesh, online shopping has gained popularity among the younger generation.

During the countrywide shutdown, many people in Dhaka city are now having to rely on online deliveries for their groceries, household essentials and restaurant foods.

But with the fast spread of Covid-19, people have questioned whether it is safe to receive packages at your home.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says that the "likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low".

Kaoser Alam, medical officer and resident cardiologist of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, told The Daily Star that, "If you are concerned about contaminated or unclean surfaces, you could open your delivery packages outside. You should then dispose of the packaging

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

# Starmer new UK Labour leader

AFP, London

Pro-European centrist Keir Starmer was unveiled as new Labour party leader yesterday, heralding a shift in Britain's main opposition party after a crushing election defeat under veteran socialist Jeremy Corbyn and years of ideological infighting.

The 57-year-old former chief state prosecutor defeated Corbyn loyalist Rebecca Long-Bailey and backbencher Lisa Nandy in a lengthy campaign sparked by Corbyn's resignation after December's loss at the polls to Boris Johnson's Conservatives.

Angela Rayner becomes the new deputy leader, Labour announced on Twitter, after it was forced to cancel a special conference because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Starmer, who was Labour's Brexit spokesman, called his election "the honour and privilege"

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



A bicycle rider delivering food in Dhaka's Mirpur-10 area. Many companies now offering home delivery services to its customers as majority of the city dwellers are staying at home amid the shutdown to prevent coronavirus spread.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

# Wearing masks 'not a bad idea'

*WHO opens up to broader use of the protective gear to limit spread of coronavirus*

REUTERS, Geneva/Washington

The World Health Organization has said that medical masks should be prioritised for health workers, but it opened the door to greater public use of homemade masks or other mouth coverings as a way to reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

A senior WHO official told reporters there was some possibility of airborne transmission of the virus that has now infected over 1 million people and killed nearly 60,000 people worldwide since emerging in China last December.

But the main driver of the pandemic was still believed to be sick people with symptoms who were coughing and sneezing and contaminating surfaces or other people.

"We must preserve medical surgical respirator masks for our frontline workers. But the idea of using respiratory coverings or mouth coverings to prevent coughing or sneezing projecting disease into the environment and towards others ... that in itself is not a bad idea," Dr. Mike Ryan, the WHO's top emergencies expert, told a news conference Friday.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease who is top US infectious disease official, said on Friday that Americans should cover their face if they have to go in public, but they should still stay isolated as much as possible.

Ryan acknowledged a "very important and healthy debate" on the wearing of masks.

He said that if used, they should be part of a comprehensive strategy and would not negate the need for

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