



The indigenous communities in the hill tracts celebrate Baisabi in a subdued manner yesterday as outdoor festivals for welcoming the new year were cancelled due to the Covid-19 outbreak. They usually go to rivers and water bodies to celebrate but this year many went up to the roofs of homes instead. The photo was taken in Rangamati. PHOTO: STAR

Rice theft goes on

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provide them with the goods, as we have no lack of relief goods.”
People in Dekichhara Natun Para, a remote village in Bandarban’s Lama upazila, are seriously passing through hard times as most of the families are facing food shortage, Reng Yan Karbari of the village told The Daily Star.
Prodip Lakra, president of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad in Natore, said at least 70,000 ethnic minority people in the district were living in poverty.
Shilpi Pahan, a resident of Hugalbaria in Natore, said, “We work in other people’s farms as we have no land. But no one is calling us for any work.”
Mohammad Shahreaz, deputy commissioner in Natore, said they have distributed 5.5 tonnes of relief among the poor. “We will distribute more.”
In Barishal city corporation areas, around 40,000 people live in 19 slums. But the corporation has only 100 tonnes of rice for it’s relief effort.
Officials said the rice they have is really inadequate.
Hayatul Islam, 45, a rickshaw puller of Palshpur area, said, “I got nothing. I barely earned anything in two weeks. Only people who have good relations with influential party men got food support.”
Those who received the goods said they got 10 kg of rice, two kg of daal and three kg of potato and a soap.
Officials engaged in relief distribution said at least 20 percent of people in Barishal should get the relief goods, but in reality, only four to five percent got them.
Mayor Serniabad Sadik Abdulla said the city corporation received far less than what was required.
In Nilphamari’s Kishoreganj upazila, officials made a list of 71,371 families that lost their income due to the shutdown.
Only 38 tonnes of rice was released for them until yesterday. Officials said they needed at least 71.4 tonnes.
In Nilphamari town, only eight tonnes of rice has been distributed among 800 people. But there are

about 75,000 people in need, officials said.
THEFT MAKE IT WORSE
Police recovered rice sacks in Joypurhat, Bogura, Chapainwabagnaj and Madaripur in the last two days. Mostly, the local ruling party men were involved with the theft, law enforcers said.
Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general at the Police Headquarters, said, all units of police were asked to be vigilant against theft of relief goods.
Meanwhile, the local government ministry yesterday suspended a chairman and two members of three separate Union Parishads for their alleged involvement in irregularities in distributing relief goods.
They are Nurul Afsar, chairman of Mirzapur Union Parishad, Hathajari Upazila; Shahin Shah, member, ward no-6, Sukash Union Parishad, Singra Upazila, Natore; and Kabir Hossain, member, ward no-8, Pirojpur Union, Sonargaon Upazila, Narayanganj, said a release of the ministry.

New York City to keep schools closed: mayor

AFP, New York

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said Saturday that public schools in the largest US city would stay closed until the end of the school year as the coronavirus pandemic continues to rage, even as the state’s governor stressed that the decision was his to make.
“There is nothing easy about this decision,” the mayor said at a news conference, before adding that “it clearly will help us save lives.”
But hours later, Governor Andrew Cuomo insisted the authority to make such a call was his.
“You can’t make a decision just within New York City without coordinating that decision with the whole metropolitan region, because it all works together,” Cuomo said.

Tk 5,000cr for farmers

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agricultural production does not hamper.
She said directives have already been given to the administration and the law enforcement agencies to allow the movement of people engaged in harvesting crops and facilitate the supply chain.
The PM asked the authorities concerned to arrange a weekly haat (makeshift market) in an open field in every area maintaining social distancing so that the farmers can sell their produce.
“Bangladesh is mainly an agriculture-dependent country. Our agricultural activities will have to continue. The most important thing is that it’ll have to ensure food security,” she said.
Mentioning that the land of the country is very fertile, she said, “If we can produce food properly, we’ll also be able to help many others [countries] meeting our demand. So, we’ll have to continue the production so that the people of the country don’t suffer.”
To ensure fair prices for farmers, the government will procure two lakh tonnes of paddy and rice extra this season than the previous one, Hasina said.
Mentioning that the government has taken various stimulus

packages and assistance, she said the government is always ready to help all kind of people, including farmers, workers, labourers, weavers, blacksmiths, and fishermen.
The PM asked the local administrations and locals to keep their respective areas protected so that no outsiders can suddenly go there.
She urged the people to be very careful over the novel coronavirus and follow the regular government directives as this virus is highly contagious.
Later, the PM exchanged views with the government officials, local representatives and the people of Bagerhat, Jhalakathi, Meherpur, Bhola, Satkhira, Patuakhali, Jhenidah, Magura, Pirojpur, Kustia, Jashore, Narial, Barishal, and Khulna.
During the views-exchange, Hasina warned that if anyone is involved in corruption over the relief distribution during this disaster will not be spared.
She also greeted the Christian community on the occasion of Easter Sunday.
PM’s Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus moderated the video conference.
On April 7, the PM held a video conference with government officials from 15 districts under Chattogram and Sylhet divisions to discuss coronavirus outbreaks there.

