



The Daily Star



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Darkness will fade away

Says PM, unveils four programmes to tackle economic fallout from Covid-19



- » Doctors urged not to lose morale
- » Tk 100 crore being allocated for health workers
- » No food crisis now in the country
- » No scarcity of safety equipment
- » Stimulus packages worth Tk 95,619 crore announced so far

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed optimism that the darkness of the coronavirus pandemic would fade away one day. She said her government has already announced various stimulus packages worth Tk 95,619 crore which is 3.3 percent of the GDP. Addressing the nation yesterday evening ahead of Pahela Baishakh 1427, Hasina announced her government's four strategic programmes, which would be implemented in three phases until 2023-24 fiscal year. The programmes -- increasing public expenditure, introducing fiscal packages, expanding social safety net programmes and increasing supply of money -- are aimed at overcoming the possible adverse impact of Covid-19 on the national economy. The PM said the first phase (immediate) programmes will be implemented over the next three months of the current fiscal year, while the short phase in the next fiscal year (2020-21) and the medium phase in SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



The Daily Star wishes its valued readers, patrons, well-wishers and advertisers a happy Bangla New Year 1427

No festivities but resolve to defeat ills

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and WASIM BIN HABIB

At the crack of dawn today, an air of festivity was supposed to flow across the country. An overwhelming majority -- irrespective of SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

HOLIDAY NOTICE
The Daily Star offices will remain closed today on the occasion of Pahela Baishakh. Therefore, the newspaper will not come out tomorrow.

BANGLADESH UPDATE	182 New cases in 24hrs	803 Total cases	39 Death	42 Recovery	GLOBAL UPDATE	116,052 Deaths	1,870,076 Total cases
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BUSINESS
CPD for more cash aid for the poor
The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) yesterday urged the government to provide some 1.9 crore poor households Tk 2,000 in cash every week for two months, a move that would have a multiplier effect of Tk 186,573 crore on the economy. The exercise would set the government back by less than Tk 30,000 crore, but its multiplier effect would be more than six times. The cash transfer will be an indirect stimulus for the large businesses involved in the supply of essential commodities as domestic demand for their products will be generated, said Fahmida Khatun, executive director of CPD, at a virtual media briefing yesterday.
STORY ON B1

On the front line, true to their oath

While some taking safer path, many risking their lives to fight the pandemic; so far, 60 of them including 32 doctors have contracted the virus

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY, RAFIUL ISLAM and RASHIDUL HASAN
Although there are criticisms over the role of some healthcare employees, many of them are giving it all on the frontline of the battle against coronavirus. Over 60 health department officials, including 32 doctors, have already tested positive for coronavirus. To make matters worse, many patients reportedly hide their health and travel histories. Besides, there are questions over the quality of personal protective equipment (PPE) supplied to them by the authorities. The rate of infection among healthcare employees in Bangladesh is higher than that in many other countries, and if the government does not take steps to protect them, the challenge to contain the spread of coronavirus would be much stiffer, experts and physicians said. Now that the virus is spreading within

communities, all healthcare employees must get proper PPE, and hospitals must ensure rigorous triage, they added. Against this backdrop, many doctors, in adherence to Hippocratic Oath they took during their internships, have devoted themselves to treating Covid-19 patients. The Hippocratic Oath means that doctors will give the utmost priority to the patients and they will ensure the secrecy of the patients. Experts said, doctors at different private hospitals should be involved in the coronavirus response as the number of government doctors are too small. As the country witnesses a sharp rise in detected coronavirus cases and deaths, the role of health service providers becomes crucial. A total of 803 people tested positive for coronavirus and 39 of them had died, according to Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR). SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

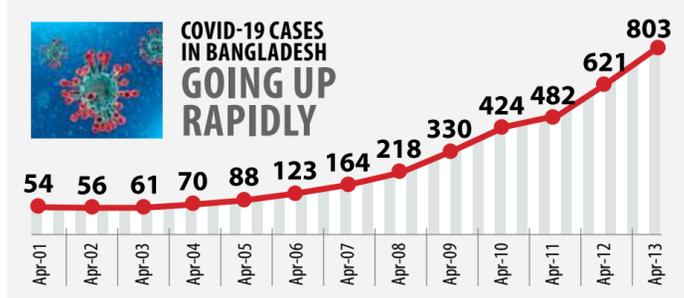
Tracking source big challenge

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government's disease control agency, IEDCR, has been able to track down the patient zero in a cluster but failed to identify how he or she got infected with coronavirus in the first place. A number of clusters have been identified in different districts, each with three to 30 patients, according to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR). "We identified the clusters and how the virus spread at the community level but could not identify how the first person of a cluster got infected. It is worrisome for us," Prof Dr Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of IEDCR, told The Daily Star yesterday. Experts say contact tracing is the key to containing the virus spread and it is hardly impossible if the source of community transmission is not traced. SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Community transmission on

Health minister finally admits; a six-year-old dies in Chattogram from coronavirus



STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday admitted that the community transmission of novel coronavirus began in the country and reported 182 new Covid-19 cases, so far the highest in a single day. The total number of coronavirus cases now stands at 803. Besides, five more people have died after contracting the virus, which takes the death toll to 39. "The community transmission has already started... we've to stay alert and ensure that it doesn't spread further," Zahid Maleque said at the regular bulletin on the coronavirus situation. Earlier, the IEDCR had said the highly contagious virus, which is wreaking havoc on several countries, including the US, Italy and Spain, might have spread at Bangladesh's community level but "on a SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Six people die showing symptoms

STAR REPORT
Six people died with coronavirus-like symptoms in five districts since Sunday afternoon. Health officers have collected samples of those who died of flu-like symptoms to test whether they were infected with the virus. After their deaths, local administrations locked down their houses and adjoining buildings to prevent the risk of spreading the virus. Our Correspondents from different districts reported on the deaths and the subsequent situations after talking to local government officials of the respective districts. In Madaripur, a 60-year-old farmer died at Rajor Upazila Health Complex around 1:00pm on Sunday. He had been suffering from fever, cold and respiratory problems. In Narayanganj, a 70-year-old man died at the city's Nandipara area on Sunday, after suffering from SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



Workers of Tex Tailor Export (BD) Ltd blocked Airport Road in the capital demanding three months' arrears and the running month's salary. Inset, the workers holding placards and gathering together with their demands, ignoring social distancing, which is crucial in the fight against coronavirus.

UNPAID WAGES, ARREARS RMG workers still out on streets

Stage protests in capital, Ctg; state minister warns owners of action for failing to pay wages by April 16

STAR REPORT
Garment workers continued their protests yesterday in several areas in the capital, on its outskirts and Chattogram amid the ongoing shutdown, demanding payment of wages for March, and protesting termination and layoffs of workers. They took to the streets for the third consecutive day in Uttara, Savar, Ashulia, Gazipur and Tongi, and some parts of the port city. Meanwhile, Begum Monnujan Sufian, state minister for labour and employment, urged the apparel factory owners to pay all workers by April 16 their wages for March. In a statement, she warned that stern legal action would be taken against the factory owners who will fail to pay workers within the deadline. In Savar and Ashulia, several thousand workers of four garment factories blocked the Hemayetpur-Singair road in Tetuljhora area, demanding payment of wages and arrears. Three of the factories were closed on February 20 without paying workers and staffers several months' wages. The management of the factories had promised to pay the workers but they didn't, said a number of staffers and labour leaders. "We have no money to buy food. If we do not get our arrears, we will die along with our family members," said Md Fazlu, a worker of Raquef Apparel that runs three units in Savar. Talking to this newspaper, Kabir Hosen, vice president SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

'Rice ATM' feeds Vietnam's poor

REUTERS, Ho Chi Minh City

A Vietnamese entrepreneur in Ho Chi Minh City has invented a 24/7 automatic dispensing machine providing free rice for people out of work following an ongoing nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Vietnam has reported 262 Covid-19 cases, and no deaths so far, but as a result of a 15-day social distancing programme that began on March 31 many small businesses have been shuttered and thousands of people temporarily laid off from work.

Nguyen Thi Ly's husband was among those who have lost their job.

"This rice ATM has been helpful. With this one bag of rice, we can have enough for one day," said the 34-year-old mother of three children. "Now, we only need other food. Our neighbors sometimes gave us some leftover food, or we have instant noodles."

The machine distributes a 1.5kg (3.3lb) bagful of rice from a small silo to waiting workers, many of whom are street sellers or people who earned a living from cash-in-hand jobs like housekeeping or selling lottery tickets.

Hoang Tuan Anh, the businessman behind the idea, had initially donated a batch of smart doorbells to hospitals

in Ho Chi Minh City before turning his technological expertise to food distribution.

Similar 'rice ATMs' have been set up in other big cities like Hanoi, Hue and Danang, according to state media.

Employees monitoring the rice ATM declined to comment, but Anh told state media he wanted people to feel they still had access to food and resources, despite the current economic difficulties they found themselves in.

"I refer to this machine as a 'rice ATM' because people can withdraw rice from it, assured that there are still good people out there who want to give them a second chance," he said.

While many in the Communist-ruled country can rely on a social safety-net, and the government has introduced a stimulus package designed to help society's most vulnerable, some people living on the margin, like Ly and her family, have not received enough support.

"I read about this rice ATM on the internet. I came to check it out, and couldn't believe it came out for real. I really hope the sponsors would keep doing this until the end of the pandemic," said Ly, adding that her family's biggest problem was now paying their rent.



People get rice from a 24/7 automatic rice dispensing machine, 'Rice ATM', during the outbreak of the coronavirus disease in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Community transmission

FROM PAGE 1
limited scale." It also said the outbreak was restricted to certain clusters in the country.

Zahid said 1,570 samples were tested in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday. Besides, three more people recovered in the 24 hours, raising the total number of recovery cases to 42.

No details on the newly infected or deceased were disclosed in the bulletin, which was aired online.

The minister reiterated that Bangladesh was still in a better condition compared to the USA and Europe. "No country can treat millions of patients in its hospitals," he said.

He claimed that the government was taking all-out steps to fight the outbreak. "We're allowing every public and private medical college at the district level to treat coronavirus patients."

He also said negotiations were underway with private hospitals, including Shahabuddin Hospital and Anwar Khan Medical College Hospital in the capital, for the treatment of Covid-19 patients. "We're also adding private hospitals in every district to this list."

As of Sunday, the virus spread to 29 districts out of the country's 64 districts. In the capital, it spread to 81 neighbourhoods, shows official data.

In the bulletin, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said the number of tests carried out in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday was 17 percent higher than that of the previous day.

She said 5,684 people were placed in home quarantine, 484 in institutional quarantine and 84 in isolation across the country.

She urged people to stay at home and maintain the sneezing and coughing etiquette to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Meanwhile, a six-year-old boy, who

Tracking source

FROM PAGE 1
"Community transmission began a few days ago and we are now at stage-4, which means an epidemic," Jahidur Rahman, virologist and assistant professor at Shahid Suhrawardy Medical College, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The reason for worry is that if we cannot identify the source, how will the spread be contained?" he asked.

The virologist further said, "We have to impose strict lockdown and bring all symptomatic and asymptomatic cases under screening within the locked down areas."

Currently, people in almost every corner of the city and many districts across the country have been affected, he said.

Prof Flora also warned that the coronavirus outbreak in Bangladesh will become an epidemic if people do not follow the stringent guidelines on social distancing.

The number of new cases has been jumping daily since April 4, amidst a nationwide shutdown of offices and the public transport system.

Some 40 of the 64 districts have now confirmed Covid-19 patients.

Yesterday, 182 people tested positive for Covid-19 in the previous 24 hours. With this, the total number of infected reached 803 and the death toll now stands at 39.

That overcrowded Dhaka is the epicentre of the outbreak is not a surprise -- as of Sunday, 52 percent of total Covid-19 patients identified are in the capital.

"Dhaka is the worst hit because the coronavirus patients travelled through Dhaka and lockdown was not strictly followed here," said Prof Flora.

"We found that many people who came from abroad said they will stay in their village homes but we later found they stayed on in Dhaka," she added.

In Tolarbagh, the IEDCR tracked where the transmission began but could not identify how the first patient was infected. The same goes for Basabo

tested positive for Covid-19, died in Chattogram General Hospital early yesterday.

The boy was admitted to Patiya Upazila Health Complex on Saturday as he was suffering from fever and diarrhoea, said Dr Hasan Shahriar Kabir, divisional director of the DGHS in Chattogram.

His sample was collected and sent to Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases at Faujdarhat to test for coronavirus.

After he tested positive for Covid-19, he was rushed to Chattogram General Hospital where he died around 2:30am yesterday.

INFECTION NUMBERS TO RISE: EXPERT

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday evening, Prof Nazrul Islam, virologist and former vice chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), said, "What we've understood in the last few days is that the [coronavirus] infection rate will go high soon."

He then criticised the authorities for coming up with "incomplete information" in the daily bulletins.

"I have never seen such type of press notes. They are hiding information," he said, demanding "right and complete" information from health officials.

He also criticised Zahid Maleque, saying the health minister, in the bulletin, said many were not obeying the government lockdown, but did not mention anything about the measures to be taken against them.

Prof ABM Abdullah, personal physician of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, however, thinks the infection rate might drop after three to four days.

"The law enforcement agencies are enforcing the nationwide lockdown strictly across the country. If they can continue it, the transmission will stop. So, the next 3-4 days are crucial for us."

He, however, agreed that people in many places were not staying indoors.

-- patient zero has not been identified.

After Dhaka, Narayanganj is another virus hotspot with 107 patients testing positive for coronavirus, as of Sunday.

Health officials said the spread in the district was caused from mass gatherings but they were unable to identify how the first person was infected.

Prof Flora said all the catalysts for the outbreak, including gatherings and returnees from abroad, were present in the case of Narayanganj.

"We do not know and we are not working on it," said ASM Alamgir, principal scientific officer of IEDCR, when asked about this shortcoming in tracing the spread. He said they are focused on testing and treating patients now.

Narayanganj district has been locked down since April 8, as well as parts of the capital. But dodging the eyes of law enforcers, people are still on the streets, increasing the risk of further spread of the virus.

Health officials, requesting anonymity, said the country is at stage-4. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), stage-4 means the spread of the virus is practically uncontrollable and there are many major clusters of infection all over the country.

"There is no confusion that we are at stage-4 and the situation is epidemic here," said Muzaherul Huq, former regional adviser of WHO's Southeast Asia.

If the government takes an appropriate strategy and fixes its priority areas, it will be easy to deal with and eventually overcome the crisis, he added.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque said yesterday, "Community transmission of the virus has already occurred in the country, but we have to be careful so that it does not grow."

The minister urged everyone to stay at home and abide by the guidelines to avoid contracting the virus.

Darkness will fade away

FROM PAGE 1
next three fiscal years.

"The shock of the world economic recession has become a cause of concern for our economy. We don't know how long this crisis will persist and how it will affect our economy. But we are working to face the possible economic adverse impact."

State-owned Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television simultaneously broadcast the PM's address. Private television channels and radio stations also aired the speech.

In her around 16-minute speech, Hasina said the government has taken up various programmes to protect the marginal people.

In this connection, she mentioned that the government has allocated 5 lakh tonnes of rice and 1 lakh tonnes of wheat for distribution among the low-income people for free and the market price of this allocation is Tk 2,503 crore.

For the low-income people living in urban areas, the sale of rice at Tk 10 under the OMS has started and 74,000 tonnes of rice would be distributed under this programme. The government had allotted Tk 251 crore to this, the PM added.

'DON'T LOSE MORALE'
Talking about physicians, nurses and

other health workers, Hasina asked them not to lose their morale during this crisis. She said the whole nation was there with them.

"Doctors, nurses and other health workers continue to provide treatment to Covid-19 patients from the frontline, ignoring the constraint of resources and the risk of death. Your profession is of such a challenge," she said.

The PM on behalf of the people of the country thanked and hailed the health workers, saying the government has already directed the authorities concerned to prepare a list of the health workers who are directly dealing with Covid-19 patients.

She said health workers would be given special honorarium as Tk 100 crore was being allocated to this end.

Hasina said a process is underway to introduce a special health insurance for physicians, nurses, other health workers, field-level administration officers, members of law enforcement agencies, Armed Forces and BGB, and other government employees directly involved in this regard.

If anyone gets contracted with Covid-19, there would be a health insurance of Tk 5-10 lakh for that person depending on the rank and position. In the case of death, one will get five times of the insurance

coverage amount. The allocation of Tk 750 crore is being kept aside for the health insurance and life insurance in this regard, she said.

Noting that there was no shortage of safety equipment, Hasina said the health workers would continue providing the optimum services keeping themselves protected.

She also urged every public and private hospital authorities to keep an eye on the situation so that the general patients were in no way got deprived of healthcare services.

Referring to agriculture, the PM said the continuation of regular agricultural production would not only be enough as it would have to be boosted in this time of dire crisis. "Don't leave any piece of land uncultivated so that the country doesn't see any food crisis in future."

The premier said a fund of Tk 5,000 crore is being created to provide running capital to the agricultural sector. From this fund, loans will be disbursed at 4 percent interest rate among the small and medium farmers in agriculture, fisheries, dairy and poultry sectors. Besides, an allocation of Tk 9,500 crore is being kept as the subsidy to the agriculture sector.

'NO FOOD CRISIS NOW'

On the front line, true to their oath

FROM PAGE 1
At least 32 doctors have tested positive for the coronavirus until April 12 and the number of infected health service providers is over 60, according to Bangladesh Doctors' Foundation.

Three of them are now at ICU while the number of doctors in quarantine is between 250 and 300, Nirupam Das, chief administrator of BDF told The Daily Star.

BDF, a platform of around 1 lakh doctors and medical students, collected the information from officials concerned, he said.

"If doctors are infected at such a rate, the healthcare system will collapse," he said.

In India, 8,504 people tested positive for coronavirus as of April 12 and of them, 289 died, according to NDTV.

At least 90 healthcare workers, including doctors and nurses, tested coronavirus positive in India, NDTV reports.

Nirupam said many healthcare employees got infected due to the lack of proper PPEs.

Besides, many patients hid their health histories when they came to hospitals and later some of them were test positive for Covid-19. Eventually, the ones who provided their treatment, got infected, he said.

Delayed introduction of triage at

hospitals is also responsible for the situation, he said.

Triage is the process of determining the priority of patients' treatment based on the severity of their condition or the likelihood of their recovery with or without treatment.

EXPERIENCE AND CHALLENGES
People sometimes do not cooperate with doctors and nurses when they test positive or come to hospitals with flu-like symptoms, some doctors said.

A man in Ramganj upazila of Lakshmipur, who was tested positive on Saturday, refused to come to hospital despite repeated requests by healthcare providers.

"Police had to intervene. They went to his village with an ambulance and brought him to the district hospital. The situation will be difficult to handle if people do not cooperate with us," said Civil Surgeon Abdul Gaffar of the district.

"People are hiding the covid-19-like symptoms... PPE is necessary for all healthcare providers now."

A doctor at Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital said, "Sometimes we do not have the time for lunch... We eat some biscuits and drink water. There is no fixed working hour for us now."

