



THE DAILY

Star

ON FRIDAY



REGD. NO. DA 781 | Vol. XXX No. 93 | BAIASHAH 4, 1427 BS | Your Right to Know | SHABAN 22, 1441 HIJRI | 12 PAGES PLUS TOGGLE PRICE: Tk 12.00

BANGLADESH UPDATE

341 New cases in 24hrs

1,572 Total cases

60 Deaths

49 Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

139,469 Deaths

2,090,110 Total cases

Storm brewing

Experts say, as govt declares entire Bangladesh risk-prone; highest deaths and infections recorded in a single day; 9.2 percent of all samples tested positive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ten people died from Covid-19 and 341 tested positive in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, with public health experts warning that the country is now going through the third stage of coronavirus transmission when the virus spreads quickly.

This was the highest number of deaths and infections reported so far in a single day.

The death toll now stands at 60 and the total number of detected cases at 1,572. In the 24 hours, 2,019 samples were tested, officials said in a daily bulletin on the country's coronavirus situation.

Overall, 9.2 percent of all samples have tested positive, which is higher compared

to the countries hit hard by the pandemic, including Italy, Spain and the USA, at a similar stage.

Talking on the issue, Ridwanur Rahman, a renowned medicine and infectious disease specialist, said most of the coronavirus cases in the country were going unreported as "only a small number of samples" were being tested daily.

He also warned of tougher days ahead. He believes the situation was likely to take a turn for the worse as the authorities lost the opportunity to control the situation a long time ago.

"The country now is crossing the third stage of coronavirus transmission. The fourth and final stage is when death cases hit the peak," he said.

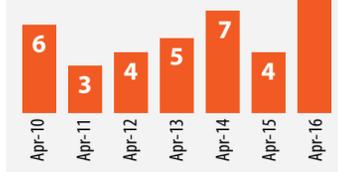
SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



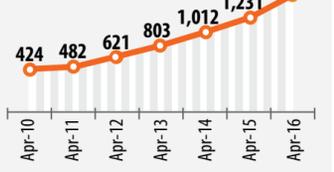
People in protective gear, presumably healthcare employees, watch as a father puts his child, who was been tested positive for coronavirus, into an ambulance. The man extending his arms from the vehicle to hold the child is the uncle. The risk of spreading the virus multiplies due to such practices. The photo was taken on Dhaka Medical College Hospital premises yesterday morning.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

DAILY DEATH TOLL ON RISE



NUMBER OF CASES SURGING



Ration cards for 50 lakh more

Says PM; govt mulls engaging retired health workers to serve covid-19 patients

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government would bring 50 lakh more poor people under its ration card facilities to provide them with rice at Tk 10 per kg to mitigate their sufferings caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

"Currently, 50 lakh extreme poor and distressed people are getting rice at Tk 10 per kg under the government's ration card facilities. We have taken a decision to bring 50 lakh more such people under the facilities to minimise their hardship in the current situation that has emerged following the Covid-19 outbreak," she said.

The PM was addressing public representatives and officials from nine districts of Dhaka division on the coronavirus situation. She joined the programme through videoconferencing from the Gono Bhavan in the morning.

Hasina said in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, the government started selling rice at Tk 10 per kg to the poor and distressed people who have no ration cards.

"But problems are being created in the rice distribution and we have postponed the programme for now as some

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



On the front line, yet so ostracised

Nurses wanted at hospitals, not wanted back home; facing eviction threats

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and ZYMA ISLAM

Yasmin Islam, a nurse at the surgery ward of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, received a call from her landlord while she was at work last week.

"If you go to the hospital, you can't come home for a month. And if you come home, you can't go to the hospital for a month," said her landlord from Babar Road in the capital, where Yasmin has been a tenant for one and a half years.

"The problem started when I went to the roof to hang some wet clothes to dry. A member of the landlord's family was there. She told me that I shouldn't come to the roof because I could be carrying the virus," Yasmin said.

She later asked her landlord to talk to the hospital director so that he could rest assured that she was not dealing with coronavirus patients, but he would not hear of it.

"It was heartbreaking, because the landlord's sister has cancer and I routinely nurse her for free as a good neighbour."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

She has forcefully been going home each day since the day she was asked to leave, and a representative from a nurses' union called Shwadhinota Nurses Parishad spoke to her landlord.

But the landlord has been attempting to tar her character, by accusing her of going out too much. While the community might be sympathetic towards a healthcare employee living alone in the city, there are no feelings to spare for an unmarried girl who "goes out too much", Yasmin told The Daily Star.

Mustafizur Rahman, the central committee president of Shwadhinota Nurses' Parishad, said he was routinely getting complaints from nurses that they were being threatened with eviction.

"A nurse from Kuwait Moitree Hospital's ICU called me at 10:00pm last week. She was saying that her landlord was not letting her in," he said.

"She lives in Shewrapara, which is far from Kuwait Moitree Hospital. She could not even go back to the hospital. I had to

RMG protest rages on

BGMEA claims wage of 87pc workers disbursed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Salaries of about 87 percent of the garment workers have been disbursed, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) claimed yesterday as workers staged demonstrations demanding wages in different parts of the country, mostly in the capital and its adjacent districts.

The agitated workers blocked many streets and important highways finding no other means as they are finding it extremely difficult to make ends meet.

The BGMEA, the country's apex association of garment manufacturers, said many of the workers who have taken to the streets were not

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Others too risking it all

RASHIDUL HASAN and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

While most expecting fathers dream of holding their child for the first time to feel the joy of holding his future in his arms, the reality was very different for one Shariful Islam.

A senior reporter of Jamuna Television, Shariful became the father of a baby girl on April 11.

However, he had to refrain from touching his baby when a nurse showed him his new born.

The journalist's job requires him to be outdoors in the time of the coronavirus outbreak. And so, to keep his baby safe, he instead took a photo in his mobile phone and saw his daughter by zooming into the picture.

"It's all for the safety of my baby girl. As I go outside every day and mix with people, I put all my emotions and feelings aside," he said.

Shariful is among several other professionals who are on the frontlines of the Covid-19 pandemic.

When social media is flooded with different types of rumours, mainstream newspapers, television channels and online news portals are coming up with authentic information, analyses, and suggestions for their readers and viewers to keep safe and stay healthy.

On the other hand, a huge number of law enforcers are

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

5 more die of Covid-19 symptoms

STAR REPORT

At least five people, including two children, died with coronavirus-like symptoms across the country yesterday.

In Sylhet, a 10-year-old girl died with yesterday. She was from the city's Upasahar area and was taken to a private hospital in the morning as she had been suffering from flu-like symptoms for a couple of days, reports our Sylhet correspondent.

The hospital referred her to the Coronavirus Isolation Centre of Sylhet Shaheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital, suspecting it to be a Covid-19 case, said Dr Premananda Mandal, civil surgeon of Sylhet.

Later, her family members took her to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital in the city, where doctors declared her dead.

Meanwhile, at least four people from Chandpur district died after showing similar symptoms in

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



Workers of Binni Garments Ltd in the capital's Kamalapur demonstrate in front of a police vehicle, demanding what some of them said was last month's salary. Some workers alleged that they went there after the management told them that they would be paid, but the factory gate was found shuttered, inset.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

32 Rohingyas die on drifting boat at sea

Coast Guard rescues 396 more; UN says they were at sea for nearly two months

REUTERS, Dhaka

At least 32 ethnic Rohingya died on a ship that drifted for weeks after it failed to reach Malaysia, officials of the Bangladesh coast guard said yesterday, following the rescue of 396 starving survivors.

For years, Rohingya from Myanmar have boarded boats organised by smugglers in the hope of finding refuge in Southeast Asia, usually making voyages during the dry season from November to March, when the waters are calm.

A human rights group said it believed more boats carrying Muslim-minority Rohingya were adrift at sea, with coronavirus lockdowns in Malaysia and Thailand making it harder for them to find refuge.

"They were at sea for about two months and were starving," a Bangladesh coastguard official told Reuters in a message, adding that the ship was brought to shore late on Wednesday.

The 396 survivors would be handed to the U.N refugee agency, said the official, who had initially said they would be sent to Myanmar. The official also revised the death toll to 32 from 24.

Video images showed a crowd comprised mostly of women and children, some stick-thin and unable to stand, being helped to shore. One emaciated man lay on the sand.

One refugee told a reporter the group had been turned back from Malaysia twice and a fight had broken out onboard between passengers and crew at one point.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Spain village churns out coffins as death doubles demand

AFP, Piñor

It may be small but Pinor village in a remote corner of northwestern Spain has the peculiar distinction of being known for coffins, with coronavirus death doubling demand at its nine workshops.

Spain is suffering one of the world's most deadly outbreaks that has killed more than 18,500 people in just two months.

For mayor Jose Luis Gonzalez, the pandemic has sent the amount of work soaring for those in the coffin-making business in this village of just over 1,000 people.

"Since (the crisis) began, we've seen demand double from normal levels," he told AFP.

At his own business, which he inherited from his father, that has meant workers constructing "around 400" coffins a month, when they

would normally be producing half that number.

With deaths mounting daily, the funeral industry has also come under pressure because the usual imports of caskets from China "are no longer arriving".

These days, the coffin-makers of Pinor are taking orders from across Spain despite initial supply chain concerns when the lockdown began on March 14, which triggered "panic that we might run out of caskets".

In order to meet demand, the village's craftsmen have had to speed up and simplify their way of working.

"We work many more hours and the coffins are more basic in terms of quality," he said, explaining that they were plain varnished wooden caskets without any of the usual marble or glass adornments.



Cleaners of Dhaka North City Corporation picking garbage and sludge from the street at Natun Bazar in the capital yesterday. The city would collapse without their essential service. But it appears that very little has been done to protect them from the coronavirus.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

RMG protest rages on

FROM PAGE 1

Workers said the authorities had earlier announced multiple dates to clear the salaries, but every time they came only to find the factory shut, and the situation was no different this time.

Contacted, Abdus Sobhan, general manager of DEPZ, told The Daily Star that, they were talking to the Italian factory owner and trying to resolve the matter.

Several hundred workers blockaded Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway at airport crossing point demanding the salary of March at around 11:00am.

"If we do not get our salaries we will have to die from starving as we are left with no money," said Asraf Ali, a garment worker.

The workers also blockaded Dhaka-Chattogram highway demanding arrears, reports our Narayanganj correspondent.

The incidents of unrest took place in Chashara, Sonargaon and Kanchpur areas in the district.

Mohammad Hatem, vice president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), said the total members of the association is 833.

As of yesterday, the BKMEA could contact 513 units and found that 477 of them have paid salaries to their workers.

Workers said the authorities had earlier announced multiple dates to clear the salaries, but every time they came only to find the factory shut, and the situation was no different this time.

Contacted, Abdus Sobhan, general manager of DEPZ, told The Daily Star that, they were talking to the Italian factory owner and trying to resolve the matter.

Several hundred workers blockaded Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway at airport crossing point demanding the salary of March at around 11:00am.

"If we do not get our salaries we will have to die from starving as we are left with no money," said Asraf Ali, a garment worker.

The workers also blockaded Dhaka-Chattogram highway demanding arrears, reports our Narayanganj correspondent.

The incidents of unrest took place in Chashara, Sonargaon and Kanchpur areas in the district.

Mohammad Hatem, vice president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), said the total members of the association is 833.

As of yesterday, the BKMEA could contact 513 units and found that 477 of them have paid salaries to their workers.

On the front line

FROM PAGE 1

call and beg the landlord to let her," said Rahman.

Sirajul Islam, a male nurse who lives in Chankharpool and works in the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said he was asked to leave on March 26. "You deal with infected patients. So, you have to leave this house," he quoted his landlord as saying.

"The hospital administration had to call my landlord and explain to him that I worked at the burn unit... I am looking for other housing options at the moment," said Sirajul.

DMCH's isolation ward nurse Shiuly Khatun is in a similar situation in Banasree. "I have been living in this house for the last 10 years, but last week I was told that I might be infecting people in the building. I was asked to act according to my conscience," she said.

"I am feeling unsafe at work because we do not have N95 masks, and I am feeling unsafe at home because I might be infecting people and maybe they are justified in wanting me out of the house," she said.