Highest cases

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-- Laxmipur, Lalmonirhat, Thakurgaon and Jhalakathi.
“Analysing the history of patients in these districts, we have found that most of them had travelled either Dhaka or Narayanganj within the last week,” Sabrina said.
Dhaka has the maximum number of positive cases with 50 percent of the patients while Narayanganj stands next to it.
Prof Sanya Tahmina, additional

director general of the Directorate General of Health Services said the government has intensified its efforts in tackling the virus outbreak.
Nearly seven lakh of personal protective equipment were brought in the country and about 4.68 lakh were already distributed among the hospitals, she said.
The government has decided to expand coronavirus testing facilities, Sania added.

Justice finally catches

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killer of Bangabandhu and his family members, was carried out at Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj at 12:01 am yesterday, Mahbubul Islam, jailer of Dhaka Central Jail, told The Daily Star.
A prison official said the civil surgeon declared Majed dead at 12:15 am.
He said that other concerned officials including a magistrate, police representatives witnessed the execution as required by the law while inspector general of prisons Brigadier General AKM Mostafa Kamal Pasha also was also present.
Meanwhile on Friday, some family members of Abdul Majed met him at Dhaka Central Jail where he had been kept in solitary confinement on death row.
Earlier on Thursday, President Abdul Hamid rejected Majed’s petition for presidential clemency, filed by the convict’s lawyer Mosharraf Hossain Kajol on April 8.
Majed was arrested on April 7 from Gabtoli in the wee hours, after decades of remaining absconding.
He was nabbed by the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of the police.
“Majed said he arrived in the country on March 15 or 16 from Kolkata. He claimed that he was hiding there for about 23 years,” Hemayet Uddin Khan, assistant public prosecutor, told The Daily Star.
The Supreme Court on November 19, 2009, upheld the death sentences of Abdul Majed and 11 other self-confessed killers of Bangabandhu. Of them, five were executed on January 27, 2010.
They were Syed Farooq Rahman, Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Bazlul Huda, AKM Mohiuddin Ahmed and Mohiuddin Ahmed.
Six other convicts, including Abdul Majed, remained at large. The other fugitive killers are sacked Lt Col Khandaker Abdur Rashid, SHBM Noor Chowdhury, Shariful Haque Dalim, Rashed Chowdhury, and Risaldar Moslehuddin.
Another condemned killer, Aziz Pasha, died in Zimbabwe in June, 2001.
MAJED: THE MAN BEHIND SERNIABAT AND JAIL KILLINGS
Law Minister Anisul Huq, who is a state counsel for Bangabandhu murder trial, told The Daily Star that Majed went to the house of Abdur Rab Serniabat and unleashed the attack. After that he went to the Radio station.
Then water resources minister Abdur Rab Serniabat was brother-in-law of Bangabandhu, and brother of Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib.
The merciless derailed soldiers attacked Sernibat’s house at Mintoo Road and killed Serniabat’s daughter, son and his nephew.
Anisul Huq also said that Majed took part in the killing of the four national leaders inside Dhaka Central Jail in November 1975.
On November 3, 1975, four leaders of the Awami League, who led the Mujibnagar government in absence of Bangabandhu -- acting president Syed Nazrul Islam, prime minister Tajuddin Ahmad and cabinet ministers M Mansur Ali and AHM Quamruzzaman -- were brutally killed inside Dhaka’s Central Jail.
BIGGEST CHALLENGE
The law minister, in a video message released yesterday, said that it was the biggest challenge for them to nab and execute convicted fugitive killers of Bangabandhu.
But it was a slight relief that one of them -- Majed -- was nabbed and executed on the year of birth