Kuwait-Bangladesh Maitree Hospital is a major hospital for

treating Covid-19 patients.

"We do not want any extra money or benefits. What we need is appreciation, not criticism," he said.

Sometimes physicians have to do the job of other employees, he said.

Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) on Saturday suspended six doctors of the hospital after they allegedly declined to treat Covid-19 patients. Besides, there are reports that doctors declined to treat suspected coronavirus patients who died later.

Most private hospitals shuttered their gates after the outbreak. After criticism, however, they changed their decisions.

WHAT TO DO NOW

The government should ensure that the PPEs are "up to the mark", and triage must be followed properly, Nirupam said.

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former adviser (Southeast Asia Region) of the World Health Organization, said whenever doctors get a suspected Covid-19 patient, they must maintain proper distance.

The ideal practice should be to quarantine doctors and other health employees treating Covid-19 patients.

The authorities should ensure residential and other essential services to the doctors at the hospital,

Saudi quarantine offers temporary lifeline to struggling hotels

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has quarantined thousands of people in hotels, some in luxury suites, to combat Covid-19, throwing a temporary lifeline to an industry struggling just months after tourist visas were launched.

Faced with nearly 4,500 novel coronavirus infections -- the highest in the Gulf -- the petro-state has halted air travel, locked down cities and imposed nationwide curfews in a crisis that has dealt a blow to the nascent tourism sector.

Offering a ray of hope, however, the government is splurging millions of dollars to quarantine thousands of overseas travellers and those exposed to infected people in otherwise empty hotels around the kingdom.

One four-star hotel in central Riyadh with 100-plus rooms was left with only five guests in mid-March when the Saudi government offered four million riyals (\$1.06 million) a month for it to be used as a quarantine facility, an industry source told AFP.

Hasina said there was no food crisis now in the country as adequate food grains are there in government warehouses and the houses of farmers.

Noting that the country had a bumper yield of Aman crops in the season, she said it is expected that there will also be a bumper production of Boro paddy in the ongoing season.

PAHELA BAISHAKH

The PM said the government has imposed a ban on all outdoor programmes to celebrate Pahela Baishakh due to the deadly coronavirus.

"It has been done taking the greater public health condition into consideration," she said.

Hasina urged all not to plunge into fear and panic as it weakens human's resistance power. "Don't spread panic. We all have to face the situation with courage and the government is always beside you," she said.

She also mentioned that some vested quarters were trying to mislead people through spreading rumours which was not desirable at all at this crisis moment.

The PM asked the media outlets to publish authentic information with responsibility to support the government to face the pandemic.

he said.

Hospitals treating Covid-19 patients, must have the arrangement, he said.

"If making residential facilities at hospitals isn't possible, they [doctors] can be kept at hotels, but similar safety measures must be taken there," he told The Daily Star.

A doctor at Dhaka Medical College Hospital said the government should immediately involve doctors at different private hospitals in this fight, otherwise it would not be possible to manage the situation.

Many nurses and ward boys who still don't have PPE are exposed to the risks and they are putting their colleagues and family members at risk, he said wishing anonymity.

BANGLADESH'S STRENGTH
According to a 2018 DGHS bulletin, the number of registered BMBS doctors was 93,358 while 9,569 were registered as BDS.

A total of 25,615 doctors are employed against 27,409 posts at different facilities under DGHS, according to a March 2020 report.

Besides, around 75,000 doctors are involved in different private facilities, a DGHS official said.

Asked about the quality of PPE, Aminul Hasan, director (Hospital) at DGHS, said, "Now we have ensured the quality of PPE."

Six people

FROM PAGE 1
the same symptoms, while a 35-year-old man died of similar problems at his home at the city's Tanbazar area early yesterday.

Authorities concerned collected a sample from the body of the 70-year-old man, but a sample of the 35-year-old man could not be collected, said Sheikh Mostafa Ali, health officer of Narayanganj City Corporation, adding that the body was cremated before the sample could be collected.

In Noakhali, a 45-year-old man died of fever, vomiting and respiratory problems at his residence at Kesharpar union under Senbagh upazila early yesterday (Monday).

In Chapainawabganj, a 14-year-old boy, who was suffering flu like symptoms, died at his home at Shibganj upazila's Purbo Shyampur village on Sunday night.

In Rajbari, a 65-year-old man died at his home at Laxmikolpur Old Harisava area in the town on Sunday afternoon. He too was suffering from similar symptoms.

(Our Correspondents from Chattogram, Narayanganj, Noakhali, Chapainawabganj and Faridpur correspondents contributed to the story.)

A bleak Baishakh for restaurants

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Around 30,000 restaurants across the country were eagerly waiting for this year's Pahela Baishakh, expecting that they would get booming sales. But none of them could have imagined what would happen in the coming days.

Covid-19 has brought the whole country to a standstill, no celebrations, no hangouts, no nothing.

Like any other holiday, Pahela Baishakh normally sees people thronging restaurants and juice bars with their near and dear ones to celebrate.

But against the backdrop of rising infections and death toll, the government has prohibited all sorts of outdoor gatherings.

Restaurant owners and staffers are struggling to stay afloat in these trying times. The miseries that come when one's short of money to feed their family is often too much to bear.

"Staffers have gone to their homes after the shutdown, but recently they started reaching out to us, as they need money to survive," said Khandaker Ruhul Amin, president of Bangladesh Restaurant Owners Association.

"We are discouraging staffers to return to the capital," said Ruhul, also a director

of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries. "We're now making a list of staffers to extend some support."

Faisal Ahmed, owner of Faisal Juice Bar and Indian Food at the capital's Wari, has been operating the business for the last seven years.

Although Bangla New Year is only celebrated for one day, a huge number of customers visit restaurants for three to four days, he said.

"We always prepare for these special days round the year. This year, we bought Tk 50,000-60,000 worth of fruits, but now, we have no choice but to eat them ourselves. Some fruits were distributed among the staff and the shop has been completely closed for the shutdown," he added.

It's not just Faisal who is desperately trying to deal with the crisis. According to the association, some nine lakh people working at 30,000 restaurants, 8,000 of which are in Dhaka city alone, are all suffering.

"On last year's Pahela Baishakh, our sales shot up by nearly three times than the usual," said Md Sumonuzzaman, operation manager of Just Juice.

He said they have six outlets in Gulshan, SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Dhupkhola kitchen market's new home at the adjacent playground. Shops are spaced out to ensure there's enough room for shoppers to maintain social distancing. Inset, a recent photo shows the crowded situation that prevailed when the market operated on the roadside.



OLD DHAKA Kitchen market relocated to playground

HELEMI ALAM

To ensure social distancing, the capital's Dhupkhola kitchen market – which usually sits on the roadside – was shifted to Dhupkhola playground on Sunday.

The initiative was jointly taken by the local police administration and army personnel.

Since the beginning of the coronavirus-induced shutdown, the kitchen market posed significant threat to maintaining social distancing in the area, as it was running on the narrow, busy road adjoining the playground.

The road is only 13 feet wide, which narrows down even further due to the makeshift shops, making commute extremely congested. This is why it was tough to maintain social distancing here, said Officer-in-Charge of Gendaria Police Station Md Shaju Miah.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Brief JS session likely on Apr 18

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Duration of the upcoming seventh session of parliament is likely to be brief to avoid Covid-19 transmission, said sources at the parliament secretariat.

The session, scheduled to sit at 5pm on April 18, would be held for 30-40 minutes with special arrangements, and the least number of lawmakers required to fulfil the quorum would be asked to attend, they added.

The quorum requires the presence of at least 60 members.

Talking to The Daily Star, Chief Whip Noor-e-Alam Chowdhury said they were planning to make the session brief.

He, however, said the final decision regarding this would be made at the meeting of Jatiya Sangsad's Business Advisory Committee, the highest legislative body that determines the duration and businesses of the House.

Parliament secretariat officials said the session would end with a condolence motion on the demise of Shamsur Rahman, the AL lawmaker from Pabna-4.

No cheer for flower growers

MOHSIN MILON and MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Pahela Baishakh celebrations are never complete without flowers. Be it for decoration, presenting a bouquet to someone special or gracing the hair of women and children alike, flowers are an indispensable part of the spirit of the festivities.

Not just revelers, the Bangla new year also brings joy to flower farmers who eagerly wait for the festival every year to sell their treasured cultivation and turn a profit.

But this year it's different due to the coronavirus outbreak. Growers are incurring huge losses amid the countrywide shutdown to prevent the spread of the virus.

Upon walking along the villages in Jashore and Bogura, one would find no dearth of colours in the stretches of land filled with rose, tuberose, marigold and gerbera. But one would also see flower growers sitting idly with blank looks on their faces.

Growers in Godkhali area of Jashore fear that they will incur a loss of around Tk 100 crore due to the ongoing

shutdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus. They said the number of buyers has fallen drastically this year.

The Godkhali market, which used to be abuzz with activities before the Bangla new year with traders buying flowers in large quantities to sell across the country, now wears a deserted look. Out of desperation, the growers are selling flowers as cattle feed.

Some 5,500 farmers cultivated flowers in around 6,000 hectares of land in Jhikargacha upazila of Jashore this year, according to Godkhali Flower Society. They said due to favourable weather, farmers got bumper production.

Usually, farmers and traders target major festivals to double their profit. But this year, most major events got cancelled held due to coronavirus.

"I cultivated rose on two and half bighas of land. But I cannot sell those. Now, I'm using those as cattle feed," said Shajahan Miah, a flower grower in Godkhali.

"I have to collect some 1,500 to 2,000 roses from the garden daily. If

I don't do so, they will go bad and damage my garden. I'm using those roses as cattle feed," he told this correspondent yesterday.

Flower trader Sher Ali of Panisara area said all growers and traders are in a dire state this year. "I hope the authorities concerned will help us in this situation."

Contacted, Abdur Rahim, president of Bangladesh Flower Society, said, "The wholesale flower market at Godkhali has been closed since March 24. As a result, growers cannot sell flowers. On the other hand, they cannot keep flowers in their garden as those will go bad and eventually damage the gardens. They are in a severe crisis and need help."

"We demand that the government arrange special incentives and loans for growers to cover up losses," he added.

BOGURA GROWERS FACE UNCERTAINTY

Meanwhile, growers in Bogura are not faring any better.

At least 300 commercial flower SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Ensure food for the unemployed: Shujan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The coronavirus outbreak in Bangladesh has not only put the lives and livelihoods of people at risk, it has also caused a surge in unemployment, with the informal sector taking the biggest hit. People with small businesses and labourers who relied on daily income barely have any savings to keep themselves afloat during this time, said civil society organisation Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan).

"It is urgent to bring food to the poor people and save their lives. Our inadequate, corrupt, and inefficiently managed social security programmes cannot ensure food security of a large population of suddenly unemployed people," said the press release, signed by Shujan president M Hafizuddin Khan and secretary Dr Badiul Alam Majumder.

Considering the humanitarian reasons and in order to eliminate the current social unrest, the organisation demanded that lawmakers formulate and implement vigorous programmes immediately to ensure food security for the unemployed poor population.

According to Shujan, the shutdown is a huge dilemma for policymakers. On one hand, it must be enforced to contain the spread of the virus, while on the other, the shutdown is causing unemployment and food insecurity.

"It is a difficult decision that involves various scientific, economic, humanitarian and political considerations," said the press release.

Besides, in order to make informative policy decisions, Shujan also urged the authorities to conduct extensive tests across the country to understand the prevalence of coronavirus infection.

Relief looters to be dealt with strongly: Benazir

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

New Inspector General of Police Benazir Ahmed yesterday warned of stern action against those involved in misappropriation of relief goods during the coronavirus pandemic.

"We will not tolerate any misappropriation regarding relief. Strict action will be taken against those who will loot in the name of relief," said Benazir, also the outgoing Director General (DG) of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab).

He made the remarks from Rab headquarters, while addressing reporters through videoconference.

After serving five years and three months as Rab DG, he is expected to take over the charge of IGP tomorrow (April 15).

Benazir said, "Regrettably, even when the nation is battling the fallout of the coronavirus epidemic, we have seen that some are trying to plunder relief supplies. My clear message to them is that they will be dealt with a strong hand."

He called upon individuals and organisations to reach relief materials to doorsteps of people maintaining social

distancing. "You have to maintain social distancing strictly while conducting any relief activity or seek government organisations' assistance if needed."

Despite repeated calls by government to maintain physical distancing, many are violating it, he said.

Benazir said there is no scope to consider the government-announced countrywide general closure as a vacation, picnic or an opportunity to gossip at tea stalls.

In reply to a journalist's query about taking steps regarding recent robbery incidents in two medicine shops in Dhaka, Benazir said many people have become jobless due to the countrywide shutdown, which may create some social problems.

"As medicine shops have been allowed to remain open round the clock, those may become the target of miscreants. Criminals who were involved in the two incidents have already been arrested," he added.

Benazir further said, "Tomorrow (today) is the Bengali New Year. This year, the new year's mood is quite different. I wish everyone a Happy New Year and request to maintain social and physical distance."

Mosquito menace returns to Ctg

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Cg

As summer approaches, mosquitoes are becoming quite the headache for port city dwellers.

In many areas across the city, mosquitoes descend upon neighbourhoods every day after sunset. But these days, even during daytime, their numbers are so high that people are finding it hard to stay home.

Under normal circumstances, this would be less of a problem. But what makes this more problematic is the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and the lockdown strategy implemented to fight it.

"I cannot read in the evening as swarms of mosquitoes keep preying on me," said Shuvesha Ghosh, a resident of the city's Rahattar Pool area, adding, "I have tried aerosol, vapourisers and mosquito racket, but nothing seems to work."

Shuvesha said her family has been suffering from this for over a month. "The nuisance started at the end of February," she said. "I honestly don't know what the city



PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

All they needed was a bamboo pole filled with mud and water to create an ideal mosquito breeding ground. This photo was taken from Gate-2 area recently.

corporation is doing [to contain the situation]."

Ratna Raha, a retired schoolteacher from Jamal Khan area, said her family finds it hard to stay at home even during daytime due to incessant mosquito bites.

"We have given up after trying out

sewers and around garbage dumps, but we do not see any initiative from Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) to clean them up."

"CCC officials should regularly clean the drains and canals and spray medicine to destroy mosquito larvae and eggs," he said.

When the government has urged people to stay at home to prevent contamination of Covid-19, residents in the city cannot do so in peace due to mosquito nuisance, said many residents.

"The mayor urged officials to start spraying anti-mosquito medicine in the city at the end of March," Asad Haider, a resident of Bibir Hat area, said, adding, "but we have not seen any CCC staff come to our area to do that. The anti-mosquito drive should have started much earlier. Had CCC started it from mid-February, we would've been more at ease now."

In addition to all of this, as drainage works across the city are halted due to the Covid-19

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Ushering in Noboborsho online

Barishal cultural activists gear up for a different celebration

OUR CORRESPONDENT, BARISHAL

Cultural activists of Barishal city have arranged a Mangal Shobhajatra that fits the time. Adapting with the ongoing shutdown all over the country, the activists are taking the age-old tradition online this year.

"Thousands of people come together to celebrate the festival typically," said Roni Das, an organiser of the initiative. "But this year, it isn't possible to celebrate Bangla new year in the usual fashion, as it would put people under risk of infection."

"So we decided to celebrate in our own homes. Photos and videos will be uploaded on social media and that is how we will bring people together online to celebrate," he added.

Farjana Priya, another cultural activist, said she will come on Facebook live to recite poetry at 8am today.

People are also involving their children in this unique celebration, as the colourful festival is a favourite among little ones.

Prapti, a second-grader, said, "I'm sad that we can't go out to celebrate but I am making paper crafts to



An artist affiliated with Charukala Barishal paints a banner for Mangal Shobhajatra, to be celebrated online this year amid the shutdown. The photo was taken yesterday from Barishal city's Bhatikhana area.

decorate the house and celebrate indoors."

Das Gupta Asis Kumar, advisor at Teachers' Association of Barishal

region said, "We are taking the celebration online through our page 'Charukala Barishal Official' on Facebook."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

RELIEF IRREGULARITIES Legal notice seeks mobile court drives

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Supreme Court lawyer yesterday served a legal notice to the government requesting it to conduct mobile court to give exemplary punishment to those involved in irregularities in relief distribution and misappropriation of relief materials during the ongoing crisis due to coronavirus.

Advocate Md Moniruzzaman Lincoln sent the legal notice to the law and home secretaries through emails, asking them to take necessary steps to this effect in seven days.

He said in the legal notice that some dishonest people including local public representatives are reportedly misappropriating relief

RAMNA BATAMUL CARNAGE

Justice in legal tangle

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Some legal tangles have caused an unusual delay in hearing and disposal of the 2001 sensational Ramna Batamul carnage case at the High Court for nearly six years, as two separate HC benches have refused to deal with them for different reasons.

Besides, the attorney general's office has not extensively taken any move for expeditious hearing of the case's death reference and appeals, considering that an expected judgement may not come from the HC as there are serious weaknesses in the investigation and lack of evidence and documents.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, however, told The Daily Star on Sunday that his office will take a step for hearing and disposing of the death reference and appeals of the case after the court reopens.

All the courts across the country including the Appellate and HC divisions of the Supreme Court are now on holidays due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak.

The courts are scheduled to reopen on April 26. The attorney general said the hearing of the Ramna Batamul killing case might have been finished recently had the courts not gone into holidays.

He, however, refused to comment about

the case's merit and possible result.

Contacted, Deputy Attorney General Dr Md Bashir Ahmed said an HC bench led by Justice Krishna Debnath is scheduled to hold hearings on the death reference and appeals of the case.

Earlier, two separate HC benches had refused to hear the same matters for different reasons.

Attorney general's office sources said the investigation of the case was conducted carelessly during the regime of the then BNP-Jamat led alliance government. Also, the main accused Mufti Abdul Hannan has already been executed in connection with another criminal case.

There is no proper documents and evidence to prove the charges brought against the accused and therefore the state counsels are not all too serious about this case, said sources.

Contacted, Advocate SM Shahjahan, a defense lawyer of the case, could not say anything about the case proceedings.

If a lower court sentences any person to death, its judgement is examined by the HC through hearing arguments for confirmation of the death sentence. The case documents and judgement reaches as

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Justice in

FROM PAGE 3
death references to the HC from the lower court within seven days after the latter delivers the verdict as per the relevant rules of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Former DAG Moniruzzaman Rubel said another case filed under the Explosive Substances Act in connection with the 2001 Ramna Batamul bomb blast is still pending with a Dhaka court.

The HC bench led by Justice M Enayetur Rahim had started hearing the death references and appeals of the Ramna case on January 8, 2017, and after hearing for several days, adjourned the hearing on February 22 of the same year.

This bench dropped the matter from its cause-list on August 8, 2017, as the state side did not officially inform it about the execution of Mufti Hannan.

Later, the CJ assigned the HC bench led by Justice Md Ruhul Quddus to finish the hearing of the death references and appeals. But, this bench could not hear the case as it's hearing jurisdiction was reconstructed.