The nurses have been mulling over the need for residential facilities in

their hospitals.

DMCH Nurses' Association General Secretary Asaduzzaman Jewel has been looking after patients in the isolation ward.

"I had to go to into home quarantine because five of the patients I looked after turned out to be coronavirus positive. We did not wear N95 masks when dealing with them. Maybe I am infected and have infected other people," he said, adding that temporary residential facilities for nurses will be a good way to control infection.

Mujibur Rahman, head of the department of medicine at DMCH, said, "Patients with flu-like symptoms come to our hospital. Some of them later test positive for coronavirus but it is not possible for us to know from the get-go."

DMCH Director Brig Gen Dr Nasir Uddin said, "We are trying to arrange residential facilities for those who are working at the hospital."

Suhrawardy Hospital Director Uttam Kumar Barua also said officials were looking for residential facilities for nurses.

32 Rohingyas die

FROM PAGE 1

"We understand these men, women and children were at sea for nearly two months in harrowing conditions and that many of them are extremely malnourished and dehydrated," the U.N. refugee agency UNHCR said.

"UNHCR is offering to assist the government to move these people to quarantine facilities," it added in a statement that also offered medical attention.

Media reports that the group was infected with the virus had not been substantiated, the agency said.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar does not recognise Rohingyas as citizens, and they face severe curbs on freedom of movement as well as access to healthcare and education.

Myanmar denies persecuting Rohingyas and says they are not an indigenous ethnic group but immigrants from South Asia, even though many of them are able to trace their ancestry back centuries.

More than a million live in refugee camps in southern Bangladesh, the majority having been driven from homes in Myanmar after a 2017 military crackdown the army said was a response to attacks by Rohingya insurgents.

Rights groups fear virus curbs across southeast Asia could trigger a repeat of a 2015 crisis, when a crackdown by Thailand prompted smugglers to abandon their human cargo at sea on crowded, rickety boats.

Chris Lewa, director of the Arakan Project, said she believed several more boats were stranded.

"Rohingya may encounter closed borders supported by a xenophobic public narrative," she said in a message.

"COVID-19 cannot be used to deny access to territory to desperate refugees in distress. Another maritime crisis in the Andaman Sea, as in 2015, is unacceptable."

Several boats were trying to reach Malaysian shores and monitoring had been stepped up, a police official in the northwestern state of Kedah told Reuters.

A police official in southern Thailand said five boats carrying Rohingyas had been spotted off the coast of Satun province late on Monday. It was not possible to independently confirm the reports.

People were smuggled out by boat and over land, said Kyaw Hla, a Rohingya from Sittwe in Myanmar's western Rakhine state, where tens of thousands of Rohingyas have been confined in camps since a bout of violence in 2012.

"Within these eight years, there has been no progress, only degradation," he said by telephone. "People can't stand it. Since we are locked up and suffocated, people try to leave, of course."

He added, "If the coronavirus breaks out here, we'll be as good as dead."

Storm brewing

FROM PAGE 1

"From next week, we are likely to see a higher number of deaths every day... A lack of coordination from the health department is to blame," he told The Daily Star.

He said the available data indicated that Bangladesh was heading towards a "disastrous" situation, following the footsteps of Italy, Spain and the USA.

Based on a scientific method of estimation, he claimed that the actual number of Covid-19 patients in the country could be "100 times higher" than that of the cases reported. "The number of tests being carried out daily is too little to know the reality."

He said data indicated that more and more people with common fever and cold were being tested positive for the coronavirus. "If 50 percent of all with fever and cold are tested, then we can get the real number of patients."

He also said, "The authorities claim that they are well prepared [to tackle the situation]. But the information given by them on the preparedness is far from the ground reality."

Like most countries across the world, the authorities in Bangladesh are using the PCR technique, a gold-standard technology for Covid-19 confirmation, which detects pieces of the coronavirus through analysing sputum or mucus samples collected from the human body - nasal and throat.

The expert said the technique has some drawbacks. "One in every four confirmed coronavirus cases tested false negative. So there is a need for a second test."

On March 8, the authorities reported the first death from Covid-19 in the country. On April 9, the authorities for the first time reported more than a hundred cases (112) in a single day.

In the last eight days, the number of

Ration cards for 50 lakh more

FROM PAGE 1

incidents happened regarding this," she said.

The premier said the government has directed the authorities concerned to prepare a list of 50 lakh poor and distressed people who would be brought under the new ration card facilities, leaving out those having ration cards and getting benefits under social safety net programmes.

She asked the public representatives to take prompt measures to prepare a list of genuine needy people, irrespective of their political affiliations, to ensure that everyone gets relief.

Hasina, also the Awami League president, said she has already instructed the party leaders and workers to form relief committees up to ward level to identify genuine distressed people and reach succour to their houses.

Reiterating her strong warning against corruption and irregularities in relief distribution, the PM directed the administration and law enforcement agencies to remain alert to it.

"It will have to be ensured that the relief, be it from the government or private organisations, reach the right persons. We will not tolerate any corruption and irregularities in the distribution of relief materials," she said.

The premier said 40 people have so far been punished, while dealership and security money of 11 more forfeited for committing irregularities and graft in relief and OMS rice distribution.

Hasina said 250 crore people of the world remain confined to their homes and their normal life is being hampered severely due to the pandemic.

She said international organisations, including the United Nations, forecast that the world may see severe economic recession due to the pandemic and even famine could happen.

"Against this backdrop, we will have to take steps to save the people and the country from possible recession or famine. Keeping this in mind, we have already declared a set of stimulus packages of over Tk 1 lakh crore and started their execution."

The PM extended her heartfelt thanks to doctors, nurses, health workers, public representative, officials and employees of the administration, members of the armed forces, law enforcement agencies and BGB for standing beside the people with utmost sincerity during this critical time.

detected cases have continued to jump.

In yesterday's bulletin, aired online, Prof Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said of those 10 who died in 24 hours since 2:30 three were females and seven males.

Six of them were from Dhaka while the rest from elsewhere.

One of the 10 was aged between 71 and 80, five between 61 and 70, three between 51 and 60 and the other two between 21 and 30, she said.

"Some 2,019 samples were tested in the 24 hours. The number of tests increased by 16 percent and sample collection by 4 percent from the previous day."

She also said 37 patients were taken into isolation in the 24 hours, increasing the total to 461. Nine were released. Around 4,499 people were in home quarantine and some 715 people were put in the institutional quarantine.

Currently, 33,300 people are in home quarantine and 3,274 are in institutional quarantine across the country, she added.

So far, the highest number of cases have been detected in Dhaka followed by Narayanganj, which is dubbed the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in Bangladesh.

Till now, the virus has spread to 40 of the 64 districts.

The government is increasing the treatment facilities. Now, there are 192 ICU facilities across the country, according to the DGHS.

Some 488 institutions were readied for quarantine where 26,352 people could be accommodated, it said.

Meanwhile, Habibur Rahman Khan, additional secretary of the Health Service Division of the health and family welfare ministry, said four staffers of the

IEDCR had tested coronavirus positive on April 7. No new cases have been detected there since then.

Following the detection, IEDCR Director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora and some of her colleagues were working from home.

Talking to The Daily Star, Prof Sabrina said, "We are continuing our work by maintaining social distance."

WHOLE COUNTRY AT RISK

In another development, the government yesterday declared that the entire country was at risk amid the coronavirus pandemic as the infection spread to its various parts.

DGHS Director General Prof Abul Kalam Azad issued a notice in this regard.

"The virus has spread to many areas of the country. As it spreads from person to person, it will not be possible to prevent the spread of the virus if physical distancing is not ensured," said the notice.

"Bangladesh has been declared at risk of infection under the Infectious Diseases (Prevention, Control and Elimination) Act 2018," it said.

Contacted, Prof Azad said, "The issuance of the circular doesn't mean that the risk has increased in Bangladesh all of a sudden. But it [circular] was necessary to help implement the steps taken by the government."

He said the emergency services would remain as the same mentioned in the previous circulars.

"People must stay at home to contain the spread of the virus. No one should go out unless it's an absolute emergency. No one will be allowed to stay outside from 6:00pm to 6:00am," the notice said.

The DHGS warned that stern action will be taken if anyone violated the directive.

all concerned to take effective measures to stop further spreading of coronavirus. "Take hot water and seasonal local foods to boost your immune system to fight the coronavirus," she said.

The PM also instructed the local administrations to put the foreign returnees in compulsory home quarantine and arrange places for putting them under institutional quarantine, if necessary, to prevent spreading of the diseases.

Hasina directed the naval police and coast guards to take effective measures so that none, particularly the workers of brick fields, could enter other areas through the naval routes.

The PM once again asked the local administrations to arrange markets in larger places to avoid mass gatherings.

Referring to an incident of leaving a mother in a jungle as she was suffering from cold, cough and fever, she requested all to be humane towards the Covid-19 patients.

"People are becoming inhuman after being panicked in the wake of coronavirus. There is no logic of such inhumanity. Take measures for giving treatment if any person shows coronavirus symptoms."

The premier also criticised the mentality of ousting a physician from his area due to his illness and said she wanted to bring it to the notice of all as she had heard many such incidents.

"Why such incidents happened in Bangladesh? Bangladeshi people were not supposed to be such inhuman."

Referring to suspension of prayers at mosques in Saudi Arabia, the PM asked all to follow the government guidelines relating to holding prayers during the holy month of Ramadan.

"Offer your prayers, particularly the Tarabi, in the holy month of Ramadan by following the directives to support the government efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus."

She said her government has taken every possible measure to make sure sufficient supply of essentials in the markets during the Ramadan as there is no shortage of commodities in the country.

PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus moderated the programme. Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim, PMO Secretary Tofazzel Hossain Miah and PM's personal physician Dr ABM Abdullah were present at the Gono Bhaban.

Others too

FROM PAGE 1

deployed to ensure lockdown and convince people to stay home while maintaining physical distancing. On many occasions, police have to guard potential Covid-19 patients so that they cannot flee. They have also been arranging funerals for dead coronavirus patients.

Bankers are another group of professionals who are providing services to people by keeping financial transactions alive. In doing so, they have to deal with a huge number of customers daily, which can be a possible source of coronavirus infection.

Police too are risking their lives. "We are working in a panicked situation. All [of my colleagues] are panicking now," said a sub-inspector (SI), preferring anonymity, of a police station in Dhaka.

"We have taken very little safety measures. Yet we have to deal all types of people and we don't know who is infected and who is not," he said.

Sharing his experience, the SI said three people in his police station have tested positive for Covid-19 and they had to be guarded so that they could not flee.

Law enforcers are also having to be stationed near hospitals.

"But, in the name PPE [personal protective equipment], what we have provided are actually raincoats. Besides, we had to buy gloves and hand sanitisers [on our own]," he said.

He has already sent his wife and two and a half-year-old child to their village home for their safety.

While their lives are at risk, their workloads have also increased, he said.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, they had to increase check-posts and patrol in areas under their jurisdictions. "Apart from our normal work, we have to collect all corona-related information, market monitoring, ensure lockdown and convince people to stay home."

Many people, however, do not want to follow safety instructions, he added. "In the given situation, we are trying our best for the sake of the people and the country."

An employee of a private bank also shares a worrisome picture. Amid the shutdown, all private and public banks are operating at a limited scale.

The banker lives at Mayakanan area near the capital's Bashabo, one of the most Covid-19 affected areas. He has to go to his office in Motijheel on foot. His colleagues living in other parts of the city or in Narayanganj are facing bigger problems. They have to work each alternative week.

"Whenever, I come out of my home, I get frightened... We are living in constant fear. One fear that always come to mind id whether I have been infected when I was outside," he said, asking not be named.

As he works at the headquarters, he has to deal with a relatively high number of people. "But my colleagues working at branch offices are at a higher risk as they have to deal with a bigger number of people directly," he said.

Situations at public banks are even more dangerous, especially at the countryside, as those have very limited online transaction systems.

An official of Sonali Bank Limited in Faridpur said that although the government has set a limited time for bank transactions, the number of service-seekers remains the same. Besides, some of their colleagues do not come to office regularly as their homes are far away.

"In the given situation, we have to deal with almost the same number of customers in half the normal time with fewer staffers," he said.

