

139
New cases in 24hrs621
Total cases34
Death39
Recovery109,823
Deaths1,792,899
Total cases

Outlook is grim for Bangladesh

Says a WB report on South Asia, dealing mostly with impact of coronavirus pandemic

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and WASIM BIN HABIB

Bangladesh's tremendous growth momentum in recent years is set to come to a crashing halt for the coronavirus outbreak in the country, with the poor and informal sector bearing the most brunt, said the World Bank yesterday.

This fiscal year, the country's GDP growth is forecasted to be between 2 and 3 percent, in a stunning decline from the 8.15 percent logged in last fiscal year.

At the start of this fiscal year, the government was hoping to register 8.20 percent GDP growth.

"The outlook is dire," said Hans Timmer, World Bank's chief economist for South Asia, at the launch of the Washington-based multilateral lender's latest South Asia Economic Focus report via a conference call on Friday.

The report, which was made public yesterday, is centred around the impact of coronavirus on the region.

The pandemic stands to wipe out the gains Bangladesh made over the past decade on poverty reduction, he said.

Since 2010, Bangladesh was able to bring down poverty from 31.5 percent of the population to 20.5 percent in 2018-19 and extreme poverty from 17.6 percent to 10.5 percent.

To avert the disastrous outcome, the government needs to ramp up social security programmes in the form of cash or food transfer to those who are above the poverty line and were gainfully employed in the informal sector but suddenly found themselves out of jobs for the

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BANGLADESH GDP GROWTH TO DECLINE: WB

(IN %)

2019 8.2

2020 2.0 to 3.0

2021 1.2 to 2.9

2022 2.8 to 3.9

Premature to project growth now

Says finance minister about WB report

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday said it was premature to project what will be the country's economic growth in the current fiscal.

"Our economy saw the usual growth in nine months," he said, adding it is unlikely to see the "imbalance" projected by the World Bank (WB) even if the country's economy experiences zero growth in the next three months.

He made the comments after the WB yesterday said that the regional economic growth in eight South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, is likely to be between 1.8 and 2.8 percent this year.

It is down from 6.3 percent projected six months ago, amid the fallout triggered by the

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WAITING FOR DUE PAY

Garment workers who have not been paid for months gather to demonstrate in front of their factory at Malibagh in the capital yesterday. They came out of their homes for the sit-in, risking infection at a time when the government is enforcing a nationwide shutdown and asking people to practise social distancing to stem the transmission of coronavirus.

PHOTO:
SK ENAMUL HAQ

COVID-19 IN BANGLADESH

Highest cases recorded in single day

Four die in 24hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country yesterday recorded 139 confirmed cases of Covid-19 -- the highest in a single day since the first case was reported more than a month ago -- with four deaths due to the disease.

The total number of infected patients rose to 621 while the death toll reached 34.

The figures showed a falling trend with 94 and 58 confirmed cases respectively in the previous two days after the authorities had reported 112 cases on Thursday.

In the 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, 16 labs across the country tested samples of 1340 individuals, Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) said in a bulletin.

Of the four deceased, two were aged between 30-40 years, one was above 70 while the other was above 60, she said.

Three more recovered from coronavirus infection in the last 24 hours, she said.

New cases were found in four districts

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Tk 5,000cr for farmers

PM unveils fresh stimulus package

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday announced a new stimulus package of Tk 5,000 crore to give financial assistance to small and medium farmers and help them face the fallout of Covid-19.

"Bangladesh Bank will formulate a new refinancing scheme of Tk 5,000 crore to pump running capital into the agricultural sector. We'll create this Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package only for the agricultural sector. We'll disburse money from this fund among farmers at only 5 percent interest," she said.

The PM came up with the package while delivering her introductory speech in a video conference from the Gono Bhaban with government officials from 16 districts under Khulna and Barishal divisions.

The money from this fund will be disbursed among small and medium farmers, including that of poultry and dairy sector, in rural areas, she said.

Besides, the existing disbursement of loan at 4 percent interest rate for price items will continue, Hasina added.

Noting that the government has already allocated Tk 100 crore for the agriculture ministry for the mechanisation of harvesting process of crops, she said the government would also allocate another Tk 100 crore in this regard.