A Dhaka court on June 23, 2014 handed down death penalty to eight militants of Harkat-ul-Jihad (Huji), including its chief Mufti Abdul Hannan, for killing 10 people in the attack on a Chhayanat event during the Pahela Baishakh celebrations at Ramna Batamul on April 14 in 2001.

Six other militants of the banned Islamist outfit were sentenced to life in prison for involvement in the blasts.



An on-duty policeman buys disposable personal protective equipment from a street hawker. Many small traders have adapted to the changing times to stock up and sell the in-demand product. The photo was taken on Saturday from Karwan Bazar.

PHOTO: AMARN HOSSAIN

Kitchen market

FROM PAGE 3
"We tried out different ways (to ensure social distancing).. but failed," the official said.

He told this newspaper of two different ways police tried to ensure this. "First we marked circles to help customers maintain distance, but most would not pay heed," the official recounted.

Additionally, they even made the road one-way to relieve some of the pressure, but that also did not work out, he said.

This is why police along with the armed forces jointly shifted the whole market to the adjacent playground, as it has a huge amount of space available.

"If we did not do this, there was a high chance of coronavirus infection

in the area, even to the police personnel who were deployed there," OC Shaju said.

"This is only a temporary solution. The market will return to its original place once the crisis is over," he assured.

Tanvir Ahmed, a resident of Gendaria's Distilary Road, applauded the initiative for facilitating social distancing.

"I have always tried to maintain at least three feet of distance whenever I visited the market since the coronavirus outbreak began. But others weren't as conscious, and sometimes my body would inevitably come in contact with theirs," he said.

Shafiqul Alam, another resident of the area, said army personnel, police officials and volunteers would

frequently visit the market and request everyone to stay apart, but to little consequence.

The new setup of the market keeps the shops separated in four rows and makes it easier for customers to maintain distance between one shop and another, he said.

Shafiqul Alam reminded everyone that, "It is not only the law enforcement agencies' duty to enforce social distancing. It's a matter of co-operation, and people should voluntarily keep themselves in check and maintain distance."

It is worth noting that the setup of the kitchen market will not disrupt operations of the shops built around the playground by Dhaka City Corporation, officials told The Daily Star.

Mosquito menace

FROM PAGE 3
pandemic, the number of mosquitoes is likely to increase.

"It is the season of dengue. If dengue outbreak starts amid this coronavirus situation, we will have to face very difficult circumstances," said Dr Manzoorul Kibria, professor of zoology department of Chittagong University. He urged CCC to strengthen their anti-mosquito drives by manifolds this year.

Contacted, Mohammad Shumsuddaaha, chief executive officer of CCC, said anti-mosquito medicine is being sprayed in every ward of CCC every day.

"Two workers in each ward have been

engaged to spray larvicide daily. However, currently we are not spraying the smoke, which may give people the impression that we are not conducting the drives. A total of 82 teams are working across the city," he said.

Asked why residents are still suffering, he said the city dwellers also have a responsibility to keep their surroundings clean and destroy mosquito breeding grounds.

"We will strengthen our drive but the residents will also have to step up in this regard. They must keep their yards and surroundings clean," the CEO said.

No cheer

FROM PAGE 3
growers are counting huge losses as this year's Pahela Baishakh celebrations have been cancelled.

Kamrul Islam, a flower grower at Mahasthangarh in Shibganj upazila, said, "Every year before Pahela Baishakh, traders from various districts use to contact me for flowers. This time no one did. The roses in my 30-decimal land bloomed fully a few days ago, and now it's rotting."

"I never thought my flowers would remain unsold. I have spent around Tk 40,000, and was hoping to make a good

profit. But I won't even get my investment back."

Abdul Mannan, owner of the Mahasthangarh Shabuj Nursery, echoed him.

Abul Kasem Azad, deputy director of Bogura Department of Agricultural Extension, said, "There are at least 300 commercial flower farmers who produce flowers worth Tk 1.5 crore on the occasion of Pahela Baishakh. Due to the coronavirus situation, they are losing all the money they had invested. We are trying to come up with something for them."

A bleak Baishakh

FROM PAGE 3
Banani, Baridhara and Uttara, where about 40 staffers work. But since March 20, when the situation gradually began deteriorating, these outlets were shut. They are now struggling to pay their employees' salaries and rent.

On March 31, the prime minister directed all to celebrate this year's Pahela Baishakh digitally, without creating any mass gatherings, in line with the government's "stay-at-home" guideline.

To bring back a little bit of Baishakhi celebration, the association is planning to introduce some special food items, but they will only be available for take-away.

"We don't need any donation, but we need low-interest loans. If the government takes steps to provide support and facilitate loans through the association, then we and our staff will be able to get through this crisis," he added.

On April 5, the prime minister unveiled a stimulus package of Tk 30,000 crore, which will be provided to affected industries and service sector organisations as working capital through banks as low-interest loans.

Legal notice

FROM PAGE 3
materials allocated by the government for the poor and destitute people.

Such irregularities and misappropriation are punishable offence under the law and the offenders can be punished through the mobile court as per the relevant rules of the Mobile Court Act, 2009, he said.

Moniruzzaman Lincon told The Daily Star he will move a writ petition before the High Court if the respondents don't take steps in seven days in line with the requirements mentioned in the legal notice.

Where are the welfare

FROM PAGE 12
Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation, an umbrella organisation of 235 transport worker unions, sought rationing programmes for food and other essentials for workers.

But many transport workers alleged that they are not getting any financial assistance from their unions or the federation, despite the fact that these platforms regularly collect money from the workers for their respective welfare funds.

"There are many transport organisations to whom we pay every day from our hard-earned money. Where are these organisations now?" asked Mohammad Kamal, supervisor of A Alom Paribahan, which operates on the Dhaka-Rangpur route.

"We used to see many transport leaders speak out on various occasions. Where are they now? We are not finding any of them by our side when we are facing the toughest time of our lives."

Kamal said the bus company was providing him with Tk 150 every day, which is not enough to buy food for three meals a day. All hotels and restaurants in the area are closed, he added.

Md Billal, another transport worker, said, "Since the shutdown started on March 26, we are now taking meals twice a day instead of thrice. But not a single transport leader has asked after us."

A top leader of the federation said each basic union provides Tk 1,000 per month to the federation. Besides, worker unions at four terminals in Dhaka collect Tk 10 from each vehicle every day on behalf of the federation.

Each union collects money -- ranging from Tk 30 to Tk 120 every day from each vehicle -- to raise funds for workers'

welfare. But the amount is usually used to provide financial help to the families of deceased members and maintain offices, he added.

"So, in this situation, we have little money to give financial support to our members. Many leaders are involved in local government bodies and we are requesting them and the administration to include our members in their relief list," he said, requesting anonymity.

On Saturday, the federation directed all union leaders to prepare a list of workers and submit it to the deputy commissioner's office of their respective districts for relief. It also asked all the unions to pay relief to their members from the "workers' welfare fund".

Osman Ali, general secretary of the federation, said these are tough times for around 50 lakh transport workers in the country.

"We have called for rationing programmes for food and other essentials for the workers. But we have not yet gotten a response," he told The Daily Star on Saturday.

Osman said each union has welfare funds ranging between Tk 10 lakh and Tk 50 lakh and they are providing food assistance to their members, but this is not adequate.

Asked why the federation itself is not providing any financial support to the workers from its own welfare fund, he said, "Many unions do not provide their contribution [to the federation] regularly and the amount of our funds is minimal."

It is not possible to give financial assistance to such a large number of workers from the fund, said Osman, declining however to specify the amount of the federation's welfare fund.

Tangail

FROM PAGE 12
week when several hundred buses were found parked in the terminal area. The workers said they were hoping that the services would resume soon.

Bus driver Minhaz Uddin, from Shibpur of Sadar upazila, said although many transport workers like him were struggling to survive, they considered it disgraceful to accept charity.

"While many have borrowed money from others, we are passing days in uncertainty as we don't know when the bus services will resume and bring back normalcy in our lives," he said.

Driver's assistant Suhel Miah, from Ghatail upazila, said they usually live from hand to mouth. But the suspension on vehicular movement has made their lives miserable. "I've got mouths to feed, but I am yet to get any sort of assistance from anyone."

Asked what the workers' union or the owners' association were doing in the situation, Babu Chittaranjan Das, general secretary of Tangail district bus-minibus workers' union, said the union leaders held a meeting with the owners' association on April 2 to discuss the issue.

But the meeting ended without any consensus, he added.

Contacted, Tangail Deputy Commissioner Md Shahidul Islam said the government would do everything necessary to assist the workers under the circumstances and with that objective, he already asked several leaders of the transport workers' union to hand over him a list of workers who are the worst affected for being out of work.

Dilip Kumar Das, office secretary of the union, said a list of 2,000 transport workers had been sent to the DC.

Meanwhile, the district transport workers' union decided to disburse money from their welfare fund to buy relief materials and distribute those to 6,000 workers in the district, said Golam Mawla, executive president of the union.

He said they gave 1,500 packets of relief materials -- each containing 10kg rice, 2kg potato, 1kg lentil, and 1 litre edible oil -- to the workers at the Tangail New Bus Terminal.

Cautious hope for a few states

FROM PAGE 12
in three weeks.

But Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez warned his country was "far from victory", with the lockdown restrictions for the rest of the nation's 47 million people remaining in place.

"We are all keen to go back out on the streets... but our desire is even greater to win the war and prevent a relapse," he said.

Police in Madrid handed out face masks to commuters at a train station where life appeared to be creeping back to normal, as workers in protective gear wiped down turnstiles.

MACRON SPEECH

In the US -- now the world's worst-hit nation with a fifth of all deaths and more than half a million confirmed cases -- the government's top infectious disease expert added to hopes the virus may have peaked.

Anthony Fauci said parts of the country could begin easing restrictions in May, but warned that the world's biggest economy would not turn back on like a "light switch".

President Donald Trump had previously wanted the US to be back to normal by Easter, but most of the country remained at a standstill.

Many of the world's more than two billion Christians celebrated Easter Sunday from the confines of their homes, while Pope Francis delivered a livestream message about an "Easter of solitude" from a hauntingly empty Vatican.

Governments in many countries continued to warn citizens to stay

indoors on public holidays as they grapple with a virus that has even infected national leaders.

In Britain, Prime Minister Boris Johnson was resting at his official country residence Chequers a day after being discharged following "a week in which the NHS has saved my life, no question", referring to the country's state-run National Health Service.

Britain's death toll passed 10,000 and it is now seeing daily fatalities to match -- and on one occasion exceed -- those previously seen in Italy and Spain.

Johnson, like Trump, had initially resisted stringent measures such as shutting down public places.

In France, Macron was set address the nation just after 8:00 pm, and sources said he would announce the lockdown in place since March 17 must be extended beyond its current April 15 expiration date until well into May.

Macron will be looking to strike a careful balance between warning France -- where the death toll stands at 14,393 -- that an early relaxation of the lockdown could be disastrous, while reassuring people that the government has a plan to get the country back to normal.

CHINA INFECTIONS RISE

In China, where authorities appeared to have the virus under control last week, officials reported 108 new symptomatic cases yesterday, the highest number of confirmed

infections in a single day in over a month.

Imported cases accounted for most of the total, the National Health Commission said, underscoring why the government has been so focused on preventing new outbreaks stemming from international arrivals.

China only recently lifted the lockdown on the city of Wuhan where the virus first emerged in December.

The quarantine measures were later emulated by Italy in early March, followed by Spain, France and other nations around the world.

Governments are under pressure to keep populations safe while preventing economic collapse, amid fears of a downturn not seen since the Great Depression.

But the World Health Organization has warned countries against lifting lockdown restrictions too early.

Meanwhile, there were also worrying signs the virus could be taking hold in new, and vulnerable, parts of the globe.

Conflict-wracked Yemen reported its first case last week, raising fears of a devastating outbreak.

Syria also faces a heavy hit from the disease after years of war that have left millions in dire conditions, with experts accusing Damascus of minimising its death toll for political motives.

"There is a disaster in the making," said Emile Hokayem, Middle East analyst at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London (IISS).

Protest of the news- broadcasted on News Media

On 08 April 2020, a news was broadcasted on private channel. Afterwards it was also broadcasted on several news media- about two strategic business units of Babylon Group namely, 'Aboni Fashions Limited' and 'Babylon Casualwear Limited'; that news was completely false. Furthermore, a mixed reaction was also observed on several social media, which created a serious damage to the 34 years of goodwill of those companies.

The news report said that on 08 April 2020 the above mentioned companies remained open by disobeying government orders and about a few hundred workers were trimmed on that day. The report also said that the authorities of those companies informed the media reporters- since the orders were being cancelled from buyers' end, so they had to trim those workers.

Yet, the reality was those two companies were laid off from 06 April 2020 to 14 April 2020. The companies paid their permanent workers' salaries of March 2020 through their mobile banking on 07 April 2020. However, only the probationary workers (not more than three months) of those companies (whose mobile bank account was not opened then), were called on 08 April 2020 to collect their salaries in cash. Even though while distributing their salaries- social distancing and hygiene was maintained and according to the labor law, those workers' salaries were paid. It is to be mentioned, on that day there was no incident of forcefully collecting those workers' signature on their resignation letters. All the evidence relating to this, are preserved on company database, which can be shown if required. The information was presented in that report in such a way, the authority is doubtful whether it was to damage the long earned reputation of those companies. However, during this 34 years of journey there is not a single record of such incidents against those companies. Above all, currently the whole RMG industry is struggling for the recent COVID-19 epidemic, everybody knows about it. In these circumstances, broadcasting such fake news against those companies are not only a threat for those companies but also a threat for the whole RMG industry. Without using an evident source of the appropriate authorities of those companies, the media reporters are cordially requested to stop broadcasting of such delusional news.

Best Regards,
Nazmul Huda Ahmad
Group GM- HR and Compliance
Babylon Group



India risks plunging into 'social unrest'

Warn industries amid lockdown

AFP, New Delhi

Key industries are warning of social unrest unless India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi makes concessions when he announces any extension Tuesday to a three-week pandemic-lockdown for the country's 1.3 billion people.

The lockdown ends at midnight today, but several state chief ministers have already said they plan to extend it for at least two more weeks. With time running out, the government has not laid out any national plan.

Modi, who is to make a nationwide address at 0430 GMT yesterday, is caught between growing fears over the pandemic -- cases have surged in recent days to more than 9,150 with 308 deaths -- and the need to get the economy moving again.

Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das called the coronavirus an "invisible assassin" that could cause havoc with the economy.

The national restaurants association, which said its members employed seven million people, warned there could be "social unrest" if it did not receive financial relief.

The government is considering making people stay at home in Delhi, Mumbai and other major cities while opening up rural parts of the country that have so far been relatively untainted by coronavirus, according to some reports. Media have predicted it would be relaxed for key sectors such as agriculture.

The commerce ministry has also reportedly urged the government to consider opening more activities "with reasonable safeguards" even if the lockdown is extended.

The possibility of arranging staggered shifts for different sectors is also being considered by authorities as a way of cutting down contact between workers.



Health workers wearing protective face masks react during a tribute for their co-worker Esteban, a male nurse that died of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, outside the Severo Ochoa Hospital in Leganes, Spain, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

LATEST UPDATES



SPAIN EASES LOCKDOWN

Spain reopens parts of its economy, with some factory and construction staff returning to work within strict safety guidelines. But Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez warns his country is "far from victory", and lockdown restrictions in place since March 14 remain in place for much of the nation's 47 million people.

OVER 114,000 DEAD WORLDWIDE

At least 114,539 people have died worldwide from the coronavirus in 193 countries and territories, according to an AFP tally around 1100 GMT Monday based on official sources. There have been more than 1,853,300 reported infections since the virus emerged in China in December. The United States has 22,109 deaths, making it the hardest-hit country. It also has the highest number of reported infections with 557,590 cases. Italy has 19,899 deaths, Spain 17,489, France 14,393 and Britain 10,612.

NEW RISE OF INFECTIONS IN CHINA

Officials in China report 108 new cases, 98 of which were imported from overseas, the highest number of confirmed infections in a single day in over a month.

MOSCOW'S DIGITAL TRAVEL PASSES

Moscow authorities launch a digital permit system to control people's movements. A website to apply for the passes starts working Monday for people travelling by car or public transport and the permit system will be operational from Wednesday.

US EYES MAY GRADUAL REOPENING

The US government's top infectious diseases expert Anthony Fauci says parts of the country could begin easing restrictions in May, but remains cautious. South Korean firms will make their first shipment of tests to the US this week after a request by US President Donald Trump.

INDIA TO EXTEND LOCKDOWN

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to extend a national lockdown, due to end Tuesday, for another two weeks, state ministers say after talks at the weekend.

ADB'S \$20B RESCUE PACKAGE

The Asian Development Bank said it will roll out a massive \$20 billion package to help developing member nations weather the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Up to \$13 billion in loans will be made available to help virus-hit developing members fill in budget gaps, with another roughly \$2 billion set for the private sector.

SOURCE: AFP

India to test 'cold spots'

Plan to use colour codes on map to navigate lockdown

AGENCIES

In a bid to widen testing and ensure that no significant number of Covid-19 cases are being left out, the government plans to expand testing in clusters chosen in 'cold spots' or areas where there are no cases reported as of now. This will be a significant decision that takes the focus beyond hotspot areas in around 133 districts where there is a high incidence of the disease.

The districts that will be taken up for sampling are being identified and a combination of pool and rapid testing will be adopted to check for the presence of Covid-19. The move, besides providing additional clinical data of the disease, is also intended to respond to criticism that India is not testing enough and positive cases might be under-reported.

The sampling will be on the basis of surveillance and tests will be conducted on ILI (influenza like illness) patients to track the presence

of coronavirus.

As of now, at least half of India's 720 districts are yet to report Covid-19 and the cases so far are concentrated in certain districts and cities in a pattern that can vary from state to state and



even within states, reports TOI.

While pool testing is a RT-PCR process, seen as a reliable means of detecting the disease, the rapid test option is intended to test for antibodies.

The arrival of rapid test kits from China has been delayed but the first lot of kits is expected to reach soon. The government has also decided

to use colour code on the country's map to Covid-19 and virus-free zones, and therefore people's movement.

After a meeting with at least 13 Chief Ministers on Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had indicated that the lockdown will be extended -- but there will be relaxations in certain areas and cases to ensure the survival of the economy as well.

This is where the colour coding comes in, some of the participating Chief Ministers, including the Chief Minister of Puducherry, told the media after the meeting, reports NDTV.

Green zones will be districts where there is no Covid-19 case. Sources said there are 400 districts, where there have been no Covid-19 cases.

Orange zones will be places which saw less than 15 cases and there have been no increase in the number of positive cases. Here, minimum activities like opening of limited public transport, harvesting of farm products will be allowed.

ACCOMMODATION FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Singapore readies 'floating hotels'

REUTERS, Singapore

Singapore is preparing to house hundreds of foreign workers in accommodation vessels typically used for offshore and marine industry staff as it races to find alternatives to dormitories where the novel coronavirus has been spreading rapidly.

Tens of thousands of migrant workers, many from South Asia, live in cramped dormitories across Singapore, which have become the biggest source of coronavirus infections in recent days.