Asked about customer safety, he said they deployed police so that customers maintain social distancing, but, on many occasions, service seekers do not bother.

About staff safety, the authorities concerned have given safety materials, which are inadequate, so they had to personally collect some, he said. "But when I go home, I feel insecure. I take a bath and wash all my clothes regularly to feel secure."

5 more die

FROM PAGE 1

different places, including Dhaka and Cumilla medical college hospitals, yesterday.

Of them, a CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver, aged around 50, died while undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, our Chandpur correspondent reports quoting Md Shakhawat Ullah, civil surgeon of the district.

A six-year-old child of Shahrasti upazila died with the same symptoms at Cumilla Medical College Hospital early yesterday, according to the civil surgeon.

On information, the local administration locked down the house of the dead and collected samples from the bodies for the tests, said Shah Alam, officer-in-charge of Shahrasti Police Station.

A 30-year-old man from Matlab Uttar upazila died at his home yesterday noon after suffering from a fever, cold and cough. A team of physicians of the district civil surgeon's office was sent to the victim's house to collect samples from the body.

Another person from the same age-group, from Chandpur Sadar upazila, died after suffering from coronavirus-like symptoms, our correspondent reports quoting Sazeda Begum, a health and family planning officer of the upazila.

Many in Ctg not social distancing

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Even though social distancing is one of the best tools we have to avoid being exposed to coronavirus and slowing its spread locally and across the country, many in Chattogram are not following this important practice.

As a result the number of Covid-19 patients is on the rise in the district, said healthcare experts.

The first patient was detected in Chattogram on April 3; the number rose to 32 till April 15. So far, four have died. Some areas including Sagarika in the city and Satkania upazila emerged as clusters.

Among the patients, eight are from Satkania and five from Sagarika area, said Sheikh Fazle Rabbi, civil surgeon of Chattogram district. "We repeatedly request people not to go outside except for emergencies but many do not pay heed," he told The Daily Star.

Due to unawareness, community transmission of the virus can start and people need to be more alert, cautioned medical experts.

"The situation in Chattogram is still under control but it may deteriorate drastically if we are not conscious and do not maintain physical distancing," said the civil surgeon.

Rashed Iqbal, a lecturer at a college in port city, said many walk on roads without wearing masks and often engage in chat without a care. "They act as if nothing has happened..." said the teacher. "Whenever they see law enforcers they disperse and regroup again as soon as police leave the area," Rashed added.

Rita Dutta, a resident of Chawkbazar, said most people who are not maintaining social distancing fail to understand the consequence. "They need to be made aware... by any means," she stressed.

Prof Dr Shakil Ahmed, in-charge of the laboratory at

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Dressed in protective clothing and carrying grocery packs on their motorcycles, activists of Sylhet's Sammilito Natya Parishad are delivering food to underprivileged and low-income people's doorsteps. They have helped out 3,000 families since March 25, collecting funds through donations.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

'Help us get home'

Over 150 Bangladeshis stranded in Australia appeal for repatriation

MUNTAKIM SAAD

Sweetie Dhar, in her mid-30s, is a cancer patient and has been in Australia for treatment since September last year.

"I finished my chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery recently. It's been a long and tough journey. My flight was booked on April 3 but it was cancelled, and the airline has not refunded me yet," Sweetie said.

"My little girl cries for me everyday. I am desperately waiting to go back home" she told this correspondent helplessly.

She is one of the 150-plus Bangladeshis -- including tourists, students and temporary residents -- who have been stranded in Australia, made an appeal to the government to come back home.

The Australian government has already advised all temporary visa holders -- like students unable to support themselves and those on visitor visas lasting three months or less, to return to their home country as quickly as possible.

In such a situation, many students and temporary residents fell into financial hardships after losing jobs, while tourists are already in cash crunch.

The Bangladesh High Commission in Australia said they uploaded a needs assessment template on its website where persons of Bangladeshi origin in need in Australia are requested to register.

"As of now, 213 people have registered among which 159 would like to travel back to Bangladesh," Mohammad Sufiur Rahman, high commissioner for Bangladesh to Australia, told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

The applicants include government employees, bankers, doctors and teachers, and those who came for cancer treatment or to attend conference.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

At the doorsteps of families in need

Sahamarmita Foundation reaching aid across country

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH, Savar

Sahamarmita Foundation, a voluntary organisation, is providing food assistance to people -- especially middle- and low-income families -- during the ongoing shutdown amid coronavirus pandemic.

The Savar-based group started helping people around 10 days ago with a target to provide essentials to 10,000 families across the country, said its members.

As of April 15, they distributed food to 850 families in Dhaka, Cumilla, Rajshahi and Chattogram, said Parvez Hasan, founder president of Sahamarmita.

"People in need contact us over the phone at numbers given on our Facebook group. Later, we reach those items to their doorsteps," he said.

"We maintain the assistance seekers' privacy," Parvez added.

They are offering daily essentials in three packages -- one-week, two-week and one-month, said members, adding that the items include rice, lentils, potato, edible oil

and soap.

"We are prioritising the middle-income people. The group cannot seek help from others like the poor do, due to social stigma," said foundation president Parvez Hasan.

More than half of the families who have received help belong to middle-income group, he said. "We have taken the initiative so that none has to starve."

Parvez urged the country's well-off individuals to stand by the poor and middle-income people during the crisis.

Sahamarmita Foundation was launched in January last year. It works for the welfare of poor children and destitute families. Currently, it has 2,000 members, mostly youths, across the country. They collect funds from their members, said Parvez.

Afzal Hossen, former principal of Ashulia School and College in Savar, told The Daily Star that other youngsters should get inspired by the foundation's noble activities.

24,103 tonnes of VGF rice for 3 lakh fishermen allotted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday allocated 24,103 tonnes of rice to around 3 lakh families of fishermen who are now out of work amid a ban on catching fish fry.

Under vulnerable group feeding (VGF) programme, the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock on April 15 granted this food assistance to deputy commissioners of 20 districts.

The DCs were asked to withdraw and distribute the rice to fishermen concerned by May 7.

The ministry has approved the allotment under the second phase of humanitarian assistance during the ban, said an official of the ministry, adding that fishers of 96 upazilas will be brought under coverage in this phase.

In the first phase, 22,477 tonnes of rice was distributed among 22.28 lakh fishermen in February and March in the same areas.

According to government decision, fish fry catching, transportation, distribution, stocking, selling and purchasing is banned from November 1 to June 30.

Apart from this, catching hilsa and any other fishes are completely banned at five sanctuaries of the country from March 1 to April 30.

The government provides food assistance to the fishermen from February to May every year.

Newly-recruited pry teachers still unpaid

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

As the coronavirus outbreak unfolds, most of the 18,000 newly-recruited government primary teachers are yet to get salaries for March, and are uncertain whether they will receive the salary for the current month as all public offices are closed till April 25.

The teachers, who joined primary schools in the later part of February and early March, are still not entitled to get salaries as the amount is to be fixed by upazila primary education office. It would then require subsequent approval from the concerned Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh (CAG) office. Both steps are yet to be completed for most.

Without this process these teachers -- who are also government officials, will not be able to enrol into an online system, styled Integrated Budget and Accounting system (IBAS++), for getting salaries, said Primary and Mass Education Ministry officials.

"We are yet to get salaries although we are passing very difficult days amid this virus outbreak," said a newly recruited teacher at

a school in Brahmanbaria district. He said work of his salary fixation was completed just before the first announcement of office closure on March 23.

"As the situation is worsening day by day I am really worried when we will get salaries," said a teacher of Sirajganj district.

Another teacher from Naogaon said if the government gives this special attention and arranges their salary, it will be great help for them and their families.

Brahmanbaria district primary education officer Shazzad Hossain and Naogaon primary education officer Siddique Md Yousuf Reza both said usually salary of newly-recruited teachers get delayed due to different formalities in multiple offices.

"This time it is taking more time due to closure of offices during Covid-19 outbreak," said Shazzad Hossain.

Around 270 new teachers joined different schools at Brahmanbaria while 278 teachers joined schools in Naogaon.

Primary and mass education Secretary Akram-Al-Hossain told The Daily Star that

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

RELIEF MISAPPROPRIATION

ACC to expedite probe into cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) will expedite investigation of cases filed over misappropriation of government relief.

"We'll file charge-sheets as soon as possible in the cases," said ACC chief Iqbal Mahmood yesterday.

The ACC chairperson told media that their 22 intelligence units are monitoring relief activities, reads a press release.

ACC on Wednesday filed cases against two rice dealers -- Rafiqul Islam and Abu Bakar Siddiqui -- for misappropriating 4,876kg of rice worth about Tk 2.19 lakh.

On Tuesday, the anti-graft watchdog filed a case against Sekendar Mia, Nayanashri union parishad member of Dhaka's Nawabganj, for taking bribe to issue registration cards under a government food programme.

On Monday, ACC filed a case against rice dealer Moshir Rahman of Bogura's Shibganj, for adding names of 17 relief recipients twice or even thrice in a list of 538 names.

2YRS OF RAJIB'S DEATH

Neither justice, nor compensation

RAFIUL ISLAM

It has been exactly two years since college student Rajib Hossain died after losing a hand that got stuck between two buses racing in the city, but his family has neither got justice nor any compensation yet.

Investigation officer of the case in December last year submitted charge sheet to a Dhaka Court "secretly" under section 304 (B) of Bangladesh Penal Code, which grants imprisonment for three years if proven guilty, although a probe report earlier found that unholy competition between the buses led to his death.

The family filed a no-confidence petition against the charge sheet as they believe the drivers of the two buses -- BRTC and Sajan Paribahan -- should get life sentences.

While they are waiting for hearing of the petition, the drivers



-- who were arrested -- recently came out on bail.

Besides, the family is yet to get Tk 50 lakh as compensation, as per a High Court verdict. The matter was stalled as bus authorities filed two separate leave-to-appeal petitions with the Supreme Court, challenging the High Court verdict. The SC is yet to set any date for hearing the appeals.

"It was a murder. Rajib was killed due to the competition of the two buses... But we are in doubt of

getting justice as the investigation officer did not submit charge sheet properly," Jahanara Begum, aunt of Rajib, told The Daily Star yesterday. Sub-inspector Idris Ali of Shahbagh Police Station submitted the charge sheet to a Dhaka Court on December 22 last year where he mentioned that he shared his findings with victim's family.

But Jahanara said they came to know about the charge sheet submission in February this year.

Jahanara said their no-confidence petition was scheduled for hearing on April 1 but did not due to the closure of courts following the coronavirus outbreak.

The right hand of Rajib, a third-year student at Titumir Government College in the capital, got stuck between two speeding buses in Karwan Bazar. After being in coma for two weeks, Rajib died on April 17, 2018.

Family members said Rajib and

his two brothers were orphaned at an early age. He used to support his brothers with earnings from a part-time job and private tuition. Rajib's brothers Mehedi Hasan Bappi -- a ninth grader -- and Abdulla Hridoy -- an eighth grader -- stay at a hostel of a madrasa in Mir Hazirbagh of Jatrabari.

The family is concerned about their future and believe they would get a little relief if they get the compensation.

Following a writ petition, the High Court on May 8, 2018, ordered the bus companies to pay Tk 1 crore to Rajib's family. BRTC and Sajan Paribahan challenged the HC order and the Supreme Court on May 22 last year stayed the order and asked the HC to form an independent committee to assess the liabilities.

The committee, led by Prof Mizanur Rahman, director of Accident Research Institute at

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

SCBA to provide interest-free loans to lawyers in need

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) has decided to provide interest-free loans to law professionals who are in need of financial support to keep up with the economic pressure stemming from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The decision was taken at a meeting of SCBA's executive committee. The meeting was held at the association's office on the Supreme Court premises on Wednesday afternoon. SCBA President Advocate AM Amin Uddin chaired the session.

"We have decided to provide interest-free loans for three years to those members who are not affluent enough to tackle the (economic) crisis caused by the coronavirus outbreak. We have already created a fund of Tk 50 lakh for this purpose," SCBA Secretary Barrister Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal told The Daily Star.

He said the SCBA office invites applications till April 25, and the maximum loan amount will be decided later.