centenary of Father of the Nation, he said.
“We promised that we will bring back all fugitive convicted Bangabandhu killers and execute them.”
We are reiterating our promise that we will bring back all fugitive killers and execute them, he added.
SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT TWO FUGITIVES
Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said that the country was more unburdened with the execution of Abdul Majed.
Talking to journalists while distributing food among the destitute at his Dhanmondi residence, home minister said that government was giving the highest effort to bring back all fugitive killers of Bangabandhu.
Asaduzzaman also said that the execution of Majed is a gift from the prime minister in the Mujib Year.
He said the government had specific information about two fugitives. “All five fugitive [killers of Bangabandhu] will be brought back and executed,” he said.
BURIAL IN SONARGAON SPARK PROTEST
Majed’s burial at his in-law’s family graveyard in Sonargaon sparked protest among the Awami League men, reported our Narayanganj correspondent.
“We have urged the local administration to remove the body of Majed from here. Otherwise, freedom fighters and the Awami League leaders, with the local people, will take steps in this regard,” said Freedom fighter Saiful Islam Bhuiyan, convener of the AL’s Sorangaon upazila unit.
Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Sonargaon Police Station, said the body was buried there as per the government directive.
Local Awami League leaders can communicate with the higher authorities of the government in this regard.

44 walk-in kiosks

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The sample-collection booth, which looks like a glass cabin, is made in such a way that the environment inside, where the medical staff stands, is always sterile. The healthcare professionals can collect throat swabs of people who will stand outside the booth.
Sabrina also said the medical technologist standing inside the cabin can use the gloves affixed on the booth to collect samples from people sitting outside the booth.
According to officials, each time after the samples are collected, the gloves and the chair, on which the person whose samples were collected sat, will be disinfected.
“This method will keep the health professionals and also the hospitals safe as the booths will be installed in school or college premises,” Sabrina said.
It will also reduce the sufferings of people, as they do not have constantly call the hotline numbers for tests. They can go to the booths for voluntary testing.
The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control, and Research (IEDCR) had started testing suspected cases on January 28, at a time when the coronavirus infection was taking a heavy toll on China.
Until march, only the IEDCR had the ability to carry out tests for Covid-19 in Bangladesh.
Over the last few weeks, testing facilities have been expanded to 14 labs -- nine in Dhaka and the rest in five other districts.
A South Korean hospital introduced this testing facility outside the H Plus Yangji Hospital in Seoul.

The other deadly ‘virus’

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epicentre of the disease, we could have thought that we are not going to be affected. But when it spread to Italy and the evidence was clear that it was carried by travellers, we have allowed flights from China to operate till March 28. What could have led us to this inexplicable and “shooting ourselves in the foot” decision?
Then when Italy became the epicentre of the pandemic in Europe, we allowed returnees from Europe -- more than two hundred thousand of them -- to just walk into Bangladesh. In the name of screening what had at the airport was just a handheld temperature check gun.
Then came the fiasco with quarantine. In contrast to the declared policy of hundred percent quarantine on arrival, which proved to be a joke, no preparation was made to handle the volume of traffic. Earlier when students from China were flown back, they had to go through a well-organised quarantine procedure. But when the influx from Europe flooded our airport, the facilities proved highly inadequate because of abysmal preparation leading the authorities to abandon the idea.
Then came the most crucial mistake of all -- home quarantine without adequate preparation. Returnees from Europe, especially those from Italy, were allowed to return to their villages

with instructions to remain in “self-quarantine” without thinking whether it was practical and without ensuring that people understood what “home quarantine” meant. The blunder was further exacerbated by not keeping a record of their cell phone numbers -- which most returnees or their relatives had -- and their home addresses. This precluded any possibility of monitoring them later.
The “inefficiency virus” that Sheikh Hasina has had and will continue to have to grapple with is a multifaceted threat not necessarily confined to a set of inefficient individual officials. Its most debilitating manifestation is a lack of coordination -- the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. It exists at almost all levels -- between ministerial, within them, within departments of respective ministries, within sections of departments and finally between officials who run them as they are more interested in ensuring that protocol and hierarchy are maintained rather than whether a work is done or not.
The effect of a lack of coordination was well exhibited by the way our health sector functioned where the minister himself went public with the compliant that he did not know what was going on. The early gulf between claims and reality in terms of preparation of testing facilities, hospitals beds, availability of ventilators, availability of doctors at

REVISED GROWTH PROJECTIONS IN S ASIA (in %)				
Country	Fiscal year	2019	2020 (f)	2021 (f)
Afghanistan	Dec-Dec	2.9	-5.9 to -3.8	3.3 to 3.9
Bangladesh	July-June	8.2	2.0 to 3.0	1.2 to 2.9
Bhutan	July-June	3.9	2.2 to 2.9	2.0 to 2.5
India	Apr-March	6.1	4.8 to 5.0	1.5 to 2.8
Maldives	Jan-Dec	5.2	-13 to -8.5	6.3 to 7.3
Nepal	Mid Jul-mid Jul	7.1	1.5 to 2.8	1.4 to 2.9
Pakistan	July-June	3.3	-2.2 to -1.3	0.3 to 0.9
Sri Lanka	Jan-Dec	2.6	-3.0 to -0.5	0.2 to 1.2
f: forecast		SOURCE: WORLD BANK		