Authorities are moving some of the healthy residents of those facilities to other sites including military camps, an exhibition centre, vacant public housing blocks and the accommodation vessels, which they have called "floating hotels".

"Each facility can hold a few hundred occupants and can be suitably organised to achieve safe distancing," Minister of Transport Khaw Boon Wan said in a Facebook post on Sunday after he visited one of the vessels.

They are docked in a restricted area in a port terminal, Khaw said. Khaw released photographs of a basic, clean cabin with three beds covered in blue linen, and said the residents would be able to use a deck for an hour of exercise every day.

Meals will be prepared off-site and delivered to the cabins to minimise intermingling. A medical facility is also being set up nearby on land.

Singapore reported 233 new coronavirus cases on Sunday taking its total to 2,532, eight of whom have died.

N Korea's Kim reshuffles top governing body

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has carried out a major reshuffle of his State Affairs Commission, official media reported yesterday, replacing more than a third of its members. Kim has established an iron grip on the levers of authority in his nuclear-armed country since inheriting power in his late 20s in 2011. He is chairman of the SAC -- the North's highest decision-making body -- and five of its 13 other members were replaced at a meeting of the country's rubber-stamp Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) parliament on Sunday, the state KCNA news agency reported. "This is a rather large scale of SAC membership shuffle," said former US government North Korea analyst Rachel Lee. Pictures carried by the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper showed hundreds of lawmakers sitting in close proximity to each other without wearing protective masks.

Alarm over dozens of missing migrants in Med

Europe's coast guard agency said Sunday it was looking for a dinghy believed to be carrying dozens of migrants when it went missing after setting sail from Libya for Italy. The UN refugee agency told AFP it was "very worried" about the fate of what could be 85 migrants lost in Mediterranean Sea. Two German monitors of dangerous migrant crossings first reported spotting four boats in distress off the southern coast of Malta over the weekend. The European



Union's Frontex border guard and coast guard agency later told AFP that one of the four boats had safely reached Italy and another two were still at sea. It said a fourth boat initially spotted on Friday was unaccounted for. "Frontex plane will fly again (Monday) morning in search of the remaining boat," a spokesman told AFP.

Afghan prisoner releases 'important step': US

The US special envoy who negotiated a deal with the Taliban said yesterday that an initial prisoner exchange between the insurgents and the Afghan government was an "important step" toward peace. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Taliban on Sunday released 20 Afghan security-force prisoners. The move came after the government last week released hundreds of insurgent captives. "The release of prisoners is an important step in the peace process and the reduction of violence," US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said on Twitter. "Both sides should accelerate efforts to meet targets specified in the US-Taliban agreement as soon as possible," he added.

SOURCE: AFP



Guinness world record holder, world's smallest living woman, Jyoti Amge, appeals citizens to stay inside their homes during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the Covid-19 coronavirus, in Nagpure, India yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Medibot' to do rounds on Malaysian virus wards

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian scientists have created a barrel-shaped robot on wheels that they hope will make the rounds on hospital wards to check on coronavirus patients, reducing health workers' risk of infection.

"Medibot" is a 1.5 metre tall (five foot) white robot, equipped with a camera and screen via which patients can communicate remotely with medics.

The invention, built by scientists at the International Islamic University Malaysia, is also fitted with a device to check patients' temperatures remotely.

It is aimed at helping nurses and doctors working on the wards with social distancing, Zulkifli Zainal Abidin, a member of the team behind the invention, told AFP.

It cost about 15,000 ringgit (\$3,500) to develop, and the university plans to trial it soon in their own private hospital, which does not treat virus patients, said Zulkifli.

If that proves a success, the scientists hope it can be used in government hospitals where people with Covid-19 are sent.

Malaysia has reported 4,683 coronavirus cases, including 76 deaths. From Thailand to Israel, robots are being used in the fight against the coronavirus, which has killed over 114,000 people worldwide.

They are being increasingly relied on as fast, efficient, contagion-proof champions in the war against the virus.

Tunisia has deployed police robot to patrol areas of Tunis, to ensure that people are observing a coronavirus lockdown.

If it spies anyone walking in the largely deserted streets, it approaches them and asks why they are out.

They must then show their ID and other papers to the robot's camera, so officers controlling it can check them. This is the second week of a nationwide lockdown to contain the virus, which has killed 14 people.

No festivities but resolve to fight ill

FROM PAGE 1

caste, creed and religious beliefs -- was to come out of their homes, many heading for Ramna Batamul to welcome Pahela Baishakh -- the first day of Bangla New Year 1427 -- amid traditional fanfare and lively pageants.

This year, however, would be completely different.

As the novel coronavirus is taking a grim toll on the country like elsewhere in the world, there would be no singing along to Rabindranath's "Esho hey Boishakh, esho esho" under the banyan tree. The cultural troupe from Chhayanaut would not be opening the biggest secular celebration of Bangladesh this year.

There would be no "Mangal Shobhajatra", a colourful, ceremonious procession, which is the mainstay of the Pahela Baishakh celebrations.

Traditional Baishakh attires -- white saris with red borders for women and panjabees for men -- would gather dust in shop racks.

The only thing that may be like other years is the smell of different bhartas (dishes made of different mashed vegetables) and fried hilsa wafting through households.

After the coronavirus hit Bangladesh, all celebrations have been cancelled, and the normal way of life has come to a halt.

So far, 39 people have died and 803 people have been infected while the country has been under virtual lockdown in its fight to stem the spread of Covid-19.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has directed all to celebrate Pahela Baishakh with their families within the confines of their homes and to refrain from holding mass gatherings.

The government has already suspended all public programmes in order to avoid gatherings amid growing concern over the spread of the virus.

For the first time since the country's liberation, Chhayanaut has had to cancel the celebration at Ramna Batamul. It started the programme in erstwhile East Pakistan in 1967 as a protest against the cultural domination of the Pakistan military regime.

The organisation even held celebrations in 2002, a year after Islamic militants carried out a bomb attack at Batamul celebrations. The attack killed 10 people and injured 50.

"This is the first time except during the Liberation War in 1971 that we are not holding a programme," Sarwar Ali, executive president of Chhayanaut, told The Daily Star yesterday.

In the Pakistan era, Chhayanaut used to arrange the programme to protest the cultural domination of the Pakistan regime and to create a "Milon Mela" for Bangalees, he said.

"After independence, the programme started to spread nationwide and eventually got a national form," he added.

"But this year, Pahela Baishakh comes amid a global disaster. In this situation, we can't consider holding such a programme."

However, renditions of selected songs and poetry from the last three programmes would be telecast on BTV at 7:00am today.

At the end of the hour-long programme, Dr Sanjida Khatun, founder and chair of the organisation, will give a speech, he said.

He also said that the funds collected for the programme are being distributed among poor people or artists from the low-income bracket.

The Mangal Shobhajatra has also been cancelled for the first time since it started in 1989. Organised by teachers and students of Dhaka University's fine arts faculty, the procession has been inscribed in Unesco's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

"This is certainly painful for us," said Prof Nisar Hossain, dean of DU's fine arts faculty.

"Everyone eagerly waits for the largest social festival of the country. But it [the coronavirus outbreak] has obstructed the programme entirely," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"However, our main focus is now on fighting coronavirus," said Nasir.

He said they usually start taking preparations for Mangal Shobhajatra a month before the programme. But as the World Health Organisation declared Covid-19 a pandemic, they feared that they might not be able to hold the programme. "That's why we did not take any preparations."

"The purpose of arranging the Mangal Shobhajatra is to seek blessings for and unite people. But it goes against the method of fighting of coronavirus, which is maintaining social distance," he said.

Like every year, Mangal Shobhajatra Research Center has prepared a poster for this year with a theme considering coronavirus to make people self-reliant to fight the disease.

The poster starts with a quote from famous American author Ernest Hemingway's novel "The Old Man and the Sea" -- "Man can be destroyed but not defeated", and ends with Rabindranath Tagore's song -- "Mukta Karo Bhoj, Apona Majhe Shakti Dharo, Nijere Koro Joy".

"We are circulating the poster online," Nisar said.

Mughal Emperor Akbar introduced the tradition of celebrating the Bangla New Year -- Naba Barsha -- to mark the closing of the annual tax collection.

Traditionally, traders and shopkeepers open a new "halkhata" (account register) on this day and celebrate it by offering sweetmeats to their clients.

In the course of time, it evolved into a day of mass celebration and an integral part of the Bangalee culture. It has been considered a non-communal festival as people irrespective of religion, sect, class and creed celebrate the day as one nation.

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES				
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY	
Closed	Closed	\$1,713.90 (per ounce)	\$31.64 (per barrel)	1.51%	2.33%	0.16%	0.49%	83.95	90.72	103.76	11.76	
				30,690.02	19,043.40	2,567.25	2,783.05	BUY TK	84.95	94.52	107.56	12.36
								SELL TK				

Star BUSINESS

DHAKA TUESDAY APRIL 14, 2020, BAISHAKH 1, 1427 BS starbusiness@thedailystar.net

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Direct cash transfer for 1.5cr poor during Ramadan

REJAUJ KARIM BYRON

The government is set to transfer Tk 2,000 crore in cash to each of about 40 lakh families whose breadwinners have lost jobs because of lockdown, as part of its efforts to keep the most vulnerable segment of the society at home to tackle the deadly virus.

The latest scheme will cover 1.5 crore population, said a finance ministry source.

The government has allocated Tk 760 crore for this group of people, which includes day labourers, rickshaw or van-pullers, mechanics, construction workers, newspaper hawkers, hotel workers, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her address to the nation last evening.

An order has been given to prepare a list of beneficiaries and their bank account numbers. Once the list is drawn up, the

one-off cash will be sent to their accounts directly, the prime minister said.

The city corporations and district administrations have already started preparing the list, the source said.

The government plans to disburse the fund during Ramadan, which starts in the last week of April.

It would be later decided whether the cash would be transferred through bank accounts or mobile financial service as many of them don't have bank accounts, the source added.

The World Bank on Sunday also suggested a similar move to help the poor and those working in the informal sector to tide over the desperate situation.

A large number of people have already lost their jobs due to the ongoing economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

At least 4-5 crore people are struggling to survive their life due to the food shortage, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, on Sunday.

Without minimum social assistance, the vulnerable and those who live a hand-to-mouth existence will have no choice but to defy orders, said Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, earlier.

The lockdown, which would continue at least until April 25, has brought all economic activities to a halt and shut offices, businesses and industries and suspended transport movement.

Bangladesh has announced various stimulus packages worth Tk 95,619 crore, which is 3.3 per cent of the GDP, the prime minister also said.

"We don't know how long this crisis will

last and how it will harm our economy," she said.

The import and export sectors have started to feel the heat of the pandemic. Most of the migrant workers were rendered jobless because of the lethal pathogen. This has stagnated remittance flow, according to the prime minister.

"We are not outside of the global system. The blow stemming from the global economic recession has become a major cause for concern for our economy too."

All agriculture-related ministries have been given instructions to accelerate farm production so that no food shortage emerges in the coming days.

"We have taken steps so that there is no shortage of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and other agriculture inputs and to take them to the farmers on time," she added.

Three more stimulus package guidelines arrive

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The central bank yesterday published guidelines to allow banks to get down to implement the government's stimulus packages to the agriculture sector, the cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises and export-oriented firms.

On April 5, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina unveiled a Tk 20,000 crore package for the cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises (CMSME).

She also announced that the Bangladesh Bank will introduce a new loan facility system titled pre-shipment Credit Refinance Scheme involving Tk 5,000 crore.

On Sunday, the prime minister announced a new stimulus package of Tk 5,000 crore for small and medium farmers.

This led the BB to publish three separate guidelines on the three packages yesterday for the implementation of the schemes.

From the Tk 20,000-crore working capital loans for the cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises (CMSMEs), commercial banks will provide the credit from their own resources to the industries or business entities concerned on the basis of bank-client relationship.

The working capital will be given at 9 per cent interest rate. Of the interest rate, 4 per cent will be borne by the borrowers and 5 per cent by the government, according to one guideline.

A bank or financial institution will be able to disburse a maximum 10 per cent of their outstanding loans as of December 31 last year in the CMSME sector in a single fiscal year under the package.

Banks and financial institutions would inform the SME and Special Programmes Department of the central bank about their respective ceiling within three months.

If needed, the BB can increase or decrease the ceiling in order to cover as many entrepreneurs as possible, the guideline said.

The lenders would not get the subsidy for the amount of loans or investments that cross the ceiling.

Manufacturing and services subsectors would get priority under the package. Business and trade-based micro and small firms would also be eligible.

Manufacturing, services and trade-based firms would receive respectively 50 per cent, 30 per cent and 20 per cent of the annual loans.

At least 15 per cent of the loans will have to be given to the borrowers based in rural areas. At least 5 per cent of the loans will go to women entrepreneurs.

Cottage, micro and small industries will account for at least 70 per cent of the loans and the rest will go to medium enterprises.

The tenure of the package will be three years. A single firm will be able to receive the subsidised loan for only one year.

The pre-shipment credit refinance scheme is aimed at helping local exporters continue to ship products.

The tenure of the scheme is three years and the fund will be a revolving one, another guideline said.

Banks will borrow money from the funds at 3 per cent interest rate and can charge the end-borrowers a maximum 6 per cent.

A maximum of 10 per cent of the commercial invoice value of exported consignment will be eligible for the scheme.

A single client may use the facility multiple times but they have to be availed in a single year.

The BB published also guideline on the stimulus package dedicated to small and medium businesses and entrepreneurs in the farm sector.

The affected clients of banks can receive an additional 20 per cent of their existing credit ceiling under the scheme. In case of new borrowers, banks will fix the credit ceiling through scrutiny. Loans taken under the scheme can't be used to adjust the old credit of the clients.

The tenure for the loans will be 18 months, including a grace period of six months at both banks and clients' ends. Banks will borrow from the refinancing scheme at 1 per cent interest rate, which they will lend at 4 per cent.

Give Tk 30,000cr in cash to poor, get six times more benefit

Suggests the CPD

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) yesterday suggested the government provide Tk 30,000 crore in direct cash transfer to 1.9 crore poor and vulnerable families to save them from hunger during the shutdown.

The civil society think-tank proposed Tk 8,000 to each of the households for two months, a move that will create domestic demand for goods and services of Tk 186,500 crore in the economy, stimulating local small business activities.

"This will also be an indirect stimulus for the large businesses involved in the supply of essential commodities," said CPD Senior Research Fellow Towfiqul Islam Khan while placing the proposal during a virtual media briefing.

Chances of the economy overheating due to the new cash injection is low, he said.

The think-tank organised the briefing to present its initial assessment of the government's interventions and proposals for food and income security of the marginalised people.

The recommendations came at a time when the cries of the poor and the vulnerable are getting louder and their queue to get rice at Tk 10 a kilogram becoming longer.

The proposal to provide Tk 30,000 crore in support is not more than the money the government has committed for the large industries.

"This support is necessary to protect the poor and the vulnerable and steps should be taken now," said CPD Executive Director Fahmida Khatun.

The think-tank proposed providing the

cash support on a weekly basis so that errors in listing could be corrected in case those who are not eligible get listed.

The cash transfer to the families will cover 7.5 crore out of 16.6 crore population based on the latest Labour Force Survey

and avoid selection bias concerning beneficiaries.

Therefore, the list of programme beneficiaries must be published through websites with other key details, including addresses and phone numbers.

For the maximum utilisation of the support measures for the social safety net programme beneficiaries, a strong effort from non-government organisations and local bodies is needed to make the selection and distribution transparent.

The government must devise a strategy in collaboration with entrepreneurs and labour leaders to ensure production of food and processed and manufactured items such as food products, medicines and medical equipment by selectively keeping factories and enterprises open.

"Health precautions and safety measures must be ensured in this regard."

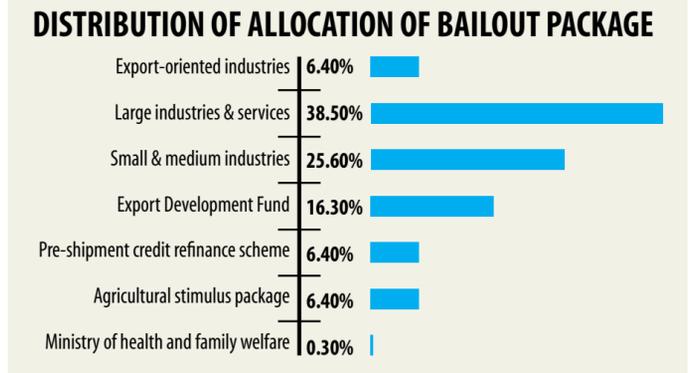
It is also critical to assess the stock of import-dependent essential commodities and accordingly prepare back-up plans on imports in the near future.

The government will also need to engage with South Asian regional leaders and global leaders to avoid restrictions on the trade of essential commodities, the CPD said.

The government will also need to pursue a more expansionary fiscal approach to boost domestic demand.

To ease pressure on public expenditure, the government needs to identify the expenses that can be deferred. Loans and recapitalisation to state-owned enterprises should be de-prioritised, it said.

CPD Distinguished Fellow Mustafizur Rahman and Research Director Khondaker Golam Moazzem also took part in the briefing.



2016-17 data.

The CPD considered day labourers, employees who get payment on a daily or weekly basis and the self-employed for the support and excluded employers and salaried population.

The largest industries that are relatively more capable of dealing with the shocks are getting the greatest support, it said.

"There is no direct transfer of funds from the government to the workers. There is no explicit allocation made for the vulnerable groups who are the farthest behind and will be the hardest hit by the pandemic."

The informal sector accounts for 85 per

cent of the total employed population and they are among the most vulnerable.

"It is widely acknowledged that the lockdown's strategy will only be successful if the state is able to protect its lower income population from hunger and provide food

security to them."

According to the CPD, 18.9 per cent of the 1.90 crore households live in urban areas.

If the 1.90 crore families could not be covered, the civil society body offers a second proposal: providing cash to 1.70 crore households covering 6.84 crore of the population.

It would cost the country 0.9-1.0 per cent of the GDP.

To avoid corruption and leakages in the proposed programme, it suggested that an in-built technology-induced mechanism be put in place to ensure minimum leakages

With great anxiety, bank staff come to work every day

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

In the first 10 working days of every month, the Agrabad branch of state-run Sonali has to give financial services to at least 2,000 to 3,000 clients, some of whom are pensioners or beneficiaries of the government's social safety net schemes.

The branch has to give the same services to at least 1,000 clients on the remaining working days of the month.

And the number of clients has even not decreased during the ongoing shutdown enforced to contain the spread of coronavirus.

"Rather, the branch staff have faced a tremendous rush of clients in recent days as the central bank has order shorter transaction hours of 10 am to 12.30 pm," said a senior official of the bank requesting anonymity to speak candidly on the matter.

Banks earlier did the same transaction until 4 pm.

"There's a rush of clients now. This makes maintaining social distance in the branch premises tough," he added.

Sonali, the country's largest bank in terms of its banking volume, has 1,224 branches across the country, and all are open.

The lender provides 37 types of financial services under the government social safety net

and other programmes.