A little foresight, a little innovation

Police official sets up disinfection gate at hospital entrance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 2,500-3,000 people visit the capital's Central Police Hospital every day, and with that comes the risk of Covid-19 transmission. To prevent the spread, hospital authorities have deployed additional police officers to work alongside hospital staff to spray visitors with disinfectants.

As the situation started deteriorating, authorities had to deploy more officers for the job. Unfortunately, officers often find it hard to properly spray visitors when a group enters together, according to hospital authorities.

That is when an officer came forward to solve the issue. After taking inspiration from a surprising source, he was set in his tracks to make the process more efficient than ever.

"After watching a YouTube video on a disinfection tunnel in Turkey, I started making a similar structure in front of the hospital gate last week," Saif Shantu, additional superintendent of police (admin) of Central Police Hospital, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He knew going at this alone would not work, so he sought help from the plumber, mason and carpenters who were working in the hospital. He then went on to collect some wood, nozzles and pipes to build the structure, he said.

After discussing with hospital doctors about



This makeshift structure at Central Police Hospital, designed by ASP Saif Shantu, sprays entrants with disinfectant.

the proper disinfection spray, he collected virucide solutions from the market.

"We attached a 500-litre tank and motor to the gate and were successfully able to complete the task last Saturday. The gate is servicing everyone from last Sunday," said the additional superintendent, while sharing his experience with the newspaper.

Asked about the expense, Saif said it costed around Tk 10,000-12,000 to make the whole gate.

"We need to refill the tank every day, but thanks to technology, it's capable of completely disinfecting people," Saif said. "We only need to spend Tk 300-500 for a batch of solution, and the whole thing is saving a lot of time too."

Saif joined police in 2008 through the 27th Bangladesh Civil Service exam.

Presently, an officer is manually operating the gate, and they need to press a button to start the motor. But Saif is working to install a sensor so that the machinery automatically sprays anyone passing through.

The coronavirus has stopped all global activities, but with this little endeavour of his, Saif plans to bring some normalcy back into everyone's life.

"I don't want to see all activities stopping for lack of proper disinfection. We want to continue our work during the coronavirus pandemic and be role models for everyone around the world," he added.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Eye in the sky

Ctg police using drone to scope out shutdown violators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) is using a drone (unnamed aerial vehicles) in the port city's Kotwali area to find people who are still going out from their residences without emergency.

Officials said they are resorting to the technology to monitor different lanes and areas more effectively, so that people stay indoors during what is estimated to be the peak time for the novel coronavirus spread.

After going through the drone footage, police are taking action against the shutdown violators, they said.

According to health experts, social transmission of Covid-19 has started in the port city and in districts like Dhaka and Narayanganj.

So far, 32 people have contracted the virus in Chattogram, of whom five have died, said civil surgeon office sources.

On April 12, Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mohammed Mohsin posted a video message on social media for residents of Kotwali area, asking them to stay indoors.

"The drone is flying and helping us see

you. (Footage of) those who are violating the government order and helping the infectious disease to spread through roaming or gathering outside without any reason are being captured by the drone. We are collecting evidence against you (the violators) to take legal action," the OC said in the video.

Talking to The Daily Star, the official said, "We are working round the clock to make sure people stay at home, along with all our other duties. It is not possible for us to visit every remote lane or area to check people's movement and whether they are maintaining social distance."

"This is why we've deployed the drone, as it shows a wider view and helps us identify lockdown violators and take legal action," he added.

"We have been doing this for the last four days," he said.

The drone's footage shows that people, especially in slums and crowded areas, are still gathering outside without emergencies, even if to only play ludo.

The idea was first introduced by Kerala police in India to detect shutdown violators in the state.

Ruhul Amin passes away

CRDY DESK

Ruhul Amin Mazumdar, a retired director of Bangladesh Tobacco Company Ltd (now British American Tobacco Bangladesh), passed away on April 7. He was 83.

He left behind his wife, two daughters, seven grandchildren and a host of family members, friends and admirers to mourn his death, says a press release.

Born in Chandpur, he started his career as an English lecturer at Dhaka College and later taught at Pakistan Air Force College at Lower Topa, Murree before joining Pakistan Tobacco Company.

Ruhul Amin Mazumdar was also a social activist and a promoter of arts and culture in Bangladesh. He was an active Rotarian, national commissioner of Bangladesh Scouts and president of Sandhani National Eye Donation Society for many years.

He was laid to rest at Banani Graveyard close to the grave of his only son, Ziaul Amin.



A teacher of Grameen Shikkha's (GS) non-formal primary school programme hands over food supplies to her students. GS has started a three-month food support programme for 163 destitute families living in slums of the capital's Mirpur.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Neither justice

FROM PAGE 3

Buet, in its report submitted to the court said reckless driving was the "primary cause of the accident".

The report pointed out that the heavy vehicles were being illegally driven by drivers with licences to drive light vehicles.

On October 25 last year, the HC in its full verdict asked BRTC and Sajan Paribahan owners to pay in two months Tk 25 lakh each to Rajib's brothers.

Both BRTC and Sajan authorities later filed leave-to-appeals with the SC. The SC is yet to set any date for hearing on the appeals, BRTC lawyer Barrister Moniruzzaman told The Daily Star.

In the verdict, the HC directed authorities concerned to bring bus services in all metropolitan cities under the franchising system, and said trip-based or daily payment based appointment of public bus drivers should be banned; a company should recruit them with monthly salaries. The court also ordered authorities concerned to run vision and drug tests at the time of granting and renewing licences for drivers of all vehicles.

However, the scenario on the roads -- at least up till the countrywide closure of public transportation late last month -- has not shown any considerable improvement.

Many in Ctg

FROM PAGE 3

Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (the only organisation entrusted with testing in Chattogram), said, "We can still control the situation if we maintain social distancing strictly."

Contacted, Dr Hasan Shahriar Kabir, divisional director of Directorate General of Health Services, said, "We are trying to control the spread by locking down detected areas. Awareness is a must to control community transmission. We have to strictly follow the government instructions of staying home and maintaining social distancing."

Newly-recruited

FROM PAGE 3

once the newly recruited teachers get entry to IBAS++ they will get salary.

"The work is progressing slowly due to current situation. But there is nothing to be worried [about], everyone will get salary," he assured.

The Directorate of Primary Education started teacher recruitment for 61 districts in July 2018, and over 24 lakh applications were submitted.

Help us

FROM PAGE 3

Syeeda Nafisa, a physician, came to Australia as a visitor and has been stuck for a month. "I need to go back to my country to serve at this time of national crisis, since my hospital is already running short of doctors," she said.

Masrur Mahmood Shuvo, an employee of a private bank in Bangladesh, has been stuck with his spouse and daughter. Talking to this correspondent, he said if they fail to find an arrangement, they will have to be stranded there for next six months without income and limited access to funds. Many will have expired passports and visas, he said.

"Under these circumstances, we would request authorities to arrange a return flight for us. In case we can arrange a flight, we would need cooperation from the high commission, the foreign ministry and the aviation ministry to accept our landing proposals and formalities," Masrur said.

Meanwhile, most Bangladeshi students there have had their job hours slashed, while some lost jobs. Nearly half of them are from Victoria, while some are in New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland.

Taukir Muzib, a law student at Swinburne University in Melbourne, said he lost his job and his funds are depleting. "With this fund, I might be able to survive a month," he said.

There are about six thousand Bangladeshi students in Australia, who have to pay USD 16,000 to 20,000 per semester. With the coronavirus hitting Bangladesh, many of them are not getting financial help from their families.

In reply to an email, the Bangladesh high commissioner said they are aware of the difficulties Bangladeshis in Australia are facing, and their officials are in touch with them.

"We've made our recommendations to Dhaka. Those include connectivity via Hong Kong or Guangzhou. As of now, we are awaiting a decision," he said.

He said they are also working with social, cultural and professional bodies to support Bangladeshis. "A pool of Bangladeshi doctors [for informal consultation] have been set up for supporting members of our diaspora in Australia."

"Additionally, the high commission has formally engaged Australian authorities to reduce tuition and ancillary fees for our students. Many universities are responding positively and have written back to us," he added.



49th death anniversary of Lt Col Abdul Qadir today

CRDY DESK

Today is the 49th death anniversary of Lt Col Muhammad Abdul Qadir.

On this day in 1971, he was martyred, says a press release.

Qadirabad Cantonment in Natore was named after him for his contributions to the 1971 Liberation War. The government also issued a postal stamp recognising him as one of the martyred intellectuals.

Qadir's grave was found in 2007 and he was reburied with full state and military honour at Qadirabad Cantonment in 2011. He is the father of eminent journalist Nadeem Qadir. His family urged all to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

Bangladesh will always stand

FROM PAGE 12

SOLIDARITY WITH VIETNAM PLEDGED Finance and Planning Minister Tajuddin Ahmed declares that the government and the people of Bangladesh will always stand by the oppressed people of Vietnam and also of any other country who are struggling for their emancipation from the clutches of imperialist powers. Addressing a mass rally organised in observance of Vietnam Day in Dhaka, he says that the independent and non-aligned foreign policy of Bangladesh does not in any way mean equating the imperialist aggressors with the victims of such aggression. Speaking highly of the gallantry and heroism of the Vietnamese people, Tajuddin Ahmed says that the national liberation war of the Vietnamese people is bound to succeed and expresses the confidence that the brave Vietnamese people are sure to make their mark in the comity of nations as a free and sovereign nation soon.

CONSTITUTION DRAFTING BODY MEETS

The Constitution Drafting Committee set up by the Bangladesh Constituent Assembly today has its first meeting. Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister and also the Chairman of the Drafting Committee Dr Kamal Hossain says at the meeting that the Constitution will be drafted incorporating the four principles

of democracy, socialism, nationalism and secularism. He reconfirms Bangabandhu's earlier declaration that all shades of opinion will be taken into consideration in framing the constitution. The Drafting Committee has been directed by the Constituent Assembly to submit the draft of constitution by June 10, 1972.

AL ORGANISING COMMITTEE FORMED Bangabandhu today declares the 44-member organising committee of Awami League. As per the request of the Awami League council members Bangabandhu will remain president of the party until the next session of the council. Zillur Rahman is nominated as the new general secretary of the party.

CONSTRUCTION OF LOW-COST HOUSES PLANNED

Public Works and Housing Minister Matiur Raman discloses that the government has taken a plan to construct sufficient low-cost houses in the country to solve the housing problems of the displaced people. He further says that Bangabandhu observed keenly how similar problems had been solved in the Soviet Union by constructing low-cost houses on a mass scale and he recommended similar measures to be adopted to resolve the housing problem of the displaced persons in Bangladesh.

SOURCES: April 18, 1972 issues of *Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Ittefaq*

Losses when profit

FROM PAGE 12

This year, batik makers' business lies in tatters due to coronavirus outbreak, small boutiques and large shopping centres alike remain closed since March 25.

Bashar is one of several hundred factory owners and workers anxious about their livelihoods as they stay at home without work at Banti, a village in Narayanganj's Arahazar upazila.

Banti has earned fame for its batik clothes, mostly printed by hand, inspiring nearby villages to also take up the business.

During a visit to the village earlier this month, The Daily Star found shops closed on the deserted main road around noon. Two elderly men were talking in front of a closed shop.

Asked why there were no dyed cloths drying outside, one of them replied that all batik printing work has been off since March 26.

Around 200 metres to the west of the main road, Bashar's factory gates were locked. He was initially reluctant to come outside but later agreed to show this correspondent around his factory, which can produce around 1,500 three-pieces [shalwar kameez sets] every week.

"Don't know what will happen in the future. For now, I am accepting the loss," he said.

The situation of around 1,000 families who work in the business is similar. Several hundred families of nearby villages, whose livelihoods also depend on the batik printing business, share the fate.

Bashar and others reminisced how the demand for batik clothes and home décor items goes up at the onset of every summer, peaking just before festivals like Pahela Baishakh and Eid-ul-Fitr.

Ahead of these festivals, the whole area would usually be vibrant with batik cloths of different colours, shapes, and sizes hung out to dry under the sun after being dyed -- covering almost every inch of available space.

The area would buzz with energy as batik workers dye, print, wash, dry, fold, and package the material that constitutes a major part of the area's economy.