Hasina said the government would also allocate Tk 150 crore for the distribution of seeds and seedlings among the affected farmers so that

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Rice theft goes on, the poor bear brunt

Over 200 tonnes recovered, 29 held in 13 days

STAR REPORT

At a time when underprivileged people across the country are suffering from hunger and unemployment, theft of relief goods and corruption in the management are making matters worse.

Law enforcers have recovered a total of 4,167 sacks, each containing 50kg rice and arrested 29 suspects in the last 13 days.

Sex workers in Mymensingh, day labourers in Bogura, rickshaw pullers in Barishal and minority communities in Natore and the hill tracts keep pleading that they were not receiving the goods meant for them.

In Bogura town, hundreds of people, mostly labourers, formed a human chain demanding food or work.

Many of the participants held hand written placards saying, "we are starving" at the event at Mozamnagar Saturday, reports our correspondent.

Contacted, Azizur Rahman, UNO of Bogura, said, "I went to the spot and talked to the people. I wanted a list from them. When they give us the list, we will

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COMMENTARY

The other deadly 'virus': inefficiency

This has been destroying us for decades

MAHFUZ ANAM

While we are haunted by the spectre of coronavirus damaging our society, its health and the economy, there is another "virus" that has been destroying us from inside for decades -- inefficiency. The vicious grip of the "inefficiency virus" is being exhibited almost on a daily basis as we take one measure after another to fight the global pandemic.

Having an efficient prime minister -- even her worst critics admit that she works very hard -- is hardly enough when she is served by a system that has no accountability, a structure given more to legalism than to performance and personnel to whom people are meant to be dominated rather than served.

While speaking to the district officials on April 7, the prime minister warned that "If we see the trend of its spread in the world, it is like mathematics; and if we gather the experience of other countries, we may face a massive blow in April and we are getting this sign and reports."

The PM's expression of "a massive blow" stands in stark contrast to the repeated messages of being "well prepared" to face the coronavirus that have been given out so far. She referred to "reports" which, if shared, would have given us a clearer picture of the "blow" that is on its way.

The dire situation that we face today is known. But are we prepared to face it? While we understand and appreciate the earnestness of the prime minister, we are afraid that the "inefficiency virus" will make our fight against the coronavirus difficult and ineffective and, in many unfortunate cases, fatal.

Let us examine our experiences so far. The early warnings were not heeded to say the least. I can live with the fact that when China was the

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Justice finally catches up with Majed

MOHINN ALAMIR

Yet another paid for his brutality while assassinating Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members as sacked army captain Abdul Majed, a "self-confessed killer" of the Father of the Nation, walked to the gallows early yesterday.

Majed was fugitive for several decades and got arrested in Dhaka on April 7. He, as part of the conspiring army officers, ruthlessly killed Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975, barely four years after he led the country to snatch independence from the clutch of Pakistanis.

The conspiring officers did not spare Bangabandhu's wife, sons, daughters-in-law and other relatives. Bangabandhu's daughters Sheikh Hasina, now the country's prime minister, and Sheikh Rehana survived the massacre as they were abroad at that time. The execution of Abdul Majed, convicted

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Booths set up at the Government Titumir College in the capital to collect samples for Covid-19 tests. At least 320 such walk-in booths will be installed across the country.

SAMPLE COLLECTION

44 walk-in kiosks to open today

NGO initiative follows South Korean model; DGHS will run the tests

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Bangladesh has installed the South Korean model kiosks to collect samples for Covid-19 tests across the country with the support of a non-government organisation.

"We are encouraging other private or non-government organisations to come forward with such ideas. Certainly, such facilities will give a mileage to our testing facilities," Abul Kalam Azad, director general of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star yesterday.

He also said this booth will reduce the manpower needed for collecting samples. The NGO -- JKG Healthcare -- has been tasked with the collection of samples, while the DGHS will carry out the tests at their own lab.

"This will ensure safety of health workers while collecting samples from suspected patients and health professionals don't have to change their personal protective equipment [PPE] kit after every sample," he said.

Dr Sabrina Arif, convener of JKG Healthcare, said, "A total of 44 such sample-collection booths have been installed and we hope to start collecting samples from people to test for Covid-19 from tomorrow [today]."

She said out of 44, eight have been installed in Dhaka, eight in Narayanganj and the rest in other divisions.

"We will install a total of 320 booths in phases across the country following the South Korea model."

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