Asked whether the bank management supplied personal protective equipment (PPE) to their employees, he said only those who handle cash got it.

Sonali's cash officials are luckier than the staff of other banks as only a few got the protective suit.

But as per the Bangladesh Bank's instruction, banks have supplied masks, gloves and hand sanitisers to their employees.

"PPEs should be provided on a priority basis," said Syed Mahbubur Rahman, an immediate past chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh, a forum of the private banks.

There are about 11,000 branches of 60 banks operating in the country, of which nearly 50 per cent are open to help keep the wheels of the economy moving.

An official of Southeast Bank's Dhanmondi branch said at least 30-40 customers now gather in front cash counters when normally 10-15 would come at once.

The central bank should extend the window for cash-related transactions to avoid the mad rush, he said.

Clients should play their due responsibility as many of them are not using debit cards, said Rahman, also the managing director of

Mutual Trust Bank.

"Rather, they send their gatekeepers and drivers to the banks to withdraw money by using cheques. They now use a cheque to withdraw only Tk 10,000-15,000, which is

illogical," he added.

Another reason many banks have kept all their branches open is that not all lenders have introduced online banking.

One such lender is Bangladesh Krishi Bank,



Snaking customers queue outside a bank branch in Dhaka yesterday.

which opens all 1,038 branches every day amid the movement control order.

Bank branches in lockdown areas are also open, creating a risky situation for the employees. Dhaka Metropolitan Police has put about 54 areas under lockdown, while the respective local administrations took the same measures for at least 31 districts.

More than one dozen employees of 10 banks have so far tested positive for COVID-19.

The number of infected employees will increase drastically if safety measures are not taken promptly, said a private bank employee.

Not all of them have their own transport and have to rely on public transport to get to work. This leaves them exposed to the lethal pathogen that thrives on hard surfaces.

Only a few have provided transport facilities to their employees, said a good number of officials of different banks.

Factoring in the risks on their lives, the BB yesterday instructed banks to provide an incentive to those who are working during the shutdown.

Bankers will get a month's basic salary as a special incentive if they work at least 10 days during the shutdown, while contractual staffs will enjoy 65 per cent of their salaries. The special incentive will range from a minimum of Tk 30,000 and a maximum of Tk 100,000 a month during the lockdown.

AMRAN HOSSAIN



TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Firms praying for an extension to hand in VAT returns

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and SOHEL PARVEZ
An announcement from the National Board of Revenue regarding the filing of value-added tax returns have thrown businesses into trouble.
The sudden move announced on April 10, came as a surprise to many businesses who have kept their offices and activities shut

and difficulties faced by businesses, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday said the deadline for returns submission would be extended.
"I have told the NBR chairman to extend the deadline," he told The Daily Star yesterday over the phone. He, however, did not say by how long would the deadline be extended.

the following month.
Firms have to pay Tk 10,000 as a penalty for failure to submit VAT returns within the scheduled time. They can also seek time for delayed furnishing of return but they have to pay 2 percent simple interest monthly for delayed submission, according to rules.
On the one hand, penalty and interest burden for delayed

"This is an abnormal situation and abnormal situation calls for abnormal measures," said Masud Khan, adviser of Crown Cement and chairman of Glaxosmith Kline Bangladesh.
The NBR officials said the authority decided to keep its field offices open on a limited scale only to receive VAT returns so that the businesses that want to submit return can. Another reason is to help firms avoid the penalty for failure to submit a return within the deadline.

The revenue authority also argues that many offices include banks, pharmaceutical companies, supermarkets, food business operators, ports and export-import related activities have been closed since March 26.

"We know that all will not be able to comply. So, we are trying to ensure the returns of those who will be able to comply. We are expecting VAT returns from those who are maintaining their operation. We are contacting firms," said a senior official of Dhaka North VAT Commissionerate.

The government also needs money, the official said.
Yet responses so far have been lukewarm, said officials at the field.

Revenue officials said a section of firms would be able to submit returns online.

It is those who are doing the jobs manually or yet to automate businesses fully are facing problems.

For instance, Green Delta Insurance Company (GDIC) could not submit returns as its branches and headquarters have been bolted shut during the countrywide general holidays.

"We have informed the field office that we would not be able to file returns due to the lockdown," said Chinmoy Chakrabarty, executive vice-president of GDIC.

The insurance company did not get all transaction information from field offices as courier services are also closed.

As there is no provision in the present VAT law to relax rules related to waiver of penalty, the NBR is working to send a proposal to the president to issue an ordinance under the circumstances.



SK ENAMUL HAQ

since the government declared general holidays and enforced stay at home order from March 26 to slow the spread of coronavirus that has claimed so far infected 803 and 39 lives in Bangladesh.

"It appeared to us that we live in a different world," said a top executive of a multinational company sharing his ordeal in preparing the returns for VAT, which is the highest sources of revenue for the state.

The company, which has been operating here for many years, had to call back its accounting and related employees to the office at a time when movement is restricted.

"We had to take the risk of going out only to prepare the returns and deposit VAT to the coffers," he said. And in the face of rising concerns

There is no provision in the VAT and Supplementary Duty Act 2012 to extend the deadline for returns submission. The NBR has now written to the president to give it the authority to extend the deadline.

Before the revenue board announced the decision that it would keep its VAT field offices open from April 12 to April 15 to receive VAT returns, businesses had expectations that the authority would relax rules regarding the fine of Tk 10,000 for delayed filling and waive 2 per cent interest for delayed submission under the circumstances.

As per rule, businesses have to submit details of transactions of the previous month and deposit VAT paid by the end consumers to the state coffer within 15 days of

submission increase cost of businesses during these days of shutdown.

On the other hand, there was no way for them to apply to the field office of VAT seeking additional time as they were also closed as per the government directive.

"How do we apply for time extension when VAT offices were also closed?" he said.

Underscoring the problem, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry urged the revenue board on April 9 for extension of the deadline from April 15 without penalty.

The country's apex trade body said it would not be possible for many businesses to furnish VAT returns on time because of coronavirus crisis.



The countrywide shutdown since March 26 to flatten the curve on coronavirus in Bangladesh has left plants in nurseries around Dhaka badly neglected and desperately parched as the workers who tend to them have packed up and left for their villages. Succulents, which prefer extremely dry conditions, though are thriving. The photos were taken yesterday. SK ENAMUL HAQ

Mobile internet slowest in Bangladesh among 42 countries

Operators seek additional spectrum to improve service

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

Mobile internet speed is slowing down in Bangladesh amid the coronavirus pandemic, according to an international study, which has found download speed in the country is the lowest among 42 markets it has covered.

The country's mobile operators said internet use has gone up following the government-announced holiday as people are using more mobile data than before, which has made it hard for them to offer better internet services with the existing spectrum.

In Bangladesh download speed of mobile internet was 9.3 Mbps in the first week of February and it came down to 7.8 Mbps in the last week of March, according to the study, conducted by Opensignal, a Hong Kong-based international mobile analytics organisation specialising in quantifying mobile network experience.

The decline in the internet speed was intensifying gradually after the second week of February, said the report published last week.

Opensignal got the data from its speed testing mobile application that people are using across the globe for assessing the users' network quality.

Since the first confirmed cases of coronavirus were announced in Bangladesh on March 8, internet use rose significantly, especially after the educational institutions were closed and the government declared a long holiday, which has taken a toll on the overall internet speed.

Opensignal analysed 4G download speed across Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South and Central America, and North America every week between January 27 and March 29.

Of the 42 countries, the download speed the Bangladeshi users were enjoying was of the poorest quality, putting the country at the bottom of the list, while Canadian users were enjoying the highest speed of 61.6 Mbps.

In Asia, South Korea offered the highest speed of 52.1 Mbps, according to the report.

The pandemic, along with its associated medical, social and economic disruptions, is also causing changes to the mobile experience

as most of the users in Bangladesh were struggling with the declining speed, it said.

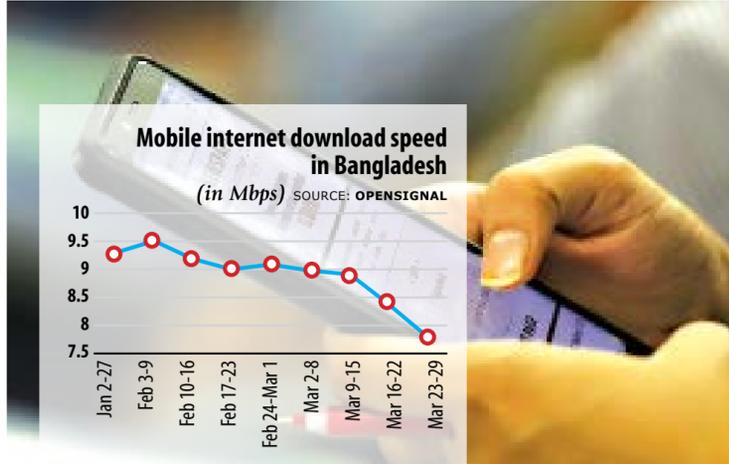
Suddenly a huge population moved from the urban to rural areas and that has caused an extra pressure on the mobile network, said SM Farhad, secretary general of the Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh.

"Operators were offering more mobile data

added.

Mobile operators said they are facing a crisis in some parts of the country as suddenly demand increased in those areas, which is why they need either time or additional spectrum for network expansion.

To that end, three mobile operators have applied to the Bangladesh Telecommunication



at lesser prices, which attracted many users to stay in the virtual world for a longer period."

Moreover, many people were working from home, while students were opting for online education. More and more people were browsing the internet for entertainment, which resulted in additional data consumption, Farhad said.

"We know, almost 95 per cent of the internet users in Bangladesh depend on mobile data for which adequate spectrum is needed."

But because of the exorbitant prices operators barely afford the spectrum they need to improve on the service quality.

"So, the poor download speed is a cumulative result of all these factors," Farhad

Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to allocate them some extra spectrum for the time being, said Md Jahurul Haque, chairman of the regulatory commission.

Robi, Banglalink and Teletalk in a letter to the BTRC sought some spectrum for three months, which the operators said will help them support the customers' growing demand for internet, according to Haque.

The operators, however, did not mention any volume or price for the spectrum. "The mobile phone companies had earlier talked with me about the issue and I think they have valid points."

On the Opensignal's report, Haque said spectrum shortage is an issue for the poor

service quality and if that can be addressed, service quality will improve.

The operators' average 4G speed is still higher than the regulator-announced benchmark but there are some parts of the country where operators cannot ensure quality service.

"BTRC is running speed tests along with other service quality parameters, and if we find anyone guilty of wrongdoings, we will take punitive actions against them," Haque added.

With the declaration of the general holiday by the government in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, the operators saw millions of people leave the capital city, said Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer at Robi Axiata.

"Usually such movement takes place during the Eid vacations and we, the operators, chalk out detailed plan to beef up our network in the rural areas to support that kind of voice and data traffic on our network."

Unfortunately, this sudden movement left the operators with no time to take the kind of preparation that was necessary to ensure a smooth network experience. As people are staying at home due to the holiday, internet use has increased by at least 30 per cent compared with the normal times, Alam said.

"The one way to solve this is to expand our network, but that requires time, which we don't have right now. The only workable

alternative is for the government to allow us some additional spectrum that is lying idle so that we can meet the customers' expectations during this crisis," he added.

In another development, the Bangladesh Mobile Phone Users' Association yesterday urged the government to allocate free spectrum to the mobile operators for the time being so that they can offer free internet services to customers.

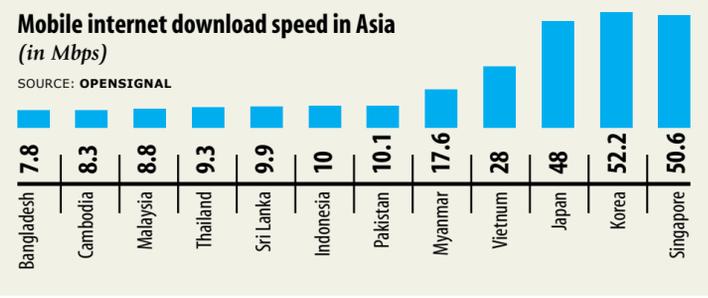
In a statement, the association placed their demand and said many countries have ensured free telecommunication services to the citizens amid the coronavirus crisis.

"Our government can take the initiative and allocate free spectrum to the carriers enabling them to serve customers for free, which will also help people stay at home," said Mohiuddin Ahmed, president of the association.

Due to the pandemic, voice calls have declined 20 per cent while internet use has increased 25 per cent.

"This causes operators to incur huge revenue losses. So to ensure that people stay at home during this crisis, the government can consider free spectrum allocation," Ahmed added.

Market insiders said governments in different countries have already allocated free spectrum to the mobile phone operators so that they can offer better services to their customers.



The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA TUESDAY APRIL 14, 2020, BAIASHAKH 1, 1427 BS

Pahela Baishakh celebrates the human spirit

To be united against all odds

OUR celebrations today will be uncharacteristically muted, without the huge congregation of people in colourful attire thronging to Ramna Batamul to listen to the songs that usher in the first day of Baishakh. There will be none of the bustle at traditional fairs. Even the vibrant celebrations of other ethnic communities will be absent from the lush landscapes of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and other places. But while the present coronavirus crisis may have brought to a halt our physical presence in all these gatherings, it cannot obliterate the spirit behind these celebrations. Pahela Baishakh's universal appeal unites all the citizens of Bangladesh and beyond, across class, race and religion. It is a recognition of our acceptance of each other, a celebration of our diversity and religious harmony, all part of our heritage.

While we may have to celebrate the New Year quietly in our own homes to adhere to the rules of social distancing, let us not distance ourselves from the spirit of unity, camaraderie and mutual respect. Let us manifest this inclusiveness through our support for each other. The Covid-19 pandemic has evoked the very best human qualities in many of us. We see this dedication to humanity in the number of private initiatives along with the government's, to provide food and financial assistance to the most vulnerable, marginalised people deprived of their livelihoods during the lockdown. We have witnessed how artists have put aside their usual grand preparations of making papier-mâché masks or traditional clay pot painting for the vibrant Mangal Shobhajatra. Instead, artists of Charukola, along with alumni and other individuals, have made personal protective equipment (PPE) to help protect doctors and other medical staff who are the frontline soldiers of the war against Covid-19. This is the true essence of Pahela Baishakh.

Our celebration is therefore of the human spirit that will survive all odds and manifest itself in the most trying of circumstances. As we quietly spend our Pahela Baishakh inside our homes, it is an opportunity for us to appreciate Mother Nature that has eternally sustained us, and make a vow to stop the destruction that we have inflicted at our own peril.

We convey our deepest sympathies to the loved ones of those who have succumbed to the virus and our prayers for those who are fighting it. We wish all our fellow human beings, Shubho Noboborsho. May you stay safe and well.

Walk-in Covid-19 test kiosks

A crucial and safe approach

WITH the support of an NGO—which has been tasked with the collection of samples, while the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) will carry out the tests at their own laboratories—44 walk-in kiosks, based on the South Korean design that has demonstrated impressive success, have been installed across the nation to enable a safe, quick and efficient approach for sample collection in order to conduct Covid-19 tests. We commend this timely initiative to address the lack of testing facilities across the country, given the importance of carrying out mass testing during this pandemic.

The testing booths are designed in such a way that safety of the health workers, as well as of those being tested, is ensured during the sample collection. The setting where the medical technologist stands is kept sterile, and the glass fixture in the middle further ensures that the precautionary distance is maintained while the sample from the supposed patient is being collected from small openings. Moreover, this method eliminates the manpower needed for the job, as well as the requirement to change the personal protective equipment (PPE) kit for every single patient. Following every sample collection, the gloves used and the chair on which the examinees sit are disinfected to ensure safety for the next person in line.

The convener of the NGO stated that an additional 320 booths will be installed in school and college premises across the country in phases. This way, the pressure on the hospitals can be reduced and the general public can easily get tested. As mass testing is the key to ensure safety, the introduction of these booths will serve as a beacon of hope in these dark times. We urge the responsible authorities to take immediate steps to set up such testing kiosks across the nation. We are still struggling in our fight against Covid-19, but such appropriate measures provide a sense of relief.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Domestic dispute during lockdown

Not everyone is actually safe in their own homes. I recently learnt of a distant family member in a difficult situation due to the lockdown. She is married to a man who has a terrible temper, and it has become extremely difficult to spend 24 hours locked indoors with him. Earlier, she would at least be comfortable while he was at work. Instead of assisting her with housework and the children, he has become more arrogant and demanding. The wife is in now constantly under pressure to attend to him, more out of dread than devotion. Those of us who are not in a similar situation are indeed fortunate. The thought of how many more women could be suffering silently from domestic disputes worries me; who is there to help them during these times?

Nipa Sarker, Chattogram

A different kind of new year

Noboborsho in the era of Covid-19



ZOBAIDA NASREEN

TWO months earlier, workers on the third floor of New Market in Dhaka were busy dyeing/preparing sarees, mostly white and red, to be delivered to boutique shops ahead of the New Year. Fine Arts students at the University of Dhaka (DU) started creating masks, paintings and replicas for the Mongol Shobhajatra. Shopping malls were about to fill their shelves with colourful clothes and jewellery. Who could imagine then that a deadly global pandemic—novel coronavirus or Covid-19—would take away all the excitement of festivity, and saving lives would become the priority?

Things changed very quickly and beyond our dreams. All of humanity is suffering today as we are in the middle of health and economic emergencies. Not just the festival economy, but most of the economy is now on hold. This year's Baishakh is perhaps the gloomiest one we are having in generations. Why is Pahela Baishakh important in these gravest of times in recent history?

We are almost four weeks into the crisis. Apart from emergency workers, we are mostly confined at home with family members. Living in lockdown or quarantine in tiny rooms can be painful. It is more painful when there is so much uncertainty. No work means many families are struggling to put food on the table. There are growing concerns about the possible health consequences of an extended period of physical distancing, particularly on mental health. Pahela Baishakh as a festival reinforces the idea of the universality of the human condition and injects a sense of togetherness, even in deeply unequal societies. It is also a time to reflect on our past mistakes and misdeeds and plan for the days to come. These are some of the strongest feelings that we need to embrace as we wade through this crisis.

Though differently, people will still celebrate Pahela Baishakh with family and friends. They will not pour onto the streets to celebrate the festival as they usually do. There will be no welcoming of the New Year by Chhayanaut artists at sunrise at Ramna Batamul. There will be no displays of having pantalish. Welcoming the New Year, many indigenous groups living in Bangladesh were also preparing to celebrate their main festivals, but had to drastically curtail their celebrations of Baisu, Sangrai, Biju, Bisu, and Bihu, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and beyond. Their celebrations are significantly different from Chhayanaut's Borshoboron and DU Fine Arts Faculty's Mongol Shobhajatra.

Yet, it is a day that brings everyone together, celebrating harmony in diversity. Understandably, there will be a lack of vibrant colours, rapturous rhythms, new dishes and excitement as a general mood of fear, depression and uncertainty prevails this year.