With the extra demand at this time, skilled workers from other areas would come to Banti in search of seasonal work. The workers printing patterns on fabrics would often work through the nights in order to fulfil their orders.

This year, however, is vastly different amid coronavirus. Helaluddin and two others were printing inside a factory, locked from the outside. He only agreed to come out and talk after making sure this correspondent was not from the local administration or the police.

The factory he works in produces around 1,000 three-pieces in a week.

"If we do not work, how we will get money?" asked Helaluddin.

A seasoned worker is paid Tk 20,000 per month, with less skilled workers getting around Tk 10,000, said locals.

"If the situation continues, we will lose our jobs. God knows what will happen," said Helaluddin.

Wholesale customers from nearby cities and towns, including Dhaka and Munshiganj, come to Banti and nearby bazaars to buy the batik clothes and materials produced here.

Now, with no shopping hordes and limited festivities across the country, demand has dropped sharply, and with it, the livelihoods of these workers and a business that usually thrives at this time of year.

While Helaluddin was talking with this correspondent, Milon Bhuiyan came forward.

He said had had closed down his wax batik factory on March 26. He had six workers, who usually earn around Tk 3,000 a month.

"I have asked all my workers not to come to work. I don't have business, what else I can do?"

Keep your body

FROM PAGE 12

There are plenty of online platforms from which one could take guidance and keep healthy, he suggested.

Jashim said the whole world is going through a stressful situation and this could negatively affect the immune system, but a consistent yoga routine can help to deal with the situation.

He suggested breathing exercises are a good way to go about it.

"To start yoga, simply focus your full attention to your breathing. One should sit straight and then close their eyes. Then the person can take a deep breath and exhale slowly," he said.

Jashim said this is very good for the lungs and it is also called the lung exercise.

As lungs are worst affected by coronavirus, this deep breathing technique is a very good activity to practise.

World Health Organisation Director General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at a press conference recently said, "WHO recommends 30 minutes of physical activity a day for adults and one hour a day for children. If your local or national guidelines allow to go outside for a walk, [go for] a run or a ride and keep a safe distance from others. If you can't leave the house, find an exercise video online, dance to music, do some yoga or walk up and down the stairs."

"If you're working at home make sure you don't sit in the same position for long periods; get up and take a three-minute break every 30 minutes."

Coronavirus could cause

FROM PAGE 12

today facing the twin threats of potential mass virus outbreaks in conflict zones and looming socio-economic upheaval. Both crises could have severe humanitarian consequences," Fabrizio Carboni, ICRC director for the Near and Middle East, said in the statement.

In an interview, he told Reuters that the aftermath of the epidemic could be worse than the disease itself, "because on top of the conflict, on top of the violence, they will have to deal with the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. And it's really scary," he said at a largely empty ICRC headquarters.

Millions already lack health care, food, water and electricity in conflict-hit countries where prices are rising and infrastructure damaged, the ICRC said.

Millions of Syrians displaced in their homeland and refugees who have fled to Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan are especially vulnerable, as are people in Yemen, where a Saudi-backed coalition has declared a ceasefire in a five-year old conflict.

Carboni said that the ICRC had provided its first hygiene kits and protective material for 10 central prisons in Syria that are run by the interior ministry.

Overcrowding and conditions would make it hard to contain any outbreaks, he said. "We are in dialogue with authorities to expand the support to all places of detention."

Protective equipment including disinfectant has also been donated to health facilities and places of detention across Iraq, the statement said.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA)
Office of the Project Director
Feasibility Study and Conceptual Design of
Proposed Bus Terminal and Depot
Nagar Bhaban (Level-12), Fulbaria, Dhaka-1000.
www.dtca.gov.bd

Ref: 35.02.0000.002.37.018.19-96 Date: 15/04/2020

Extension of EoI Submission Deadline for Individual Technical Consultant

Due to unavoidable circumstances, the submission deadline of the EoI requested vide ref no. 35.02.0000.002.37.018.19-81, dated 15/03/2020 is hereby further extended as follows:

| Current Deadline | Extended Deadline |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 20/04/2020 Up to 05:00 PM | 31/05/2020 Up to 05:00 PM |

Submission of EOI in PDF format through e-mail (ade@dtca.gov.bd) will also be acceptable. All other terms and conditions will remain unchanged.

(A.S.M. Elias Shah)
Project Director
Tel: 02-47120390

GD-743

Red Chittagong Cattle (RCC) Improvement and Conservation Project
(Phase-II) Project.
Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute
Savar, Dhaka-1341.

Memo No: 33.05.2672.107.03.001.19-120 Date: 15-04-2020

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender will be invited through the National e-GP System (<http://www.eprocurement.gov.bd>) for procurement of following goods details are given below:

| Tender ID No. | Package No. | APP ID No.: | Description of goods | Tender Document Last Selling/ Downloading Date & Time | Tender Closing Date & Time |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 453633 | GD. 5 | 162889 | Supply of Farm & Others Equipments. | 29-Apr-2020 16:55 | 30-Apr-2020 13:00 |

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP system.

To get access to the e-Tender document, the required fee is to be deposited through any registered branch of enlisted banks on or before 29-Apr-2020 16:55. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Dr. S. M. Jahangir Hossain)
Project Director
Phone No: 02-7791670
E-mail: smjhossainbri@yahoo.com

GD-744

Political deadlock drags on in Israel

A countdown to a fourth election in Israel in more than a year of political deadlock began yesterday after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and main rival Benny Gantz missed a deadline to form a government. Both men had pledged to join forces in a national emergency government to battle the coronavirus crisis. But they could not agree on terms for power-sharing. Israel's parliament now has three weeks to agree on a candidate for the task. If no nominee is chosen in the next 21 days or if the appointee does not form a government within two weeks of being chosen, parliament will automatically dissolve and a new election will be held.

Google launches 'journalism relief fund'

Google said it will launch an emergency fund to help local news outlets struggling to maintain operations in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. The internet giant gave no specific figure for its fund, but said it would offer grants ranging from the "low thousands of dollars" for the smallest operations to "low tens of thousands for larger newsrooms." The move comes with the media sector facing deep cutbacks resulting from the global consumer lockdown, an intense economic slump and a retrenchment in advertising revenues that many news outlets depend on. Google News vice president Richard Gingras said the fund will open to outlets "producing original news for local communities during this time of crisis," with applications due by April 29.

WWII veteran, 99, raises £12m for UK health workers



A 99-year-old British World War II veteran yesterday completed 100 laps of his garden in a fundraising challenge for healthcare staff that has captured the heart of the nation, raising more than £12 million. "Incredible and now words fail me," said Tom Moore, a captain who served in India, after finishing the laps of his 25-metre (82-foot) garden with the help of his walking frame. Moore initially set himself the goal of raising £1,000 for a National Health Service charity in time for his 100th birthday at the end of the month. But his efforts have made him a star in his own country and abroad. The final lap of his garden in Bedfordshire, south England, was met with a guard of honour from the Yorkshire Regiment and broadcast live on British TV.



A police officer along with social worker BK Sharma distribute vegetables to people in need during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown in Amritsar. Photo was taken Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS IN INDIA BY TABLIGHI JAMAAT

Culpable homicide charge against leader Saad Kandhalvi

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has brought charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder against the chief of a Muslim seminary for holding a gathering last month that authorities say led to a big jump in coronavirus infections, police said yesterday.

The headquarters of the Tablighi Jamaat group in a cramped corner of Delhi were sealed and thousands of followers, including some from Indonesia, Malaysia and Bangladesh, were taken into quarantine after it emerged they had attended meetings there in mid-March.

Police initially filed a case against Muhammad Saad Kandhalvi, the chief of the centre, for violating a ban on big gatherings but had now invoked the law against culpable homicide, a police spokesman said.

"Delhi police had filed a first information report earlier against the Tablighi chief, now section 304 has been added," the officer

said, referring to culpable homicide in the penal code, which carries a maximum punishment of a 10-year prison term.

Authorities said at the beginning of the month that a third of the nearly 3,000 coronavirus cases at that time were either people who attended the Tablighi gathering or those who were later exposed to them.

India's tally of coronavirus infections has since jumped to 12,380, including 414 deaths, as of yesterday.

Officials have rejected suggestions they were unfairly targeting the Muslim community, but said they had to rebuke the group because it had behaved irresponsibly by ignoring social-distancing rules.

Pakistan has recorded 6,505 cases according to its latest data, a jump of 520 over the previous day. About 60 percent of Pakistan's cases load was linked to the Tablighi or were people who had gone on religious pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia and Iran, officials said.

Only a vaccine can bring back normalcy

Says UN chief Guterres

AFP, United Nations

A Covid-19 vaccine may be the only thing that can bring back "normalcy," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Wednesday, hoping for just that before the end of the year.

"A safe and effective vaccine may be the only tool that can return the world to a sense of 'normalcy,' saving millions of lives and countless trillions of dollars," he added during a video conference with the 50 or so African countries that are members of the United Nations.

He called for its accelerated development and accessibility to all, adding it must have a "universal global benefit" and "allow us to control the pandemic."

"We need an ambitious effort to ensure that international stakeholders operate through a harmonized, integrated and leveraged approach to maximize the speed and scale needed for the universal deployment of such a vaccine by the end of 2020," he insisted.

Guterres said his appeal on March 25 for \$2 billion in donations for a comprehensive UN humanitarian response to the pandemic had so far raised about 20 percent of that amount.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

LATEST UPDATES

DEATH TOLL NEARS 140,000

The worldwide death toll from the novel coronavirus pandemic rose to 137,500 yesterday, according to a tally compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT from official sources. More than 2,083,820 declared cases have been registered in 193 countries and territories. In the United States, the death toll stood at 30,985 with 639,664 infections. Italy is the next most-affected country with 21,645 deaths from 165,155 infections. It is followed by Spain with 19,130 fatalities from 182,816 confirmed infections, France with 17,167 deaths and 147,863 infections and Britain with 12,868 deaths from 98,476 cases.

US CASES HAVE 'PASSED PEAK'

President Donald Trump claimed that the US cases had "passed the peak" of the crisis despite a record daily death toll. He promised swift "guidelines" on reopening parts of the country, suggesting less-affected states could ease restrictions before May 1.

JAPAN EXPANDS EMERGENCY

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday expanded a state of emergency due to the coronavirus to cover the whole country to stem the growing spread of the disease. The declaration allows regional governors to urge people to stay indoors, but with no punitive measures or legal force, the measure is far weaker than strict lockdowns seen in other parts of the world.

GERMANY TO EASE RESTRICTIONS

Germany has achieved a "fragile intermediate success" in its fight against the coronavirus and will take small steps out of lockdown with the partial reopening of shops next week and schools from May 4. Social distancing rules would remain in place until May 3.

106-YR-OLD BEATS COVID-19

A 106-year-old great-grandmother, thought to be the oldest patient in Britain to beat the novel coronavirus, was discharged from hospital to applause from nurses and health workers. Connie Titchen, from Birmingham, in central England, battled the virus for just under three weeks and was given a clean bill of health by medics at City Hospital.

AUSTRALIA TO KEEP RESTRICTIONS

Australia will retain restrictions on public movement for at least four more weeks, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said yesterday, dashing speculation the country's sustained low growth in new cases could spur a quicker return to normal. Australia has averted the high numbers of coronavirus casualties reported in other countries around the world after closing its borders and imposing strict "social distancing" measures for the past month.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

More relief rice

FROM PAGE 12

A case was filed with Babuganj Police Station accusing four people, including the chairman, in this connection.

Police detained a trader for selling relief rice in Sirajganj's Chowhali upazila on Wednesday night.

Over 40 sacks of such rice were recovered from the trader's warehouse and a UP member's house.

A case was lodged against rice trader Abu Bakar of Jotgari Bazar and UP member Rafiqul Islam of Khaskaulia Dakshinpara village, said Rashidul Hasan Biswas, OC of Chowhali Police Station, adding that the UP member went into hiding.

In Bogura, police held Mirza Golam Hafiz Sohad, BNP-backed chairman of Majhihato Union Parishad, for storing nine sacks, containing 330kg of rice, at home in Shibganj upazila on Wednesday evening.

