



A hawker sits with an array of newspapers for sale on the footpath of the deserted Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. Despite the entire country going into a virtual shutdown over the novel coronavirus pandemic, the print news media continues to soldier on to produce their daily editions, with a steadfast commitment to bring authentic information to the public.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

# Doctors in Ctg worried by patients’ undisclosed info

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

A sense of apprehension has gripped doctors and healthcare providers in Chattogram, after the first coronavirus patient of the port city potentially infected his medical attendants at a private hospital by excluding vital information from his contact history.

The 67-year-old, who was detected Covid-19 positive on Friday evening, primarily withheld the information that his daughter came from Saudi Arabia recently. As a result, doctors and healthcare providers treating the patient did not take protective measures, said Dr Hasan Shahriar Kabir, director (Chattogram division) of Directorate General of Health Services.

Three doctors and 15 nurses and staffers of a private hospital -- who came in contact with the patient -- were sent to home quarantine on Friday evening, he added. "This trend of concealing information puts healthcare providers at risk," said Dr Hasan.

Meanwhile, many patients alleged that they hide such information so that they are not deprived of treatment. SM Nazer Hossain, central vice president of Consumers’ Association of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star that patients now do not get to see doctors at chambers, they rather go to hospitals.

"Many patients with symptoms like fever and cough have been refused treatment at hospitals," he said, adding, "So patients conceal their history, fearing refusal."

"Safety of doctors is a must but at the

same time the rights of patients have to be ensured," he said. Both doctors and patients should be able to trust each other and it's the responsibility of the authorities concerned to ensure a safe atmosphere for them, he added.

Contacted, Prof Dr Selim Muhammad Jahangir, former principal of Chattogram Medical College, said patients should provide accurate information when asked by doctors. "If a doctor gets infected due to concealing information by a patient, there is a chance that others might get affected as a physician tends to many people."

"If a person who came in contact with an expatriate has fever or flu, he or she should go to hospitals designated by the government. That person should not go to a general hospital, concealing information," said Dr Jahangir.

Contacted, Dr Faisal Iqbal Chowdhury, general secretary of Bangladesh Medical Association, Chattogram, requested all not to hide information from doctors. "If you hide information, you'll put both your and the doctor's lives at risk."

Regarding patients' allegation of being denied treatment, he said there are isolation wards at different hospitals. These hospitals are bound to receive and treat patients. "Do not be worried... you will get treatment."

Chattogram Civil Surgeon Dr Sheikh Fazle Rabbi also said suspected coronavirus patients are being admitted to isolation wards of designated hospitals. Patients do not need to hide information, fearing refusal of treatment, he added.

# Caught up in uncertainty

Urban poor in high stress, finds Brac univ study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The coronavirus pandemic has created high level of psychological stress on people living in informal settlements in Dhaka city, said Brac University, citing a new study report.

In a release sent to The Daily Star yesterday, the university said the study found narratives from the respondents had a common theme and most families were "extremely anxious about the continued uncertainty in their lives".

The study was part of Brac University's James P Grant School of Public Health's (JPGSPH) series of rapid research assessments including surveys throughout the country in informal settlements to understand the brunt of the pandemic on the lives of diverse communities.

In Dhaka city, about 80 case studies were conducted to explore daily experiences as

well as emotional and mental well-being of inhabitants of six slums located in both city corporations.

Residents who participated in the interviews were mostly informal sector workers who once relied on daily incomes. They were generally the most vulnerable to the impending pandemic.

The respondents shared they were grappling with daily emotions of "panic, restlessness, hopelessness, fear, and were occasionally breaking down", as uncertainly over the current situation increases.

Living in congested spaces with inadequate access to clean water and improved sanitation creates another level of anxiety, as several respondents shared they were unable to maintain the recommended precautions.

Some respondents reported physical manifestation of continued stress, saying

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

# SBMCH unprepared to tackle dengue as mosquitoes buzz aloud in Barishal

Testing equipment out of order; city corporation drives inadequate

SUSHANTA GOSH, Barishal

After a short-lived respite from mosquitoes and dengue, residents of different parts of Barishal are now again enduring the menace as the number of mosquitoes has been on the rise.

However, Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH), the major state-run healthcare facility in the division, is not yet prepared to treat dengue patients.

No facilities to provide such treatment has been introduced to the hospital. Moreover, its lone dengue detection machine has been out of order for a long time.

Besides, most doctors and nurses are now busy serving patients with coronavirus symptoms.

Last year, 14 patients died from dengue at the hospital and at least 3,500 received treatment, said SBMCH sources.

Hospital Director Dr Bakir Hossain said, "We have appealed to the health ministry for a new machine a year ago, but to no avail. Besides, we need more technicians."

"At present, there are only five technicians at the pathology department, which is enough for a 500-bed hospital. But the hospital had been upgraded to a 1,000-bed one year ago. So, we need to double

our manpower to tackle regular health service," he added.

Dr Sudip Halder, president of Inpatient Department Doctors Association, said if dengue patients start arriving, they will face severe crises as they are not ready yet.

Seeking anonymity, several intern doctors alleged that around 88 doctors out of 100 are skipping duties in fear of coronavirus, leaving them to tackle the situation during this crisis.

The hospital authorities admitted the allegation. During a recent visit to the hospital, this correspondent also saw only a handful of senior doctors on duty.

SBMCH Deputy Director Dr Abdur Razzak said the situation was not supposed to be like this. The doctors were provided with personal protective equipment, he added.