Originally a harvest festival marking the beginning of the crop cycle, Pahela Baishakh is also a time to reflect on issues that govern our lives. In these turbulent times, which are often described by world leaders as war-like, our top priority must be to protect the most vulnerable segment of society, who are disproportionately affected by the lockdown. The government has to find ways to minimise hardships by ensuring that people do not die of hunger and lack of treatment. Unfortunately, the early

stimulus packages totalling BDT 77,750 crore, which is 2.7 percent of the GDP. All of these are for formal sectors. While these packages are very important for setting the stage for a strong economic recovery, the more immediate need was a survival package for the most vulnerable people under lockdown, who are mostly from informal sectors. The vast majority of those people, living on daily wages and with very low savings, cannot stock up on essentials. Several weeks into the lockdown, community support is also drying up for them. It is imperative that a public distribution system is developed to ensure essentials are delivered to their doors.

What we require urgently is funds and goods for stabilisation during the pandemic, and then to stimulate the

There are many more community and local initiatives throughout the country.

Everyone's life depends on making sure that they have supplies of essential food items. As we are in the middle of agricultural high season, small farmers and day labourers will be putting themselves in the path of Covid-19 to feed the people. We should not forget that they are especially prone to respiratory illnesses due to their nature of work and ways of living. In this high season, when Covid-19 is spreading in different districts, more measures are needed to change the way these essential workers are forced to live and work.

Some people, especially the lower classes, will possibly experience the greatest hardships of a lifetime. We need the positive powers of Baishakh to help



FILE PHOTO

signs are ominous: one DU student died without getting treatment, and starving people under lockdown reportedly looted a truck carrying relief goods in Jamalpur. April is very crucial for us. By the end of the month, it should become somewhat clear how deep the crisis is in our country.

When a calamity strikes, it exposes how dangerously unprepared our government is. Despite getting several months for it, the efforts to contain the pandemic lacked coordination, a fact that the health minister himself admitted. Then, unprecedented quarantines have been imposed throughout the country. People are being prevented from travelling, or even going out of their homes. Despite calls for national unity from all sides, we are not all in this together. The government has announced six

economy after the pandemic. What we witnessed is the announcement of stimulus packages, but not many stabilisation efforts. This is symptomatic of a disproportionate influence of businesses over the government. What will happen after the lockdown? We must start preparing ourselves for post-coronavirus challenges. Diversification of our economy in a reordered global economic order is essential. Labour and health policies need rethinking. We need to invest heavily in universal health care, public education and food security.

Amid these turbulent times, there are signs of hope and courage. Initiatives like Bidyanondo Foundation's alternative food distribution or a leftist group's alternative ambulance services and "Manobotar Bazar" have drawn popular attention.

them get through it. Baishakh prepares us for a new beginning and to dream—not just lofty dreams, but those that are grounded in reality and are achievable. Not only on an individual level either, but a collective dream that puts collective wellbeing at its centre. In spite of Covid-19, dengue or any other public health threat, its spirit means our will to survive and our love of life will triumph.

In this crisis, we are required to face Covid-19 together, even when we are distancing ourselves physically. Pahela Baishakh gives us a chance to experience our community and reminds us of our togetherness, interdependence and solidarity.

Zobaida Nasreen teaches anthropology at Dhaka University. She can be reached at zobaidanasreen@du.ac.bd.

Democratic elite complicit in a potential Donald Trump victory

By backing a barely coherent Joe Biden over Bernie Sanders, Democratic elite have revealed their preference for neo-fascism over mild social democracy



IMTIAZ AREFIN

THE 2020 US elections will have a huge impact on global affairs. As one of the most powerful countries in the world, USA has an important role to play if we are to survive the two biggest threats

to existence—risk of thermo-nuclear war and climate change. The necessity of a steady and capable leader—who grasps the gravity of these challenges—to lead USA, and by extension, the world, cannot be overstated. The Democratic presidential primary race was still now down to Joe Biden (the centrist) versus Bernie Sanders (the progressive), with the winner competing against Republican President Donald Trump in the general elections. The Democratic establishment had left no stone unturned to hand the nomination to Biden and given Sanders' recent withdrawal from the race, they have succeeded. The concern is—on top of Biden's history of being on the wrong side of most major political issues, he continues to show signs of serious cognitive decline. Trump has already brought this up multiple times and will continue to religiously dwell on it till the cows come home. By running such a frail candidate against an incumbent President with a very enthusiastic voter base, the Democrats were essentially willing to risk a Trump victory in order to avoid a Sanders one.

In a decadent US society where unfettered capitalism has become the feature and not the bug, short term profits of large corporations—from fossil fuel companies to defence contractors—supersede the prospect of organised human life. As renowned public intellectual Noam Chomsky points out, "In the US, there is basically one party—the business party. It has two factions,

called Democrats and Republicans, which are somewhat different but carry out variations on the same policies."

But in 2016, Bernie Sanders started a political movement without any support from large corporations, wealthy individuals or the media—breaking with a century of American political history. As a Sanders presidency presented a genuine threat to the status quo that the power establishment thrives in, he needed to be stopped at any cost. In all

But despite Biden's wondrous turn of fortunes, all major left-wing progressive outlets in USA are warning that he is essentially Hillary Clinton 2.0. Besides the shared affection for pabulum and platitudes, they both voted for—in some cases, championed—disastrous trade deals and (now unpopular) wars.

likelihood, that has been achieved; at this point, only a cataclysmic event can prevent Biden from being the nominee and even in that scenario, party leaders will not nominate Sanders.

Even with the ceaseless ridicule and rebuke of Sanders, his supporters and his policies by the corporate media, and the party establishment shenanigans in Iowa (the first primary state), the 2020 Democratic primary started off almost like a fairytale for the Sanders camp. With the moderate vote being

split among centrist candidates, Sanders looked to be on the same path to victory as Trump's in the 2016 Republican primary. But after Joe Biden's remarkable South Carolina win, the entire Democratic establishment coalesced around him with astounding velocity and unprecedented coordination on the eve of Super Tuesday, when the greatest number of states held primary elections and caucuses. Biden's fellow moderates in the race—Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar—immediately dropped out and endorsed him, with Obama reportedly playing a hand behind the scenes. Having initially written Biden off, the national corporate media came around instantly to play their dutiful part and fall in line, providing USD 72 million in largely favourable earned news coverage.

But despite Biden's wondrous turn of fortunes, all major left-wing progressive outlets in USA are warning that he is essentially Hillary Clinton 2.0. Besides the shared affection for pabulum and platitudes, they both voted for—in some cases, championed—disastrous trade deals and (now unpopular) wars. Clinton herself recently stated that "Joe is building the kind of coalition that I had." If that's not a bellwether of impending disaster, I don't know what is. As pointed out by many political commentators, including MSNBC's Chris Hayes and Al Jazeera's Mehdi Hasan—there is no good reason for believing that the Democrats can rerun their 2016 playbook and Donald Trump will not rerun his. Indeed, insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.

In a showdown between Biden and Trump, voters will have to "choose" between two candidates more alike than apart. From similar resumes on hawkish foreign policy to corruption to even sexism and sexual harassment, the differences between the two candidates are far from obvious. And given Trump's formidable advantage in campaign funds

over the Democrats, this would be very easy to exploit and possibly lead to a depressed Democratic voter turnout.

Furthermore, in stark contrast to Biden's current lack of elocution, one of Trump's biggest strengths is (manipulation through) effective communication. Despite his cavernous incompetence on the coronavirus response, Trump is winning the messaging battle. And although the latest ABC/Washington Post poll currently has the two candidates in a virtual tie, the key metric to look at here is the enthusiasm level of supporters, where Trump holds a huge lead over Biden. This is a warning sign for Biden, as all recent Presidential candidates with low supporter enthusiasm ended up on the losing side. Some political commentators are wary of Biden's vapid candidacy and are hence betting on Trump botching the response to the ongoing crisis as the potential path to victory for Biden.

But even if Trump bungles the response to the pandemic and economic downturn, it doesn't automatically guarantee a Biden victory. To win, the Democrats need a large turnout among young voters, independents and typical non-voters (groups Sanders was overwhelmingly winning over); this is especially crucial in the Rust Belt states that delivered Trump's victory in 2016. But despite Biden's recent acknowledgement of the strength of the Sanders movement, he has not yet offered anything concrete to earn the votes of Sanders supporters. And as he has confirmed not picking Sanders as Vice President, party leaders must convince him to pick a major Sanders surrogate (like Nina Turner) or endorse significant policy proposals that matter to progressives. As these are quite improbable, Democratic elites are likely headed towards snatching defeat from the jaws of victory once again.

Imtiaz Arefin is a Masters graduate from Brandeis University, USA.

Magical thinking in the time of Covid-19

This is the final article of a two-part series



NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

I don't remember exactly when I heard about the 2019 version of coronavirus, Covid-19, but I do know it was during my travels in Asia this past January. Covid-19 was still local to China, as far as I knew, but having lived through swine flu (I vaguely remember chickens being slaughtered *en masse* in Bangladesh in response) and Ebola (which infected only 11 people in the United States), I engaged in a bout of magical thinking when I thought we—humanity as a whole, in general, and our world leaders, in particular—would be equally adept at fighting Covid-19. It turns out, this virus is far more insidious than anything we've seen before.

I thought we knew how to live through viral diseases: it primarily requires excellent leadership and cross-country multilateral coordination; re-allocation of resources to produce necessary instruments, including testing kits, vaccines, and cures needed by communities worldwide; and, public buy-in that happens through mass-messaging via government and non-government institutions, and more informally, through social networks, community leaders, and these days, social media influencers. More distant history provided comfort as well. Lessons from how tuberculosis was tackled include the import of community focused interventions such as "search, treat, and prevent" that were orchestrated collaboratively by governments, employers, and unions in the United States. But that too was magical thinking; we don't live in those times anymore. Unions, and relatedly workers, no longer have that kind of power, and after almost 40 years of neoliberalism we have, for the most part, governments so small that they are ineffective in handling anything that requires a unified intervention

addressing the needs of people without prioritising profit maximisation. And those two are inherently mutually exclusive under global capitalism. With privatisation and NGOisation, we are now reliant on those sectors for aid and intervention in crises. That those sectors are hardly equipped to deal with a pandemic has become exceedingly clear. This is perhaps a key reason for the prolonged period of non-response from governments and the institutions that implicitly run the government under neoliberalism.

This is true across the world; after all, there are no libertarians in a pandemic—everyone wants big government.

What we saw when Covid-19 broke out of China and into other parts of Asia, Europe, and then the Americas, is that many heads of government chose to play ostrich, and then martyr; they started getting infected themselves (I'm thinking of Boris Johnson here), all the while sitting on a novel virus that gained momentum, resulting in a rising human cost that is, frankly, unimaginable, particularly at this time of scientific and medical innovation and discovery.

We know that crises make way for the stripping of rights. Under global capitalism, that amounts to deep violence and indignity of people who are made expendable. Across the globe, the expendables are those who are poor and considered minorities, those who already have limited rights, and those who work the most precarious jobs, without whose labour the world would cease to function. Yet, they are the ones who risk their lives to provide essential labour. In the US, more than 22,000 have died from Covid-19; reports suggest this is an underestimation. It surprises no one that emerging data show that most casualties are from historically oppressed groups—Black, low income, immigrants. For example, in Chicago, 70 percent of those who died are Black even when they constitute 29 percent of the population.

In Bangladesh, the number of deaths remained steady at five for weeks, then rose to 13, and then shot to 39. The

disparity between the two nations is a function of underestimating the death count, even though both nations suffer from the same problem of not testing enough. Of the 39 that are known, most are middle-class; oppressed groups in the global South are often seen as faceless masses of people stripped of individuality and individual lives. They don't have access to medical care, and when they die, it is often attributed to poverty related health impairments. Even in death, they don't count. But this time, they might have to be, given the sheer number of fatalities that are

being used to engineer a change in demographics. It is, after all, low-income neighbourhoods that are worst affected by Covid-19. In these neighbourhoods, people don't have the luxury of "working from home" as social distancing mandates go into effect. This population includes many Bangladeshi immigrants in the United States who work jobs that have now become essential. They choose between poverty and risking their lives. When they die, it is framed as a choice—because they are arguably aware of the risk they are taking—constrained as that choice is. They are then blamed for their own deaths because they tend to have socially produced underlying diseases such as hypertension and diabetes that increase their risk of being severely affected by Covid-19. Informal tallies indicate that over a hundred Bangladeshi immigrants in New York have already died of Covid-19.

And this is how we know that their lives don't matter: amid the Covid-19 crisis of which New York is the epicentre, New York Governor Cuomo is considering a plan that would cut Medicaid spending, the means-tested public health insurance programme that many workers rely on.

Then there are those who are even more marginalised: prisoners in densely populated jails, homeless people, and immigrants in detention centres. And in the time of coronavirus-inspired paranoia, our minds go to dark places. In particular, I am reminded of the Nixon era "benign neglect policy" or "do nothing approach" as we hear about the cases of Covid-19 in these populations. The humane thing to do would be to let prisoners out, let the migrants in detention centres through to find safety, treat all individuals like citizens, put the legalese aside, and provide them with healthcare.

They have a right to the same kind of healthcare as those who have been elected to represent them.

identities. But that has never stopped politicians from blaming people for ill health, in the same way that people are blamed for the poverty in which they are forced to live. Such forms of erasure deny people the cause of their suffering; indeed, such erasure is undeniably a form of violence.

When such rhetoric is explicit, like that of Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, who said "lots of grandparents" are willing to die to save the economy, it inspires all kinds of worrying questions, including about whether the pandemic



A body wrapped in plastic is unloaded from a refrigerated truck, handled by medical workers wearing personal protective equipment, at Brooklyn Hospital Center in New York City.

PHOTO: AP/JOHN MINCHILLO

being projected. A leaked memo from the United Nations estimates that two million will die from Covid-19 in Bangladesh.

We are being told that "healthy" people can survive Covid-19, thus responsabilising and shaming those with "underlying conditions" that increase the risk of mortality. Specifically, older adults and people with medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity are being told, directly and indirectly, that they are expendable; that had they been taking care of themselves,

available to them. Molecular and cell biologists should be able to develop very specific bioassays based on the above molecular targets, and these disease-specific bioassays could be used to screen the very large libraries of indigenous medicinal plants, and isolated secondary metabolites, collected by ethnobiologists and medicinal chemists in Bangladesh. Every positive lead compound would be a potential candidate drug against SARS-CoV-2 that could be patented and developed into a new drug if the required technology platform is established as a national core facility, another plea that has gone unheeded over the last fifteen years. Hopefully, the Covid-19 pandemic will open the eyes and ears of our policymakers so that higher education, research and innovation are supported at the required levels, so that we are prepared the next time around.

Besides coronaviruses, a number of viruses have crossed over from wild animals to humans (Influenza, HIV, Ebola, Marburg) in recent years, causing very frightful diseases. Most of them have lived in animal hosts for thousands of years but in recent times, human activities have destroyed the natural habitats of their hosts and brought man and wild animals into close contact. The Covid-19 pandemic is a timely warning to the human race to not destroy the environment and natural habitats of exotic animals in the mad pursuit of profits and development at any cost.

Prof Ahmed Azad PhD, a retired molecular virologist, has been intimately involved in developing several anti-viral drugs and vaccines. After retirement (2006), he has worked with younger colleagues to help build biotechnology research capacity in Bangladesh. Email: aazad1945@gmail.com

Covid-19: Taming the beast

AHMED A AZAD

THE Covid-19 pandemic, caused by coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, has brought the entire world to its knees and virtually stopped all face-to-face social interactions between humans. Personal freedoms and human rights have been severely curtailed all over the world to help slow down the infection and death rates. This newly discovered coronavirus is extremely contagious, and up to 20 times more deadly than seasonal flu. Currently, the only way to reduce community spread is by maintaining good hygiene, social distance and self-isolation. In Bangladesh, it will be a challenge to implement these public health measures in congested environments, and particularly hard for disadvantaged people and casual workers who would starve if confined at home for long. A substantial portion of the government's stimulation package must be ring-fenced for the poor and needy, otherwise the public health measures will fail.

Effective health and economic policies to counter the adverse effects of the pandemic require extensive testing for the presence of the virus in infected individuals, and people they have been in contact with. PCR- and sequence-based tests require expensive equipment and reagents, are time-consuming, and the total capacity is hardly adequate for testing all infected individuals, contact tracing and determining the infection status of health care workers. There is an urgent need for a quick, inexpensive and less invasive blood tests for detecting anti-viral antibodies and confirming infection. A simple dot-blot blood test that provides results within 15

minutes has reportedly been developed through a joint venture collaboration between Gonoshasthaya Kendra and RNA Biotech Ltd, a company formed by a group of young researchers in Bangladesh.

If the claims for this locally developed test are validated, then the project should be treated and supported as an urgent national priority, so that adequate numbers of kits can be made available for extensive testing at the earliest. The quoted price per test is minuscule in comparison to the gene-based assays currently in use in Bangladesh, and could be much lower if the recombinant antigens (the four structural proteins of the virus) were produced in Bangladesh. The imported recombinant viral antigens, produced in bacteria (*E.coli*), might suffice for virus detection but may not be ideal for further biological and clinical studies.

The above rapid test, using locally-produced recombinant antigens that more closely resemble those in the virus particle, could also be an important research tool for following antibody production and response during different phases of disease progression. If properly designed, the dot-blot assay could help identify virus-neutralising antibody in blood collected from individuals recovered from the infection. If the neutralising antibody could be purified, then its protein sequence could be reverse-engineered into a therapeutic monoclonal antibody for mass production by recombinant DNA technology. The required expertise is present in Bangladesh but the multidisciplinary technologies need to be assembled under one roof as a national core facility, a plea that has

fallen on deaf ears.

It is not enough to just keep the virus at bay by social isolation. The virus-induced paralysis of normal life and enforced shutdown cannot continue *ad infinitum*, and countermeasures need to be contemplated. To tame and conquer the invisible beast, we need to understand its biology and molecular structure to discover its soft underbelly as a target for drug and vaccine development. Coronaviruses of innumerable types are ubiquitous in many non-primate animals. Seven of these have managed to cross over into humans. Four have been around for over a century, and cause about a third of all the seasonal colds. Three that have emerged in recent years (SARS, MERS and Covid-19) cause severe illness in humans, termed Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS), but SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19 virus) is by far the most deadly and contagious.

So, how did SARS-CoV-2 emerge in humans and why is it so dangerous? The ancestor could be a bat coronavirus (88 percent sequence homology) that cannot produce disease in humans or spread from one human to another. It could have picked up these properties through genetic exchange with another coronavirus in a co-infected intermediate host such as a pangolin (an ant-eating mammal), which is a culinary delicacy and is used in Chinese medicine. It is possible that the Covid-19 virus that had finally evolved into a dangerous pathogen in pangolins passed over into a human in the wet markets of Wuhan. SARS-CoV-2 can enter human cells and spread to other humans through a molecular interplay between the viral spike protein on its surface (that gives all coronaviruses the spectacular

fallen on deaf ears.