Mizanur Rahman, OC of Shibganj Police Station, said the case statement would be sent to the Anti-Corruption Commission office in Bogura.

In another incident, police seized 14 sacks of relief rice from a closed shop at Galagaon Bazar in Mymensingh's Tarakanda yesterday afternoon.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team raided the shop of rice trader Emdadul Haque and recovered the rice, said Abul Khayer, officer-in-charge of Tarakanda Police Station.

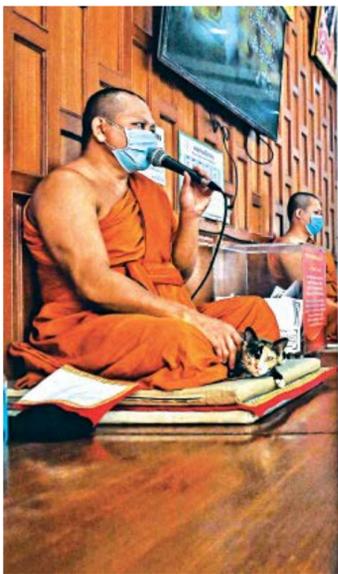
But the trader managed to flee, the OC added.

Besides, a mobile court recovered 11 sacks of such rice from the possession of a dealer of Muktagachha upazila on Wednesday evening. The court jailed him for three days and fined him Tk 30,000.

In two other incidents in the upazila, police rescued 47 sacks of rice from the possession of a dealer in Dagaon and 21 sacks of rice from the possession of two other dealers in Tarati union in the morning.

Two separate cases were lodged.

Our correspondents from Barishal, Bogura, Pabna, and Mymensingh contributed to this report.



Buddhist monks conduct prayers behind a plastic screen, as a preventive measure against the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus, at Wat Samian Nari temple in Bangkok on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Workers forced to dismantle ships

FROM PAGE 12

five thousands workers left stranded at various labour camps and forced to join amid fear of being affected by coronavirus.

"Many of the workers left Sitakunda for their homes. We could not do so because of the absence of vehicles on the streets. A colleague of them died in February with coronavirus symptoms. In such a dire situation, we are forced to work from today," he said.

Usually, there were no safety gears for the workers. Due to Coronavirus, the situation turned even worse for the workers as there is no mask, PPE, gloves, and other safety gears, the workers who have been working for a decade or more in ship-breaking yards told The Daily Star.

Mohammad Abu Taher, president of BSBA, said that they kept their yards closed for the last 10 days but began the operations from yesterday at 60 yards.

Asked why they restarted their operation after a pause, he said they did it for the workers who were going through hardship due to the shutdown.

He said there was no government instruction regarding keeping operations close. As many of the workers living in hardship and there were chances for

materials to be stolen if yards suspends operations, they restarted their activities.

He claimed to have ensured all safety measures for workers.

AKM Shamsul Arefin, additional secretary of the ministry of industry, said that he saw no problem in starting the yards' operations.

"It is the workers who urged to restart the works as they could not go home for long distances. There are at least 5,000 workers who are living in dearth of daily needs. Besides, the yard owners have bank loans which they need pay," he said.

He said if they follow the health advisory issued by the government there would be no problem at all.

Mohammed Ali Shahin, coordinator of YPSA (Young Power in Social Action), a platform which monitors ship-breaking activities, told The Daily Star that most ship-breaking yards normally do not have arrangement for occupational safety except few.

"There are enough reason to be doubtful regarding Coronavirus safety issues where normal occupational safety is not followed and maintained. We urge government to step up for workers safety and contain the pandemic," he urged.

Indian hospital segregates patients

FROM PAGE 12

nearly 13 straight years from 2001 before he became India's prime minister in 2014.

When Al Jazeera called Jayanti Ravi, the principal secretary of health in the Gujarat government, about the segregation of patients on religious lines, her personal assistant took the call and suggested we speak to Dr Sanjay Solanki, the resident medical officer at the hospital.

"I have no idea," said the personal assistant, without revealing his name.

Solanki, in turn, asked Al Jazeera to speak to Rathod. "He is the right person to talk to," he said.

Rathod did not answer the phone calls made by Al Jazeera.

Meanwhile, Gujarat's Health Minister and Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel told Al Jazeera that nothing of that sort had happened.

"Whatever is needed to give people the best possible treatment is being done," he said and hung up.

The state's health department also put out an official statement, calling reports of separate wards for Muslims and Hindus "baseless".

"Patients are kept in different wards based on their medical condition, severity of the symptoms and age, purely based on the advice of the treating doctors. Therefore, reports appearing in certain media are totally baseless and misleading," it said.

However, in The Indian Express report, a patient was quoted as saying, "On Sunday night, the names of 28 men admitted in the first ward (A-4) were called out. We were then shifted to another ward (C-4)."

"While we were not told why we were being shifted, all the names that were called

out belonged to one community. We spoke to one staff member in our ward and he said this had been done for 'the comfort of both communities'."

According to a doctor quoted in another report by The Hindu newspaper, "Certain patients from the majority community were not comfortable being in the same ward with patients of the minority community."

"After some patients complained, it was decided to segregate them on temporary basis," the doctor told the newspaper on condition of anonymity.

When Ahmedabad-based sociologist Ghanashyam Shah was asked by Al Jazeera if the hospital segregating patients according to their religion amounted to apartheid, he replied, "Absolutely."

"Knowing Gujarat, I am not surprised it has happened," he said.

"It is a very obvious kind of thing. The fake news propaganda around Muslims spreading the virus is probably rampant across India. But I can see it is visible in Gujarat."

Shah was alluding to a widespread Islamophobia fuelled by the coronavirus pandemic, especially after Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim missionary group, organised a congregation in New Delhi in March.

The congregation was later linked to hundreds of COVID-19 positive cases across the country, triggering a nationwide hunt to trace the attendees.

On Wednesday, Tablighi Jamaat chief Maulana Saad Kandhalvi was charged with "culpable homicide".

Earlier this month, the World Health Organization had warned against any religious profiling of coronavirus patients by the governments across the world.



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Project Director
Bangladesh Railway
Outer Circular Road, Kamalapur, Dhaka-1217

No. PD/DT/JDLP/TENDER/WD2.904 **Dated: 15.04.2020**

Package No. WD2: Design, Supply, Installation and Testing-Commissioning of Computer Based Interlocked Signaling system at 7 (seven) stations including interlocking of selected level crossings and installation of optical fiber cable based telecommunication system for block operation and CTC interface work (turnkey works) in connection with Construction of 3rd and 4th Dual Gauge Track in Dhaka-Tongi Section and Doubling of Dual Gauge Track in Tongi-Joydebpur Section.

Ref:

- IFT No. PD/DT/JDLP/TENDER/WD2-831; Dated 20.02.2020
- Corrigendum 1: PD/DT/JDLP/TENDER/WD2-859; Dated 08.03.2020
- Corrigendum 2: PD/DT/JDLP/TENDER/WD2-884; Dated 19.03.2020

Corrigendum No. 3 (dated: 15.04.2020)

| Sl No. of IFT | | Provision as per Corrigendum-2 | | Provision as per Corrigendum-3 | |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|---|---------------------|---|---------------------|
| 17. | Tender last selling date | 18.05.2020 (during office hours) | | 08.06.2020 (during office hours) | |
| 18. | Tender closing date and time | Date | Time | Date | Time |
| | | 19-05-2020 | Up to 12.00 hrs BST | 09-06-2020 | Up to 12:00 hrs BST |
| 19. | Tender opening date and time | Date | Time | Date | Time |
| | | 19-05-2020 | At 12:30 hrs BST | 09-06-2020 | At 12:30 hrs BST |
| 21. | Place/date/time of pre-tender meeting | Conference Room 'Meghna' (5th Floor), Rail Bhaban, 16, Abdul Gani Road Dhaka. Date & time 23.04.2020 at 11:00 hrs BST | | Conference Room 'Meghna' (5th Floor), Rail Bhaban, 16, Abdul Gani Road, Dhaka. Date & time: 10.05.2020 at 11:00 hrs BST | |

All other terms and conditions of the tender notice shall remain unchanged.



Md. Shahidul Islam
Project Director
Construction of 3rd and 4th Dual Gauge Lines in Dhaka-Tongi Section and Doubling of Dual Gauge Line in Tongi-Joydebpur Section Project
Cell phone: +88 01711506113
E-mail: pd_3rd4th@railway.gov.bd

GD-742

| STOCKS | | COMMODITIES | | ASIAN MARKETS | | | | CURRENCIES | | | |
|--------|--------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|----------|---------------|-------|--------|-------|
| DSEX | CSCX | Gold | Oil | MUMBAI | TOKYO | SINGAPORE | SHANGHAI | USD | EUR | GBP | CNY |
| Closed | Closed | \$1,742.50 (per ounce) | \$27.67 (per barrel) | ▲ 1.13% | ▼ 1.33% | ▲ 0.45% | ▲ 0.31% | BUY TK 83.95 | 90.28 | 103.86 | 11.71 |
| | | | | 30,722.95 | 19,290.20 | 2,617.35 | 2,819.94 | SELL TK 84.95 | 94.08 | 107.66 | 12.31 |

আপনার নিরাপত্তাই আমাদের অগ্রাধিকার

ব্যাংকিং হোক ঘরে বসেই

- দ্রুত ট্রানসাকশন
- মোবাইল টপ-আপ
- ক্রেডিট কার্ডের বিল শ্রদান
- ইন্সট্যান্ট বিল শ্রদান
- ব্যাংক চেকটমেন্ট

SIBL Social Islami Bank Limited

Star BUSINESS

DHAKA FRIDAY APRIL 17, 2020, BAISHAKH 4, 1427 BS • starbusiness@thedailystar.net

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Govt in great pickle over next fiscal year's budget

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal plans to unveil the national budget for next fiscal year on June 11 amid deepening uncertainties brought on by the deadly coronavirus.

Earlier this week, he proposed two dates to the prime minister for presenting the budget for fiscal 2020-21. The premier chose June 11 over June 4.

The finance minister has also kept the coronavirus situation in mind as he prepares the budget for the next fiscal year. The final decision about the size of the budget, targets and modes would be taken in the first week of May.

Although the whole country has been on lockdown since March 25 owing to the rising cases of the novel virus, the finance ministry's budget formulation team has been working to prepare it in June.

The core teams of the budget formulation committee are going to the office as usual.

Kamal discussed alternatives with the prime minister if the pandemic makes the



RASHED SHUMON

situation in Bangladesh even more complex.

One of the alternatives might be to unveil a temporary budget for three months in line with a provision of the constitution. Alternatively, a temporary budget for two months may be presented under the presidential ordinance.

During the period of the temporary budget, the finance ministry would polish off the full fiscal year budget.

Last year, ahead of the polls, India had announced an interim budget.

Another option is to present the full-year budget and revise it after a quarter or so.

COVID-19, which has brought the economy to its knees, is not the only cause for concern for the finance minister.

Deficits and public borrowings were

already on the rise for the past year-and-a-half amid sluggish revenue generation before coronavirus hit.

The size of the national budget was initially planned at more than Tk 600,000 crore, in keeping with the growth seen in the last decade.

But it may be Tk 580,000 crore in the end, which would still be an increase of about 11 per cent from the amount earmarked for fiscal 2019-20.

With revenue receipt growth remaining sluggish, the government has to rethink the size of the next budget to keep the deficit within a tolerable level, said a finance ministry official.

Budget deficit is already set to be about 6 per cent of GDP this fiscal year, which is above the recommended 5 per cent, and it may go up to 7 per cent in fiscal 2020-21 because of increase in expenditure to counter the rampage of coronavirus and sluggish revenue generation.

Initially, the government had thought that the revenue generation by the National Board of Revenue (NBR) would face a collection shortfall of Tk 52,000 crore in the fiscal year ending on June 30. But now it seems the deficit may be Tk 100,000 crore.

However, the government is hopeful that the economic activities would get momentum in the next fiscal year. And the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also given such signal.

On Tuesday, the crisis lender forecasted that the GDP would grow only by 2 per cent in 2020, but it would make a sharp recovery in 2021, reaching its highest-ever 9.5 per cent.