Outlook is grim

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countrywide shutdown enforced by the government from March 26 to flatten the spread on coronavirus.
And the Bangladesh government has more fiscal space than the other nations in South Asia as its external debt is low and its budget deficit has largely been within the responsible bound of 5 percent.
Although the first confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Bangladesh were not announced until March 8, the government had started its contingency planning two months ago, said Hartwig Schafer, the WB’s vice-president for the South Asia regions.
“We are all in uncharted territory, so you can’t be too early on the planning for such events,” he said, adding that the Bangladesh government is doing the best it can given the resources in hand and the extraordinary circumstances.
The government has acted quickly with public health directives, stimulus package and scaled-up social protection programmes, said Mercy Meiyang Tembon, the WB’s country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan.
The WB is willing to make available more than \$6 billion for Bangladesh to tackle the outbreak and also jumpstart the economy once the lethal pathogen has been extinguished.
It is now working to divert funds it had approved projects previously. The lender has approved 46 projects worth about \$12 billion, and more than half of the sum has not been disbursed yet due to slow progress of the projects.
The WB is now looking to force start a \$300 million cash transfer project it had approved earlier but was taking a while to get off the ground.
It is also working with the other multilateral lenders like its sister concern the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to arrange more funding.
Given the uncertainty surrounding the duration of the pandemic and its economic and death tolls, the multilateral lender forecasts the GDP growth next fiscal year would be between 1.2 percent and 2.9 percent.
The Bangladesh economy will be “significantly impacted” by the coronavirus juggernaut, it said.
The low-income, people, especially informal workers in the hospitality, retail trade and transport sectors, and the small- and medium-sized enterprises will be hit hard.
“Poor people have a higher likelihood to lose their work and have no buffers to absorb a loss in income. Migrant workers who had escaped rural poverty by finding work in cities are forced back into rural poverty again,” the report said.
But the economy will particularly be knocked on two fronts: remittance inflows and garment exports, both sources of foreign currency for the country and livelihood for many marginally poor.
The decline in national and global demand for manufactured goods, particularly in the garment sector, risks creating unemployment and deepening poverty.
With 81 percent of total exports coming from the textile and garments sector, Bangladesh will suffer disproportionately, in part because the countries that suffered the largest

outbreaks are also the largest buyers of garments from Bangladesh, the report said.
On the other hand, some construction and infrastructure projects stopped in the country because equipment could not be imported, and technical staff could not travel.
The rest of South Asia is not faring any better though and is on course for its worst economic performance in 40 years.
Growth in the region, which comprises eight countries, will fall to a range between 1.8 and 2.8 percent in 2020, down from 6.3 percent projected six months ago, thanks to halting economic activity, collapsing trade, and greater stress in the financial and banking sectors.
India’s GDP is forecasted to grow at 1.5-2.8 percent, while Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives will register negative growth this year.
In case of prolonged and broad national lockdowns, the WB warned of a worst-case scenario in which the entire region would experience a negative growth rate this year.
This deteriorated forecast will linger in 2021, with growth projected to hover between 3.1 and 4 percent, down from the previous 6.7 percent estimate.
The priority for all South Asian governments is to contain the virus spread and protect their people, especially the poorest who face considerably worse health and economic outcomes, Schafer said.
“The Covid-19 crisis is also an urgent call-to-action moment to pursue innovative policies and jumpstart South Asian economies once the crisis is over. Failure to do so can lead to long-term growth disruptions and reverse hard-won progress in reducing poverty,” he added.
In the short-term, the report recommends preparing weak healthcare systems for greater Covid-19 impacts as well as providing safety nets and securing access to food, medical supplies and necessities for the most vulnerable.
To minimise short-term economic pain, the report calls for establishing temporary work programmes for unemployed migrant workers, enacting debt relief measures for businesses and individuals and easing inter-regional customs clearance to speed up import and export of essential goods.
Once lockdown restrictions are loosened, South Asian governments should adopt expansionary fiscal policies combined with a monetary stimulus to keep credit flowing in their economies.
Since many South Asian countries have limited fiscal space, these policies should target people worst hit by the freeze on economic activity.
The report urges governments to adopt temporary spending measures and coordinate with international financial partners to avoid unsustainable long-term debt levels and fiscal deficits.
After tackling the immediate Covid-19 threat, South Asian countries must keep their sovereign debt sustainable through fiscal prudence and debt relief initiatives, Timmer said.
“And looking beyond the present crisis, lie great opportunities to expand digital technologies for payment systems and distant learning to unlock remote areas in South Asia.”