It is not enough to just keep the virus at bay by social isolation. The virus-induced paralysis of normal life and enforced shutdown cannot continue *ad infinitum*, and countermeasures need to be contemplated. To tame and conquer the invisible beast, we need to understand its biology and molecular structure to discover its soft underbelly as a target for drug and vaccine development. Coronaviruses of innumerable types are ubiquitous in many non-primate animals. Seven of these have managed to cross over into humans. Four have been around for over a century, and cause about a third of all the seasonal colds. Three that have emerged in recent years (SARS, MERS and Covid-19) cause severe illness in humans, termed Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS), but SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19 virus) is by far the most deadly and contagious.

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QUOTABLE Quote

RABINDRANATH TAGORE
(1861-1941)
Bengali poet, writer, musician and painter.

Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Singer Josh
- 7 Troubling sign
- 11 "Forget it!"
- 12 Mountain lion
- 13 Pressured
- 15 Plains grazers
- 16 Ignored the limit
- 18 Fourth-down play
- 21 Fly high
- 22 School paper
- 24 Sit-up targets
- 25 Small tablet
- 26 Take to court
- 27 Lose
- 29 Butte's kin
- 30 Bike part
- 31 Bird home
- 32 Trouble

DOWN

- 1 African grazer
- 2 Guitarist Wood
- 3 Strange
- 4 Singer Justin
- 5 Bitter
- 6 Brooklyn team
- 7 "Let me in!"
- 8 Stein's kin
- 9 Outback bird
- 10 Photographer
- Goldin
- 14 Had aspirations
- 16 Ferber book
- 17 Out of style
- 19 Snouts
- 20 Reliance
- 21 Frodo's friend
- 22 Bright beam
- 23 Hot brew
- 25 Kitchen gadget
- 28 Record companies
- 29 Sky streaker
- 31 First Indian prime minister
- 33 Wild guess
- 34 Sky sighting
- 35 Silent assent
- 36 Expected
- 37 California's Big -
- 38 GI-entertaining org.
- 39 Fresh

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

BOSSA HATCH
ARIEL OMARHA
RECAP BY FAR
SHOOTIE
SEAHAWKS
ERGO NEEDED
TIERS NAOMI
SCREEN FLIP
SEASALTS
KINDYER
ICEUP PECAN
TORSO IRATE
ENDED ASYET

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

DID YOU FINISH THE POT OF COFFEE?
NO, I POURED IT ON THE FLOOR.
IT WORKS BETTER THAN THE INDUSTRIAL-STRENGTH CLEANER.

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

JUDITH'S MIND-YOUR-MANNERS ACADEMY? I WANT TO ENROLL HANNIE.
WHY?
SO HE'LL LEARN THE SOCIAL GRACES.
WOULD HE STILL BE ALLOWED TO MAKE ARMPIT NOISES?
MAYBE THERE'S A FATHER-SON DISCOUNT.

LAW VISION

COVID-19 and force majeure: A Bangladeshi perspective

Md. SAMEER SATTAR

THE outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan, China was first reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) Country Office in China, on 31 December 2019. Within three months, COVID-19 has affected more than 100 countries and been characterised as a pandemic by the WHO. As the virus spreads, it is believed that it will have a far-reaching impact on the global economy and international trade. Companies will need to be prepared for the pandemic and circumstances where the outbreak brings an adverse impact on business generally and, more importantly, on the performance of commercial contracts. In particular, companies should consider whether they are entitled to invoke *force majeure* under the contracts, and thereby defer the performance of their contractual obligations without penalty.

A *force majeure* event means an extraordinary event which is beyond the control of the contracting parties. Examples include, *inter alia*, acts of God (like a natural calamity) or events such as a war, strike, riots etc. In simple terms, a successful invocation of a *force majeure* clause generally relieves the

parties from their respective contractual obligation and/or liability.

Under English Common Law, the applicability of *force majeure* is purely contractual. It is understood that a generalised doctrine of *force majeure* does not exist and it is up to the parties to define the events as to what constitutes *force majeure* events. In Bangladesh, the position is similar as there is no direct statute that directly governs the doctrine of *force majeure* or gives effect to it in express terms. Since the doctrine of *force majeure* does not have any direct statutory basis under the laws of Bangladesh, its reliance is based primarily on the parties' agreement and the respective terms of the contract entered into between the contracting parties.

However, not all commercial contracts may contain a *force majeure* clause and, in today's situation of COVID-19, parties may be in an uncertain position as to whether they can perform their respective obligations under the contract in a timely manner or, if at all. It is therefore essential to understand whether parties in Bangladesh can successfully claim a *force majeure* event or be relieved from their respective responsibilities due

to COVID-19 under the existing legal framework in Bangladesh. All contracts, which are governed by Bangladeshi law, are regulated by the Contract Act 1872 (the "Act of 1872"). The doctrine of frustration is enshrined in Section 56 of the Act of 1872 which provides that a contract becomes void when, *inter alia*, it becomes impossible to perform. So, if the contract becomes impossible to perform for any reason whatsoever, it shall be treated as void under the laws of Bangladesh, provided that the defaulting party did not know or could not have known that the contract would be so frustrated. The effect of a void contract is that it cannot be enforced by law

"In the absence of an appropriately worded *force majeure* clause in a contract, the parties in Bangladesh may have the option of relying on the existing provisions of Bangladeshi law."

and the parties are relieved from their respective obligations.

It is clear that, to attract the doctrine of frustration, the performance of the contract must become absolutely impossible due to the happening of some unforeseen event. This was clearly held by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh where it stated that to attract the doctrine of frustration of contract, the performance of the contract must become absolutely impossible due to the event (subsequent to the making of the agreement) which are not in contemplation of the parties and which could not be foreseen with reasonable

diligence. The position is similar in India as well where the Indian Supreme Court has articulated that *force majeure* events are governed by similar provisions of the Indian Contract Act 1872.

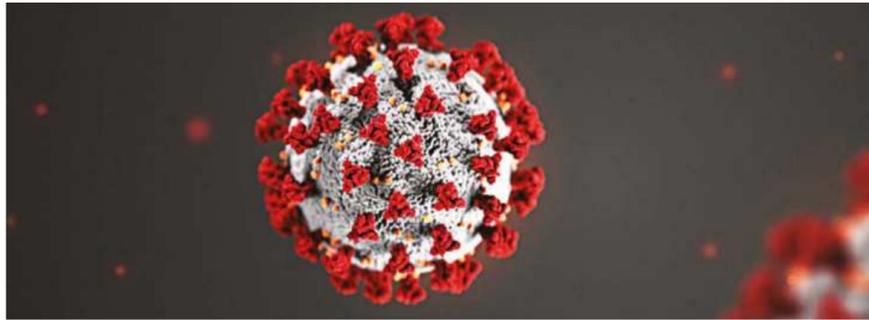
Therefore, in the absence of an appropriately worded *force majeure* clause in a contract, the parties in Bangladesh may have the option of relying on the existing provisions of Bangladeshi law - in particular, Section 56 of the Act of 1872 - in order to excuse itself from the timely performance of their respective obligations under the contract. However, in order to avoid unscrupulous parties from taking advantage of COVID-19 as a *force majeure* event, it must be remembered that a valid claim under a *force majeure* clause due to COVID-19 is likely to depend on strict considerations and the contracting party should be prepared with clear evidence to support its claim. There has to be a clear nexus between the *force majeure* event and the non-performance of the contractual obligation. The burden of proof is on the party seeking to rely upon the *force majeure* provisions, and the provisions are usually construed narrowly against that party. In particular, the Courts have been reluctant to interpret such provisions so as to excuse non-performance where there is evidence of negligence or a breach of duty by the party affected. Even if it is established that there is a causal link between the *force majeure* event and delay, parties are likely to have to show that they have taken all reasonable endeavours to circumvent the *force majeure* event. For example, if the delay in delivery of materials has caused a delay in performance of the contract, it will have to be shown that reasonable efforts have been adopted to avoid the *force majeure* event by, for example,

obtaining materials from alternative suppliers.

It follows that, when considering claims for *force majeure* events, parties should diligently review and consider the precise wording of the relevant *force majeure* clauses of each contract and check the time limits and/or notification obligations of the same. The parties should ensure strict compliance with the notice provisions of such a clause and monitor closely the development of the COVID-19 situation and how it has affected the performance of the contract. The affected party should also formulate any emergency plans to mitigate the effect of such a *force majeure* event, and gather evidence to demonstrate that they have acted reasonably in the circumstances.

Lastly, it is important to mention that, in order to avoid any ambiguity on the subject, the Governments of different countries have already issued circulars clearly stating that COVID-19 is to be treated as a *force majeure* event. For example, the Government of India has issued a notice on 19 February 2020 that COVID-19 "should be considered as a case of natural calamity" meaning that *force majeure* clauses in contracts can be invoked for such events. On the other hand, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, a quasi-Governmental body, announced on 26 February 2020 that it had issued more than 1600 *force majeure* certificates covering contracts worth tens of billions of yuan. It is also advisable that our Government of Bangladesh should consider the current situation and also take appropriate steps in defining this pandemic as a *force majeure* event, where applicable.

THE WRITER IS THE HEAD OF FIRM OF SATTAR & CO. ASSISTED BY HIS ASSOCIATE, MD. KHADEMUL ISLAM CHOYON.



YOUR ADVOCATE

Quarantine and its legal enforcement



This week Your Advocate is Barrister Omar Khan Joy, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh. He is the head of the chambers of a renowned law firm, namely, 'Legal Counsel', which has expertise mainly in commercial law, corporate law, family law, employment and labor law, land law, banking law, constitutional law, criminal law, IPR and in conducting litigations before courts of different hierarchies. Our civil and criminal law experts from reputed law chambers will provide the legal summary advice.

Query

In this highly alarming situation of Coronavirus, we have observed that people do not stay in quarantine and they are still attending public gatherings and exposing themselves to the risk of being infected with it. How do we legally enforce the order of quarantine and stop public gathering?

Response

Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) has been declared as an internal public health emergency by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which has infected millions of people worldwide. In Bangladesh, laws such as the Contagious Diseases (Prevention, Control and Eradication) Act 2018 (CDA 2018) have been enacted with the view to preventing, curing and eradicating contagious diseases. Under CDA 2018, the Directorate General for Health Services (DGHS) is responsible for taking appropriate measures regarding contagious diseases, including, but not limited to, purifying/destroying products of infected persons, putting an infected person in quarantine, etc. CDA 2018 further provides penalties for persons spreading contagious diseases advertently, obstructing the DG or other personnel in discharging their duties, etc. Moreover, Sections 269 to 271 of the Penal Code, 1860 can also be invoked

to punish the people, who may risk the spreading of the novel coronavirus and/or violate the order of quarantine. In addition to that, the Hon'ble High Court Division has also given an oral direction for the checking of foreign nationals while entering Bangladesh, preparatory measures to be taken by public and private hospitals and the Government to import emergency equipment, if needed. However, it is clearly visible that there is a lack of seriousness to the entire issue of COVID-19. Although the Government has adopted a few measures, such as production of masks, introducing COVID-19 helpline, briefing IEDCR, closing down schools, colleges, etc., it is still insufficient if we come to analyse the catastrophic effect COVID-19 may bring to our country. Proper implementation of the law and rigorous measures seem to be missing.

If we come to think of the measures taken by other countries, we can clearly see that almost all the countries are in a lockdown and

people are abiding by the directions given by the Officials of their countries. Unfortunately, our country people are unaware of how deadly COVID-19 can get and the catastrophic consequences associated thereto.

In such a situation where people are not abiding by the order of quarantine, an order under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898 (or similar provisions for the metropolitan areas) may be imposed against such persons. An order under s. 144 of CrPC 1898 can be issued by a District Magistrate or any other Magistrate specially empowered by the Government or the District Magistrate to act under s. 144, where they consider that such direction is likely to prevent obstruction, annoyance, injury, danger to human life, health or safety, etc. Historically, during most of the military regimes, we have seen the use of this section, mostly for arbitrary purposes. However, we can make use of this order in a positive manner at this moment of crisis and solely for the purpose of public welfare, health & safety. It has been

reported that orders under section 144 of Indian CrPC have been imposed in Noida, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra as a precautionary measure from COVID 19. Moreover, section 144 has also been imposed in the Punjab Province of Pakistan after cases of COVID-19 have been reported in the country.

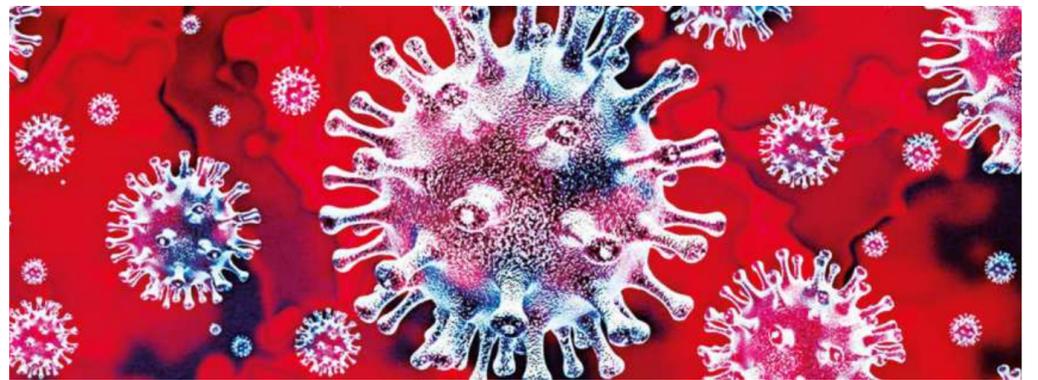
Likewise, the Italian Prime Minister has signed a decree, ordering people to stay at home, banning all sorts of public gatherings. Most of the Italians have followed decree, however, there have also been people who have been found in breach of it. It is worth mentioning that Italy has put charges on more than 40,000 people who have been found in violation of the lockdown. In a similar manner, a decree of State of Alarm has been approved by the Government of Spain and hundreds of people have been arrested across Spain for violating the said decree.

Therefore, at the moment where the people of our country are knowingly or unknowingly failing to fathom the seriousness of the situation and the intensity of the deadly COVID-19, making ill-use of the quarantine and attending public gatherings, imposition of section 144 seems to be the only way through which they can be compelled to stay indoors and avoid all sorts of public gatherings.



LAW ANALYSIS

The laws relating to communicable diseases



IN light of the current pandemic caused by COVID-19, it is important to review the existing legal provisions that outline the powers and duties of the Government to mitigate and prevent further spread of infectious diseases. The Penal Code, 1860 and the Communicable Diseases (Prevention, Control and Elimination) Act, 2018 are relevant in this regard.

The Penal Code, 1860 contains provisions on the negligent and malignant spread of infectious diseases and criminalises disobedience of quarantine rule. With the unprecedented degree of transmission of the novel Coronavirus, any negligent conduct resulting in spreading is bound to have dire consequences. Sections 269 and 270 of the Code apply to negligent and malignant conduct respectively, of which the former is more relevant in the present context. Section 269 states that a person shall be imprisoned for a term up to six months or be liable to fine or both, if they commit any act which they know or have reason to believe is 'likely to spread' the infection of a disease dangerous to life. Even without conclusive evidence on the fatality rate of the COVID-19, it is abundantly clear that the virus can have deadly consequences. Arguably, the terms 'likely to spread' and 'has reason to believe' entail a wide scope of application, particularly against the backdrop of growing national and international pleas aimed at confinement of the virus.

Section 271 imposes a punishment of imprisonment up to six months and/or fine for disobeying any rule of putting vessels into quarantine or 'regulating the intercourse between places where an infectious disease prevails and other places'.

While the Penal Code imposes criminal liability on individuals, the 2018 Act holistically addresses the prevention, control and elimination of infectious diseases. It is aimed at tackling public health emergencies, mitigating danger to public health and creating awareness. Section 4 of the 2018 Act contains a list of diseases that fall within the ambit of the Act, but the list is not exhaustive. The Government may, through an official gazette, declare an emerging or re-emerging disease to be an infectious disease within the meaning of the Act. In fact, the High Court Division on March 18, 2020 directed the Government to issue a gazette declaring the novel coronavirus as a contagious disease under the 2018 Act.

Under the 2018 Act, the Directorate of Health is authorised to inspect and take necessary actions with regard to any place, clinic, hospital and diagnostic lab that provides healthcare for contagious diseases. It can also direct any person in possession of information regarding the disease to provide the same to the Directorate. Furthermore, to contain the spread of the disease, the Directorate can impose quarantine or isolation measures on any person suspected to be affected at any hospital, temporary hospital, establishment or their homes. Movements within the country as well as the arrival of flights, sea-vessels, bus, train or other vehicles can also be prohibited under this Act.

If it is evident to the Director of Health or any empowered official that the disease in any particular area cannot be contained or removed, it may declare the area as infected and prohibit entry under Section 11 of the Act. And if there are reasons to believe that the disease may be transmitted from an infected individual,

the Director or any empowered official may direct for that person to be isolated or transferred to a different location. As per Section 20, any individual who has expired due to a contagious disease, has to be buried or disposed off as per the directions of empowered officials.

The Act also imposes responsibility upon the concerned health practitioners and respective owners and managers of hotels, boarding(s) or residential places to notify the Civil Surgeon regarding any instances of contamination under Section 10. Under Section 18, if the concerned officials have reasons to believe that the transport is contaminated with the disease, they may direct the owner or caretaker of the transport to take necessary measures for disinfection.

Sections 25 and 26 of the Act contain penal provisions. Under Section 25, obstructing any Director General, Civil Surgeon or other empowered officials from performing their lawful duties, or refusing to follow any directions of the same is punishable with up to three months of imprisonment and/or fine up to BDT 50,000. On the other hand, Section 26 penalises the furnishing of false information. Any person who provides false or incorrect information regarding any contagious disease despite possessing the correct information can be sentenced to maximum two months of imprisonment and/or a fine of BDT 25,000.

To sum it up, it is evident that prompt and effective actions are crucial to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government should heed the urgency of the matter and implement the relevant laws.

FROM LAW DESK.

সলিড নন ফ্যাট টেস্ট
মিল্ক, প্রোটিন টেস্ট ও হাইড্রোবায়োলজিক্যাল
টেস্টসহ বারবার নানা পরীক্ষায়
নিকিত স্বাস্থ্য পরিকল্পনাকারী
আড়ং ডেইরি পণ্য

যশোগুণ
ডালিবাস

Has the 'tree' taken root properly?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

'April is the cruellest month,' T.S. Eliot had written in *The Waste Land*. Given the current coronavirus crisis the world over, this April is likely to be another cruel month for mankind.

However, April has not always been so cruel to Bangladesh, and one April 23 years ago in particular, had brought reason for massive festivity when the national cricket team secured their maiden berth in the World Cup by winning the ICC Trophy.

Driven by the heartbreak of '94, three years later a team showed what can be achieved with the right processes. National cricketers who were born on April 13, 1997, heroes who are still remembered with great respect when one walks down the memory lane. But for one of those heroes, the memories could have been sweeter had growth of cricket in the country been at an optimum level.