Social distancing in garment factories out of the question

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Social distancing has proven to be one of the most effective ways to contain the spread of the lethal coronavirus but the safeguard remains largely elusive in Bangladesh's garment factories that employ about 4.1 million people.

Stakeholders blame it on three factors: most factories pay wages in cash for which workers have to gather in a place and form long queues; many garment units with dense seating arrangement are still open; and workers often take to the streets in droves demanding arrears.

As many as 76 per cent of the factories still pay wages in cash, 9 per cent via mobile financial services, 4 per cent through banks and 11 per cent through other means, according to a survey by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The BGMEA and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) in a joint statement urged the factory owners to clear the wages of March as soon as possible.

Factory owners have also been asked to maintain social distancing among workers during salary disbursement.

A factory owner at Ashulia, an industrial belt on the outskirts of Dhaka, said he paid 70 per cent of his 12,000 workers in cash and the rest via MFS or bank accounts on April 9.

"I tried to enforce social distancing while disbursing salaries, but it's not always possible," he said asking not to be named.

So, he has already opened MFS accounts for all his workers so that he can pay them digitally from the next month.

The industrial police always try to ensure that workers maintain social distancing in the factories, said Md Farhad Hossain Khan, additional superintendent of police at the industrial police headquarters in Uttara.

"But the number of workers is so high that it's not always possible," he added.

As of yesterday, some 87 per cent of the garment workers were paid their salaries for March, according to the BGMEA, while BKMEA said 477 of their members out of the total 833 have cleared wages so far.

"Social distancing is hard to maintain in the garment sector as workers are coming to factories every day," said Nazma Akter, president of Sammitito Garment Sramik Federation, a platform for apparel sector workers.

She called upon factory owners and retailers to take a united stand to this end.

"We have requested every member of our association to pay wages as soon as possible, preferably by April 16," said BGMEA President Rubana Huq.

Though most factories pay salaries in cash, MFS would be a better option, she said, adding that they have requested the owners who are still paying in cash to help their workers maintain social distancing.

So far, 300 factories paid salaries for March through bank transfers or MFS accounts, said Shibnath Roy, inspector general of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, adding that social distancing is difficult to maintain in the labour-intensive factories.

Nagad slashes transaction charge for SMEs

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Mobile financial service provider Nagad yesterday announced it slashed the transaction charge for small and medium-sized enterprises by about 59 per cent to Tk 6 for every 1,000 to mitigate their woes in the time of the coronavirus pandemic.

Nagad's registered customers for its Swadhin Merchant programme, which is dedicated to SMEs, would be able to perform business transactions with other merchants at the new rate, it said in a statement.

The move was made in response to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's call to stand by people in this hard time caused by the lethal pathogen, which has brought business activities across the country to a halt.

Nagad is owned by Bangladesh Post Office.

Tk 5,600cr needed pronto to stave off hunger among poor

Finds joint study by PPRC and BIGD

SOHEL PARVEZ

Food insecurity among the poor and economically vulnerable population has started and the crisis will intensify by the end of this month if the government does not take any immediate steps, said a recent study.

"We want to give an alert to the government," said Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), which conducted the study in collaboration with the BRAC Institute for Governance and Development (BIGD).

With the view to flattening the curve on the highly contagious, lethal pathogen, the government on March 26 put the country on shutdown -- a move that gashed the income of the poor and the vulnerable non-poor saw their income come crashing by as much as 70 per cent.

The study, conducted over telephone among 5,471 households in slums in cities and rural areas from April 4 to April 12, found that the poor and the vulnerable were trying to cope with the current crisis by using savings, borrowing and reducing

FINDINGS & ADVICE

Food insecurity to intensify by April-end
Income of poor and vulnerable non-poor to drop more than **70%**

Food consumption cut **40%** among poor, **35%** among vulnerable non-poor

Broad-based near universal support needed

Tk **5,600**cr package to support poor for a month

Tk **1,368** per person in rural areas

Tk **1,702** per person in urban areas

Additional package for vulnerable non-poor

PPRC & BIGD survey 2020

food consumption.

Some 40 per cent of the poor and 35 per cent of the economically vulnerable non-poor had to reduce food consumption since the coronavirus outbreak in Bangladesh in March.

Their savings will run out by next week, said Imran Matin, executive director of BIGD, while sharing the findings of the study yesterday.

Then, without any support, they will descend into deep trouble, Rahman said.

Subsequently, the study suggested the government provide Tk 5,600 crore immediately -- Tk 1,368 for per person in rural areas and Tk 1,702 in urban areas -- to ensure food security for a month for the nearly four crore poor population.

The economically vulnerable population were above the poverty level as their incomes were higher during the pre-coronavirus period, particularly in February. Researchers termed them as 'new poor': their income dropped 71 per cent since coronavirus took over the national discourse.

Almost 80 per cent of the vulnerable non-poor have seen income contraction

and this section of people might go above the poverty line if the situation normalises next month.

"But it is very unlikely as it appears to us that the crisis will prolong for the next couple of months," said Rahman, also a former adviser to an immediate caretaker government.

The amount of traditional relief has been increased for those who suffer from food insecurity.

"What we wanted to say was that the upcoming crisis of food insecurity could not be tackled through a lumpsum increase in traditional relief activities."

A dedicated package is urgent to support people facing food insecurity, Rahman said.

Earlier this week, the government allocated Tk 760 crore to transfer cash to poor people.

"There is a large-scale acute need of basic livelihood support because of massive income drop," Matin said.

People should be given a widespread generous support package and traditional safety net thinking needs to be changed, he added.

Virtual healthcare, once a hard sell, can't keep up with demand now

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

Virtual healthcare service has gained traction in Bangladesh in the last few weeks as senior consultants and professors have put their private practice on hold while people are less inclined to visit hospitals and clinics to cut the risk of contracting the deadly coronavirus.

Patients are availing basic healthcare services by consulting doctors via video conferencing. Some senior professors are also trying to assess and treat patients using Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.

Indian online health initiatives are also wooing local patients through digital channels against the backdrop of travel bans.

With the government declaring general holiday from March 26 to curb the spread of the coronavirus, healthcare-related digital platforms are getting a lot of hits.

Some platforms stated that calls had gone up four to five times compared with what was just a month back.

To support the growing demand of patients, a virtual hospital, HelloDoc, was launched on Tuesday, the first-of-its-kind in the country.

Patients can consult 42 senior consultants and professors through video channels, get tests carried out through visits of sample collectors and avail home deliveries of

lifesaving medicines.

Kotha, a local social and lifestyle mobile application, with digital platforms Amarlab and Ergo Ventures initiated the platform. The promoters say patients would be served free of cost as long as the pandemic persists.

Currently, there are about 15 digital healthcare service providers, according to the Access to Information (a2i), which is run under the Information Communication Division. The a2i is trying to coordinate among the platforms.

It has already promoted the platforms and is meeting up with them regularly. On Wednesday, there was also an online consultation among the entities.

"Definitely telemedicine or video conferencing could be the best solution in this situation when the COVID-19 is affecting the country," said Anir Chowdhury, senior policy adviser of the a2i. "And we are trying to promote that."

About 80 per cent of the medical services can be provided through video conferencing, said Aftab Hossain, chief executive officer of Olwel Digital Hospital, a Finland-based start-up, which has been working in Bangladesh for three years.

Olwel was born to provide on-call doctors' support at the doorstep of patients. The

platform has gained a lot of popularity, he said. It has rolled out video-conferencing support and there are 40 professors and senior consultants on its pool.

Currently, Olwel is organising about 20 video sessions per day and most of those connect with specialists.

"Lots of specialists have stopped visiting chambers and we are bridging consultants with patients through video calling."

In the process, doctors can stay home and Olwel is connecting them to patients through the internet.

The fee depends on consultants; it ranges from Tk 200 to Tk 600 per session. The fee includes Olwel calling back patients to check up on their conditions.

The on-demand healthcare solution provider will soon roll out a mobile application, which will also help them reduce technical challenges.

Olwel is planning to take some calls free of charge once the service goes live on the app by next week, Hossain added.

Praava Health, another big player in this sector, says the number of calls it receives has gone up fivefold since the shutdown was declared on March 26.

Now, it is receiving about 70 to 80 calls a day and more than half are about the coronavirus-

related issues, said Shakib Hadi, brand manager of the digital healthcare system.

Praava is also organising group calls for corporates where a good number of executives gather to have their queries answered by senior consultants. It has already run eight conference calls for different corporate houses.

It charges Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,200 for every video conversation with a specialist. Home sample collections are being charged Tk 1,000.

Through Praava's platform, customers can pre-book doctors for consultation by dialling the short code 10648, he added.

There are also some international players offering the services, such as MilVik and Tonic. Mobile operators earlier also provided healthcare support through digital platforms, which were accessible through short code 789.

Some platforms are organising live sessions on Facebook to address different issues and anyone can attend and ask questions.

However, of all of these initiatives, the government is handling most of the calls through the National Health Call Centre. Every day, it is receiving 80,000 to 90,000 calls and the service is completely free.

Local software firm Synesis IT has developed a platform and has provided 70.72 lakh services since its inception, of which 18.15 lakh were related to the coronavirus and were

delivered from March 8 to April 14.

The service was started in 2008 for mobile operators and later the government accepted it, said Rupayan Chowdhury, group CEO and co-founder of Synesis IT.

The average number of daily calls was hovering around 5,000 to 8,000 but it rose to 25,000 per day during the influx of chikungunya and dengue outbreak, which prompted them to increase capacity.

Another government initiative, 333, a national short code, handles a huge number of calls per day where a pool of doctors has been formed following the Uber model, meaning doctors connect with patients whenever they have time.

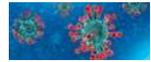
Some Facebook groups of doctors are also serving patients for free.

One of them is Dhaka College Friends '97, a group of students of Dhaka College who passed Higher Secondary Certificate exam in 1997.

A good number of students from the batch have become physicians and they are serving patients through Facebook Messenger and voice calls.

Pharmaceutical companies that have online presence and companies that collect samples for laboratory tests are also getting a lot of hits.

Pharmacy.com.bd is getting at least five times the number of regular hits, said Saiful Islam, the platform's head of sales.



TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

We paused the economy to save lives. But how do we press play again?



ZAHID HUSSAIN

The historical novelty of the coronavirus shock has unravelled as the lockdown continues. Bangladesh's economic expansion is projected to face a drastic brake.

Such brakes are expected all over the world more or less. Germany and France are already in recession. The American economy is expected to shrink as much as during the Great Depression but much quicker.

There has never been a crash landing like this before.

The immense human distresses defy calculation. Yet the point of attempting economic calculations, as done in the World Bank's just-released South Asia Economic Focus, is to gauge the likely impact of the coronavirus-induced disruptions and its propagation through the economy.

The fall in growth is the result of a deliberate policy choice made unavoidable by the killer pandemic.

We now face a protracted period in which falling consumption, exports and investment drive further contraction.

Some 93 per cent of the low-income households reported on average 75 per cent loss of income, according to the Brac perception survey carried out between March 31 to April 5.

The longer the lockdown, the deeper the scarring to the economy.

Given the risk of second- and third-wave outbreaks, no one has any idea how far and how fast the resumption of normal life can safely proceed.

We still seem to be on the exponentially rising part of the spread curve, as evident from recent official data on infections.

The correlation between the number of positive cases and the number of tests done is 0.96 (based on data covering the last 14 days).

The good news is that the cumulative number of tests has increased exponentially in recent weeks. The bad news is that so has the number of infected cases.

Bangladesh has the lowest number of tests per 1 million population amongst South Asian, East Asian and Southeast Asian countries.

Countries that have lower tests per million population than Bangladesh are Papua New Guinea, Mauritania, Mozambique, Haiti, Myanmar, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe.

Bangladesh's testing coverage looks even lower when compared across countries vis-à-vis their population densities.

More relevant metrics to gauge the state of the virus spread may be data on community-level proxy indicators such as respiratory-related hospitalisation and COVID-19 suspect deaths.

These can help identify infection hotspots where the limited testing capacity may be focused.

At the current rate, mass testing is an unlikely possibility.

The World Bank has just produced a new research and policy brief, titled 'How Two Tests Can Help Contain COVID-19 and Revive the Economy', where it suggests that two tests "can help governments shorten and soften economically costly suppression measures while still containing the novel coronavirus pandemic".