A 125-bed isolation ward was set up at a separate building for Covid-19 patients, he said, adding that eight doctors, eight nurses and four assistants were assigned to discharge duties by rotation.

But other doctors have to serve patients too, said an administrative official of the hospital. "We are trying to resolve the matter," the official added.

Director Bakir Hossain added, SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

# In dire straits

Locked-in sex workers at M'singh brothel appeal for help amid coronavirus crisis

OUR CORRESPONDENT, M'singh

Some 300 sex workers of a brothel in Mymensingh city are in need of immediate relief as most are passing days unfed ever since a lockdown had been enforced there to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Appealing for help, they said they no longer have money to pay for food for themselves or their children due to the sudden closure of the brothel in the city's Station Road area. If they were informed beforehand, they could have tried to save up as much as possible, inhabitants of the brothel added.

"We were locked down on March 21; since then we have been completely cut off from rest of the country," said Hasna Begum.

"I have been living here for over 35 years and never have I experienced such a food crisis," said the 50-year-old.

She said there are some 320 sex workers at the brothel, while the total number of population including children is over 500. Some children live with their

mothers inside the brothel while others are kept outside in rented houses for their education, said Hasna.

"We are in dire straits... many of us have to support our families back home as well," she said, adding that right before the countrywide lockdown around 50 of them left the brothel. "But the rest of us stuck here are struggling to survive."

Once in a while they are given help, but it is not sufficient.

On March 26, Brac gave relief packs to 320 sex workers there, Each containing 5kg rice, 2kg dal, edible oil and potato.

On Thursday, some students of Government Ananda Mohan College gave 70 relief packets to them, they said. On Saturday, the local ward commissioner handed over relief (3kg rice per person) among 180 sex workers.

Lipi Akter (30) said, "We did receive some aid but it's not enough. I have to take care of my children with the help I get."

Runa Akter, a 35-year-old mother of two, said many socio-cultural and political

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

# US-Bangla gets permission to fly with cargo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US-Bangla Airlines has received government permission to operate cargo flights, in a bid to facilitate export and import.

The airlines will operate its maiden cargo flight next week, US-Bangla said in a release yesterday.

It will primarily carry cargo to Singapore, Malaysia, China, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, India, Qatar, Bahrain and UAE, the press release said.

Products including personal protective equipment, sanitiser, gloves and masks will be imported using four Boeing-737 aircrafts.

Besides, US-Bangla will also ferry emergency goods, especially garment products and vegetables.

Each aircraft will carry 20 tonnes of cargo items.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

A man is stopped by Bangladesh Army personnel near Babubazar area on Saturday, with a medical head cap pulled down to his mouth and a face mask tucked under his chin. While everyone is trying to protect themselves against contracting the coronavirus, lack of awareness on how to use safety gear can leave many susceptible. The man was eventually sent back home after he could not give a satisfactory explanation of why he left home.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Police are regularly providing food to people living on the streets amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Yesterday, five police vehicles roamed around the streets of the capital's Wari and distributed packed meals among those in need.

# Giraffe born at national zoo

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh National Zoo has been closed since March 20 amid the coronavirus outbreak, but new life has arrived there regardless, as a baby giraffe was born on Saturday.

The giraffe has been named Wuhan, said Dr Nurul Islam, curator of the zoo. The name marks the unusual times during which the giraffe was born.

The baby giraffe is a boy, and it's the tenth giraffe at the zoo currently.

The curator said the baby is in good health.

Four giraffes were brought to the zoo in 2012, of whom one died two years ago. However, seven giraffe babies were born in the zoo since then, including Wuhan.

"The animals are getting proper food and medicare," said Dr Nurul.

A hippopotamus at the zoo also gave birth last month, bringing their total number to 16, he said.

As the zoo is free of crowds, animals are getting favourable atmosphere to breed, he added.

There are 2778 animals and birds in the national zoo which is located on 187 acres of land in Mirpur.

# Grameen orgs step up to tackle Covid-19

CITY DESK

The Grameen group of organisations have come forward with various initiatives to help combat the coronavirus crisis.

With a view to ensure safety and protection of doctors, nurses and all health workers, Grameen Fabrics and Fashion Ltd has manufactured 20,000 PPE and supplied those to different hospitals and medical centres. Production of another 10,000 PPE is currently underway, said a press release.

Besides, steps have been taken for the import of specific cloth and seam sealing tape, which will be used for manufacturing 20,000 PPE for doctors, nurses and health personnel performing duties in intensive care units (ICU). These raw materials are expected to arrive in the country by April 18, the release added.

Grameen Fabrics and Fashion is now working to produce a supply of 50,000 PPE including 20,000 pieces of the highest grade ones. These are being produced with the financial support of Grameen Telecom.

During the initial production, these PPE were distributed to Kurmitola General Hospital; Kuwait Maitree Hospital; Health Division of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport; Sir Salimullah Medical College and Mitford Hospital; Khulna Children's Hospital; Ambulance Owners Cooperative Society; Uttara Women's Medical College and Hospital; DSK Hospital; Swisscontact Bangladesh; Uttara Modern Hospital and Bangladesh Medical Association.

Along with that, within the next 10 days Grameen Telecom will receive 200,000 surgical masks; 50,000 N95 masks; 50,000 KN95 masks; 50,000 hand gloves and 10,000 protective goggles.

Grameen Telecom will supply such emergency equipment to doctors, nurses and health personnel nationally. These will be given to medical organisations and facilities after necessary consultation with relevant

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5