Khaled Mashud, nicknamed Pilot, had scored a match-winning 70 against Scotland in the game that mattered the most -- the semifinal -- before playing a cameo in the final to emerge as one of Bangladesh's saviours in difficult moments. During an interview with *The Daily Star*, Mashud recalled how the final was 'one about happiness' while recalling that they were under 'great pressure' before the semis since 'either you win that or you are out of the World Cup'.

"I had never batted at one-down before, but it just clicked that day. I was instructed to hold one end given that the ball was swinging early on those astroturf wickets. I was like a nightwatchman.

"It was a lot of hard work before the tournament and we became a great team. The preparation was good and we even played in astroturf in domestic league," Mashud recalled.

Who can forget Mashud hitting a big six off Martin Sujji or Hasibul Hossain Shanto stealing a single off the last delivery to clinch the enthralling final? 23 years on, those images remain iconic for our cricket.

"It was a great feat to beat Kenya, who were already playing in the World Cup," Mashud said.

For him, the feat of winning the ICC Trophy was 'like planting the tree from which everything would take root' in Bangladesh cricket.

"Had we failed, maybe there wouldn't have been the enthusiasm to develop cricket and move forward. Had we lost,



Bangladesh national cricket team was given a grand reception at the Manik Mia Avenue in the capital in 1997 after their historic ICC Trophy triumph.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

maybe we wouldn't have played Tests in 2000 and we would have to wait for everything for four more years," the wicketkeeper-batsman reflected.

But looking back at the times that have passed since that triumph, the now successful domestic coach has a tinge of quiet regret.

"Except for India, cricket is not as popular anywhere else in the world as it is in Bangladesh. I feel that in these 23 years, Bangladesh should have been a better team. I think we could have performed 30 percent better had we focused on the structures and processes, especially on how players come up through the system and how to create structures for that. We are improving. There is money coming into cricket and facilities have improved and the board is rich, but process-wise, we are lacking.

"We have passed two to three generations of players after becoming a Test nation. We should have not only had a strong eleven but a batch of 40 players

who could be at a level close to India's.

"We needed a better plan so that no matter who comes into the board, the process doesn't change. There has only been one cricket academy in Mirpur in all this time. It doesn't require money but a good thought process to reach that level," Mashud lamented.

Asked about the recent players' strike, Mashud said: "I don't know what the public perception is but what they wanted [during the players' strike] was the right thing. Think about it, if Shakib [Al Hasan], Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza] or Tamim [Iqbal] don't work for Bangladesh cricket after retirement, if their opinions are not sought, it won't affect them but it would be a huge loss for our cricket."

And this had happened in the past too, Mashud opined. "Look at our former players like Akram [Khan] who is now the Cricket Operations Chairman or Khaled Mahmud in Game Development. There should be others to shape structure but it would

have been more crucial if former players were involved with the next generation. Things such as how Akram bhai used to build his innings should be shared at field level. [Minhajul Abedin] Nannu bhai and Habibur Bashar are selectors now, but they could have been batting consultants. Their experience would have been crucial."

The development that is hoped for could have been possible. Mashud drew on the example of FC Barcelona in order to find the talents and said: "They [Barca] have a process. BCB should have enlisted all cricket academies in the nook and corner of the country. They should have categorised the academies according to quality of service provided. A standard should have been set and the BCB should have then assessed if the right way of training was taking place. Groom the coaches and provide a training structure for them. That's what they could have done," Mashud said, reminding that the tree ultimately did not take root the way it should have.

'We have meals on alternate days'

Bangladesh's fastest teenage sprinter talks about his hardships

ANISUR RAHMAN



The country's fastest teenage sprinter Samiul Islam and his family have fallen upon hard times in the midst of the global coronavirus pandemic, which has led to a countrywide shutdown that has hit Samiul on multiple levels.

Apart from winning the 100m sprint in the 18-19 age-group of the 35 National Junior Athletics Championships, clocking 11.41 seconds (electronic timing) in October 2019, Samiul is often called Kylian Mbappe for his nippy runs up front when going to Khulna to play in leagues as a hired striker.

With an income of Tk 1,850 per week as a temporary labour at Khulna's Crescent Jute Mills, under Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC), and through sporadic earnings from football, Samiul and his family were more or less content. However, losing his BJMC job in December 2019 and the subsequent suspension of sport countrywide have thrown them into a state of despair.

"We are not in a good position as we have been spending days almost without food. To be honest, with what the situation of the country is at the moment, we are taking meals on alternative days because we are a family of six with the father unable to do hard labour due to his back pain. Meanwhile, I don't have a job at BJMC and can't earn money playing football. Besides, I could also work as a farm hand on the field but there is no work at the moment," Samiul told *The Daily Star* over phone from Khulna yesterday.

"It would make a big difference to us at the moment if we had the job at BJMC. Because, we could have at least met the basic necessities at a time when everyone is struggling to feed their family," said Samiul, one of 273 athletes working as temporary labour, but all of them were terminated by BJMC in December last year as part of cutbacks as a result of losses incurred by the state-run corporation.

Samiul's family is now being run with a little income from his father, who is selling diesel to farmers at a profit of Tk 3 per litre.

"Having played football, I managed some money for my disadvantaged father, who is now selling some 40 to 50 litres of diesel a day to farmers in this harvesting season, apart from selling pigeon feed. Our family is surviving on an overall income of Tk 150 per day and through the money I saved from playing football," said the 20-year-old athlete, who said that he earned between Tk 200 and Tk 2,000 per match and around Tk 7,000 to Tk 8,000 per month during the football season.

After becoming the fastest teenager in the junior meet, Samiul got an offer from Bangladesh Army to play for them on a temporary contract, but the sprinter refused the Army job as he had the BJMC job then.

"After losing the BJMC job, I haven't had the chance to continue as a sprinter and I am likely to leave athletics permanently and play full-time football, as I can earn from it and bear the educational expenses of my three younger siblings -- two sisters and a brother," said Samiul, who hails from Digholia Upazila of Khulna.

The country's former fastest woman and BJMC coach Sultana Parveen Lovely had spotted Samiul from the remote area and trained him to compete at the national level.

"He was an obedient athlete from an underprivileged family and he had been doing really well. Although Samiul won the 100m sprint in junior championships, he was actually better in the 400m run. We could have made him a good sprinter had we given him more time and had BJMC not terminated him," said Lovely, adding that Samiul joined BJMC in the middle of 2017 and left BJMC in December, 2019.



SAMIUL ISLAM

BFF officials distribute food in Fatullah

SPORTS REPORTER

Some of the staff of Bangladesh Football Federation, along with local coaches, distributed one week's food items including rice, potato and oil, lentils and onion among 220 people in Fatullah, Narayanganj yesterday.

Mohammad Hasan Mahmud, assistant head of competitions department of BFF and Eftekar Uddin, an executive of the same department distributed the football at the Signboard area of Fatullah.

Narayanganj has been the second-hardest hit district by the coronavirus pandemic, with the city under lockdown since last week.

BFF is, meanwhile, carrying on distribution of cooked food among less privileged people of Arambagh area since the nationwide shutdown started.

Drogba offers hospital in virus fight

AFP, Abidjan

Former Chelsea forward Didier Drogba has offered his hospital in his native Ivory Coast to the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, a local politician said.

Drogba, who scored 65 goals in 105 appearances for his country, has proposed the use of the Laurent Pokou hospital in Abidjan.

"We thank Drogba for this gift considered as an act of patriotism," the head of the city's regional council Vincent Toh Bi said.



The term social distancing, which has now been prioritised over anything to help curb the spread of coronavirus, seemed to be lost on some teenagers, who sneak past the patrolling police at every opportunity to gather and play cricket at the Anandabazar beach in Halishahar, Chattogram. Meanwhile, at the old part of Dhaka, a young person is pictured, who unlike the ones on the left heeds to the social distancing term as he flies a kite on his own from a rooftop.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/RAJIB RAIHAN

Nadal 'doesn't give a damn about tennis right now'

AGENCIES



Rafael Nadal 'doesn't give a damn about tennis right now' as the fight against coronavirus takes priority, said his uncle and former coach Toni.

Tennis has been on lockdown since March when Indian Wells was called off due to fears over the spread of Covid-19.

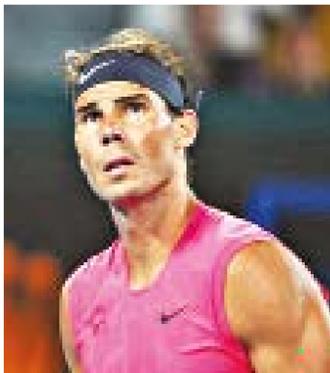
Wimbledon and the Olympics have also now cancelled for the summer, with the French Open rescheduling for September.

Even that date is far from secure, though, and the same can be said of the US Open, leaving tennis facing the very real possibility that it may not be able to resume until 2020.

"We [Rafael Nadal and I] were talking and he told me he doesn't give a damn about tennis right now," Toni Nadal told the Spanish media. "That's logical if you have a little sensitivity."

"I said a few weeks ago that things were going to be totally stopped for a while. How do you want us to play tennis? It's unthinkable.

"It won't be played until there is a very clear security measure.



"If not, how do I go to an event? What if another wave [of infections] comes back in October? How many countries won't make restrictions on movement? How long will lockdown last? I don't know.

"Tennis is a sport that moves many people from one country to another.

"With the huge problem we have, all this has been forgotten. It's secondary. Coronavirus is what counts, not tennis.

'I'm not a sack of potatoes'

REUTERS, Barcelona

Barcelona midfielder Ivan Rakitic has criticised his club for their recent treatment of him and for trying to force his departure last year.

The Croatian has been at Barca since 2014 but has fallen out of contention this campaign due to the arrival of Dutch midfielder Frenkie de Jong.

"I understand the situation but I'm not a sack of potatoes who you can do anything with," the 32-year-old told Spanish newspaper *Mundo Deportivo*. "I want to be somewhere I feel wanted and respected. If that's here then I'll be delighted but if it's somewhere else then I'll be the one who decides where, not anyone else."

Rakitic confirmed he refused to move to PSG last year as part of a deal to bring Neymar back to the Camp Nou.



Tottenham midfielder Dele Alli was treated to a special cake for his 24th birthday while being locked up inside due to the coronavirus crisis. The England international showed off his PlayStation controller cake on social media to his seven million Instagram followers, with his fans loving the design.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

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Cautious hope for a few states

Spain eases lockdown as death toll drops; Italy, New York report lowest fatalities

AFP, Madrid

Spain reopened parts of its coronavirus-stricken economy yesterday as slowing death tolls in some of the worst-hit countries boosted hopes the curve may be starting to flatten and lockdown restrictions could soon be eased.

Watched by a world that is keen to temper a brutal pandemic-induced recession, some Spanish factory and construction staff were set to return to work within strict safety guidelines.

However China, where the virus emerged late last year, recorded its highest number of infections in weeks -- most of them imported cases -- as warnings echoed that lifting restrictions too early could unleash a second wave of Covid-19.

French President Emmanuel Macron was set to warn the nation that its lockdown would stay in place for several more weeks at least, while outlining steps for recovery.

More than half of the planet's population is staying home as part of efforts to stem the spread of the virus, which has now killed at least 114,000 people and infected over 1.8 million, overwhelming healthcare systems and crippling the world economy.

Yet there is cautious optimism the virus may have reached its peak.

Spain's death toll fell again yesterday with 517 fatalities, plus the lowest daily figure of new confirmed infections since March 20.

France and the US also saw a drop in daily Covid-19 deaths, along with Italy which reported its lowest fatalities

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



A rickshaw-puller, wrapped in a PPE-like dress, transporting two police officials in the capital's Fakirapul who appear to be a lot less cautious than the former. Like the duo, many people roam around the streets of Dhaka disregarding all government directives on social distancing.

PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

STAY HOME, STAY WELL

Bond better with your children

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Due to the countrywide shutdown to curb the spread of coronavirus, children have been confined to their homes and their daily routines have changed completely all of a sudden.

It is imperative to help children feel settled at home as confinement can be a reason to become restless. Suddenly they cannot meet their schoolmates and friends, which can aggravate the problem.

It has become a tough task for parents to keep children inside the home to protect them from the risk of contracting Covid-19.

Experts said during this crisis period parents should be more patient to make their children understand the situation and of the importance of staying at home.

"Tell your kids that there are some new germs in the environment. We have to stay home and you [children] also have a role to play," said Tanjin Jahan, a

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Where are the welfare funds?

Transport workers passing tough times amid shutdown get little financial help from unions

TUJIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and RASHIDUL HASAN

As evening falls, an eerie silence now replaces the usual cacophony of honking buses, hawkers shouting out their wares, and music blaring from sidewalk shops at Gabtoli Bus Terminal.

Around 15 people, seated in a few groups, were gossiping by the array of buses when The Daily Star visited last week. They wore no masks or gloves, and were oblivious to maintaining the recommended social distancing during the coronavirus outbreak.

They were transport workers -- drivers, conductors and helpers -- assigned by their owners to look after the buses that have been at a standstill for more than two weeks now.

"I am here to guard the buses of my owner. He gives me Tk 100 per day as khoraki [daily allowance], which is not enough for three meals," said Rabiul Islam, a helper of Himel Paribahan.

He spends nights inside a bus and eats at local restaurants during the day. His wife and three-year-old daughter are in his village home in Rangpur.

Rabiul used to get Tk 500 for each

round trip and earn between Tk 7,000 and Tk 8,000 per month.

But everything changed after the government suspended operation of all public transport from March 26 to April 4 to slow the spread of coronavirus in the country. The suspension was later extended to April 25.

"I don't know when buses will start operating again. It's not possible to live here for a long time like this. When will the situation become normal?" asked Rabiul.

More than 50 lakh transport workers are living in misery as they have no earnings for the past two weeks. They are usually paid on the basis of the number of trips.

While some like Rabiul are guarding their owners' vehicles, most workers have returned to their village homes.

Although the government kept vehicles carrying goods, including trucks and covered vans, out of purview of the suspension, only few workers operating vehicles carrying daily essentials have jobs as export-import remain halted.

FEDERATION DOING VERY LITTLE

During this ongoing suspension, the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Tangail transport workers suffering

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Several thousand transport workers and their families in Tangail have been passing days in hardship since bus services were suspended on March 26.

Movement of non-emergency vehicles were suspended on that day as part of the country's ongoing efforts to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The transport workers, including drivers and their assistants, employed by bus operators, usually do not get any fixed salary. Instead, they are paid a cut of earnings from total trips a bus makes each day. There are nearly 1,000 buses under different owners and operators in Tangail.

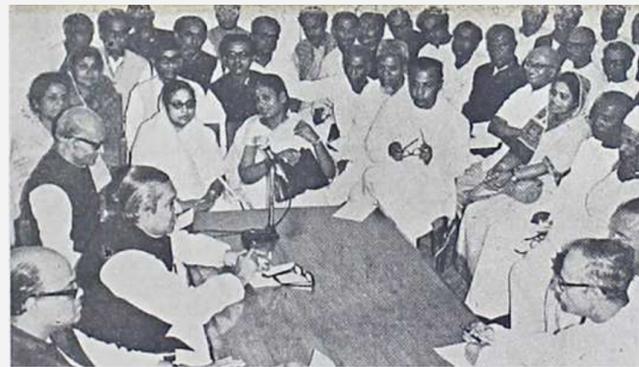
No one, not even the owners' association or the workers' union, came forward to help them out in this time of distress, said transport workers.

Many of them, looking dejected, were seen sitting around in Tangail New Bus Terminal complex last

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

'Rebuild Shonar Bangla'



Bangabandhu addressing the members of the Awami League parliamentary party on April 9, 1972.

April 14, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

BANGABANDHU'S NEW YEAR APPEAL

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today calls upon the people irrespective of their political opinion, cast or creed to take a determined vow to dedicate themselves to the welfare of the suffering masses of Bangladesh. In a message to the nation on the eve of Pohela Boishakh, the prime minister says, "Let this be our new year's pledge that Bangladesh must be built as Shonar Bangla."

The prime minister says that the Bangla year 1378 (1971 Gregorian) will remain forever bright and unforgettable in human history because this year

Bangladesh carved its place on the world map at the cost of three million lives. After a long 25 years of struggle, sacrifice and bloodshed, the green flag with a red orb today flies over Bangladesh, he adds

He calls upon the people, "Let us take a vow in the name of millions of martyrs to dedicate ourselves to the task of building up this country so that we all can keep the honour and sanctity of this flag intact."

The prime minister further says that 75 million people live in Bangladesh on only 56,000 square miles. For all-

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



7 sent to jail for rape, spreading clip of incident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Sirajganj court on Sunday sent seven college students to jail in two cases filed in connection with raping and spreading the video clip of the incident via internet.

Police arrested them after the girl's father lodged the cases on Saturday.

The incident of rape happened around eight months ago, and the video went viral recently.

The victim, a second-year college student, had a relationship with Tanveer Hossain when they studied at a school in Ullapara upazila. After their admission to different colleges, they continued the with relationship, said Mosharraf Hossain, sub-inspector of Ullapara Police Station.

Tanveer, 19, had a physical relations with the girl promising to marry her and videoed the incident

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



PRAYER TIMING APRIL 14

Fajr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4:35 12:45 4:45 6:24 7:45
JAMAAT 5:10 1:15 5:00 6:28 8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



Transport workers passing an idle time as the government has imposed a countrywide shutdown to contain the spread of coronavirus. The photo was taken at Gabtoli Bus Terminal, one of the busiest terminals in the country.

PHOTO: STAR

বাংলাদেশ কলেজ অব ফিজিশিয়ানস্ এন্ড সার্জনস্
Bangladesh College of Physicians & Surgeons

BCPS

স্মারক নং-৭৭৬/২০২০/
তারিখঃ ১৪ এপ্রিল, ২০২০খ্রিঃ

পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহণের জন্য অনলাইন রেজিস্ট্রেশন সংক্রান্ত বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, আপামী জুলাই ২০২০ সেশনে অনুষ্ঠিতব্য এফসিপিএস ১ম পর্ব, প্রিলিমিনারী এফসিপিএস ২য় পর্ব, এফসিপিএস (ফাইনাল), এফসিপিএস (সাব-স্পেশালিটি) ও এফসিপিএস পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহণের নিমিত্ত অনলাইন রেজিস্ট্রেশন কার্যক্রম নিয়মানুযায়ী ১৫ এপ্রিল, ২০২০খ্রিঃ তারিখ থেকে শুরু হওয়ার কথা থাকলেও, দেশব্যাপী করোনা ভাইরাস রোগ (কোভিড-১৯)-এর প্রাদুর্ভাবের ফলে উল্লৃত পরিস্থিতিতে তা যথাসময়ে শুরু করা সম্ভব হচ্ছেনা।

উল্লেখ্য যে, অনলাইন রেজিস্ট্রেশন কার্যক্রম শুরু হওয়ার তারিখ পরবর্তীতে বিজ্ঞপ্তির মাধ্যমে জানানো হবে।

এ ব্যাপারে সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলকে কলেজের ওয়েবসাইট ও দৈনিক পত্রিকা অনুসরণ করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো।

অধ্যাপক আবুল বাসার মোহাম্মদ খুরশীদ আলম
অনারারি সচিব, বিসিপিএস