The first test facilitates the identification of infected persons, the tracing of their contacts and isolation.

The second antibody test can help assess the extent of immunity in the general population or subgroups, to fine-tune social isolation and manage health care resources.

The first test is generally available but needs to be processed in adequately equipped laboratories with trained staff. The second test is easy to perform and can be processed quickly on the spot. But at this stage, its reliability is not conclusively established.

It is available only on a limited scale in a few countries. The estimated economic benefits of the tests are likely to far outweigh the cost, as this research shows.

The international community must help countries develop the capacity to process the first test and procure the second when it is proven to work.

The above would be ideal, but not realistic to expect in low middle-income countries such as Bangladesh to the extent possible in high-income countries.

There are radical uncertainties in the current situation. Many unknown, unknowns. However, we know for sure the following:

First, the virus spread risk is

with a big bang. It will have to be selective, gradual and methodical. Given the resource constraints, the testing strategy might need to be prioritized to facilitate reopening.

There is now a lot of discussion on differentiated reopening. Starting with "essentials" (food, clothing, housing) and non-essentials (sports, theatres and malls), difficult choices

populated low and lower middle-income countries.

Differentiation by demographics can help prevent the explosion of spread risk due to reopening.

Should the young with no pre-existing conditions return first while the high-risk groups stay home until they are all tested? Should females be preferred to males since they appear

to have to be verified more rigorously from our own data.

It is possible many young and females are as vulnerable as the elderly because a vast number of them are poor living in dense communities in polluted areas.

The immune systems of low-income youths and females may be as weak, if not weaker, than high-income

critical for dispassionately updating evidence from data points added every day.

Even assuming social assistance to the poor and the vulnerable, lockdown will be subject to diminishing effectiveness over time.

Absent social assistance, the compulsion to reopen is even more obligatory.

A corollary is the extent of production and distribution chain coordination needed to make the reopening economically meaningful. The real choice is between ways of reopening.

The implementation of a differentiated approach is not remotely as simple as the above may sound.

The war against such a wickedly powerful and invisible enemy whose vulnerabilities are yet to be discovered cannot be easy. It is unprecedented.

How do you keep the green zones green and prevent the browns from turning red?

Blocks of areas and people may need to be physically and socially separated to prevent the inter-zonal spread of the virus. Workers in green zones will need lodging, for instance.

The immune systems of the poor are weaker and yet their need to return to work is the most pressing! The green, red and brown are neither neatly divisible nor static over time.

The design of the strategy must be based on epidemiological dynamics, economic incentives and the ability to govern.

Cliché in the rich countries is "we need an all of the government approach". The cliché in low capacity countries such as Bangladesh ought to be "we need an all of society approach" to tap ideas, mobilise resources, and push back unwarranted political and business pressure.

Some chaos during the transition is probably fait accompli in any context, ours' in particular, given the inertia in our social decision-making processes, and the time it takes to adapt to new behavioural norms at work.

Policymakers can only attempt to make the transition more orderly, the adaptation quicker and unlock aggregate demand more than otherwise would be the case.

The writer is an economist



The usually pandemoniac Shahbagh Square wears a forlorn look during the countrywide shutdown enforced since March 26 with the view to flattening the curve on devastating coronavirus.

PALASH KHAN

currently extremely high. Although we may not be able to scale up testing, tracing and isolating like the rich countries, we have to massively scale up from where we are.

Our dotted line on the virus spread diagram -- the capacity of our health care system to help everyone who is very sick -- is very low.

We will have to deploy a lot more resources at elevated levels of efficiency to save lives and contain the spread.

We need to invest in facilities and people to raise the dotted line. Providing the frontline responders -- the doctors, nurses, pharmacists, technicians, the military and the police -- safety gears, equipment, training and social protection is the topmost priority.

It is not a challenge either the public or the private sector can handle by going it alone.

Bringing the public health workers under health and life insurance coverage and adding honorariums to their salaries are right moves.

They all need to be provided more testing kits, labs, medical supplies, hospital beds and ventilators all over the country to test and treat quickly as many as possible to maximise the benefits from the lockdown.

Social distancing remains the only large-scale measure available to prevent the infection spread.

We need to learn from China and Singapore on how to ensure even enforcement. We need to learn from South Korea, Kerala and Sweden on how to ensure consistency in the interpretation of social distancing messages.

There is still a lack of awareness among many sections of the population. Livelihood disruptions make it impossible for many poor to stay home.

Customising social distancing and hygiene measures in densely-settled urban slums remains a daunting challenge that no country has yet found a way to come to grips with.

Second, we will have to make a call in May or June on how to open up.

Our troubles will deepen geometrically if we do not massively scale up testing before reaching this point.

Yet, the decision to relax suppression of the economy will need to be made without the benefit of sufficient tests.

It's not just the health of the population but also the health of the prevailing social order that is at risk.

Unlike the sudden stop, the reopening will not be a sudden start

will need to be made about what activities to reopen where and who should be allowed back to work.

Spread risk mapping of areas (hotspots) and activities within a particular essential sector (rice in agriculture) will allow science to shape the choices.

High-risk activity in high-risk areas can be categorised as red; low-risk activity in low-risk areas as green, while the other two -- high-risk activity in low-risk areas and low-risk activity in high-risk areas -- can be categorised as brown.

The green category can be opened in the first phase provided the red category is fully contained and the brown categories are locked.

While the green zones reopen, aggressive testing and tracing in the brown zones to isolate and treat the infected will be needed to pave the way for their reopening as efforts to test, trace, isolate and treat in the red continue.

In the last phase, the lockdown ends completely when the red eventually becomes green. Until a vaccine is available, all the reopening will remain subject to the feasibility of social distancing.

Factories and markets may be allowed to operate at different times.

Let's say, some in the first half and others in the second half of the month. There has to be some coordination between the two because one without the other may not do much economic good.

Should the factories stagger shift with, say, no more than 50 per cent capacity utilisation in each shift to maintain 6 feet physical distancing between workers?

Should the restaurants have fewer tables? Should there be restrictions on the number of passengers per transport vehicle? Should shops be subject to factory type staggering and social distancing requirements? Will all these be enforceable?

Social distancing may be easier to practice in some sectors, say pharmaceuticals, garments, banks and departmental stores than others such as land and water transport or retail and wholesale trades.

India has just announced Lockdown 2.0. It allows rural industries; agriculture, fisheries and horticultural activities; cargo trucking; construction activities where workers can live on site; public workfare programme; and e-commerce and courier services in non-hotspot areas to operate. All other activities remain suspended.

How this works may bring important lessons for many densely

to be better fighters of COVID19?

According to the World Health Organisation's April 13 Situation Report #7, male represent 70 per cent of the reported cases in Bangladesh.

Assumptions about the risk profile of different demographic groups will

elderlies and females.

Compilation and analysis of our own data by competent researchers have to be rapid in real-time so that it can feed policy choices.

An online real-time national data bank on COVID-19 symptomatic, infections, recovery and death is

NEXT STEP

Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

E-mail etiquette rules to keep in mind before hitting "send"

Email is a remarkably convenient medium used in business communication. Given the current situation with the Corona pandemic where working from home is adopted by more companies every day, it has become even more important for effective communication.

Here are some principles you need to adhere to conduct effective communication and maintain professionalism:

SUBJECT LINE

If you want your e-mail to stand out among the numerous e-mails people receive, you must keep your subject line concise and relevant to the content of the e-mail.

SALUTATION AND CLOSING

You should opt for culturally accepted salutations while addressing the receiver of your e-mail and choose formal complimentary phrases as closings in your e-mail. You can include a signature block regarding your contact information at the end so that the recipient can reach out to you easily.

BE PRECISE

You need to make sure that you introduce yourself properly so that the person you are contacting recognizes you seamlessly. While formulating an e-mail, do not forget to mention where you got the contact details and specify the reason for sending the e-mail as well. You should try to determine the objective of your email using the standard paragraph structure to make the email easy to follow to understand the message.

PROOFREADING IS A MUST

You should never get carried away and accidentally



send your e-mail without reading it over first because an e-mail filled with misspelled words and grammatical mistakes is a red flag. You can press F7 to double-check your spellings and grammar, or you can perhaps ask someone else beforehand for a quality check of your e-mail to avoid errors.

While composing emails, exclude the usage of slang, jargon, emoticons or emojis and abbreviations. You can consider using the classic fonts, befitting tone or highlighting tools while ensuring that you have labelled all your attachments correctly. Lastly, make sure you use a professional e-mail address instead of one that claims you are a dangerous boy or downright an angel.

REHENUMA RAYSA

Why should govt. assistance package exclude Boro farmers?

There is still time to help them

THE government's relief package of Tk 5,000 crore for the agriculture sector surprisingly does not cover crop and cereal producers such as Boro cultivators, even though Boro accounts for more than 50 percent of the country's total rice production. The agriculture ministry justified its decision saying that it's too late to aid Boro cultivation. However, experts and farmers disagree, saying that it's only in the haor region of Sylhet division where Boro harvest has already begun. In other parts of the country, the crop will be harvested next month.

The assistance that the government refused to provide could have helped small farmers the most, who account for 78.62 percent of farmers, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic is set to cause huge losses for the farmers many of whom are already getting discouraged from continuing farming amidst such losses.

One major concern during any crisis, as also portrayed by this one, is a potential food shortage. And it is always the farmers who we rely on to save us when such circumstances arise. Yet, for whatever reason, the government is once again failing them. If farmers are forced out of business or discouraged from continuing to farm, how will the country's population manage in a crisis situation when importing food becomes impossible? The short-sightedness of the government and its failure to aid Boro farmers, particularly given the existing reality, is a major let-down.

It isn't only a lack of cash incentive that agricultural producers and experts are worried about. Farmers are facing a host of other problems concerning loans, manpower, machinery, etc. And the government should have ensured that farmers have all the necessary assistance right now, no matter how much it has on its plate.

The government needs to wake up to the current reality. It needs to take into account the advice of farmers who are actually the ones we all depend on for our food security. Accordingly, it should provide immediate assistance to Boro cultivators.

Uniform mechanism needed to detect suspected cases, collect samples

Confusion about Covid-19 transmission level may lead to a disaster

IT is worrying to learn that the low number of Covid-19 positive cases in Bangladesh could be due to flaws in detecting suspected cases and collecting samples. While other countries struggling with the virus have a much higher rate of infection at stage 4 of the outbreak, the number of positive cases in Bangladesh at the same stage is still very low. As of April 15, the authorities tested 14,868 samples in total and confirmed 1,231 positive cases across the country, which means the infection rate here is only 8.2 percent.

The fears expressed by the experts have valid grounds because of the disparity in the number of cases found in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) and the 15 other testing labs across the country. The BSMMU has found a higher number of positive cases compared to the other testing facilities where the number of negative cases still remains higher. According to our report, from April 1 to April 12, the BSMMU lab detected 136 positive cases from 369 samples, which means around 34 percent of all the samples tested positive.

So why this disparity in the number of positive cases when all the labs in the country have been using the same PCR technique to conduct the tests? According to doctors and health professionals, there must be some serious flaws in the case selection process and the skills of the lab technicians. The labs that are testing suspected Covid-19 patients must follow a uniform mechanism to select the people they are going to test. A rigorous background check of the patients before carrying out any test is absolutely necessary, which the BSMMU has been doing with much success. If samples are not collected from the actual suspected patients, test results will definitely be negative.

Then comes the issue of sample collection. We need skilled people to collect samples from suspected cases, for which the lab technicians need proper training. Also, there should be a uniform technique to collect samples. While the BSMMU lab has been collecting sputum samples for conducting the tests, all other labs in the country have collected nasal and throat swabs so far. Thus, the authorities need to decide on this, too.

We think the entire testing activity needs to be brought under a uniform mechanism to get the real picture of the Covid-19 outbreak in the country. Only by knowing the real number of infections can we overcome our shortcomings in response, and fight the outbreak efficiently. Otherwise, the shutdown enforced by the government to contain the spread of the virus will be futile.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Ensure safety of emergency service providers

Recently, one of my female colleagues working in a bank was wounded by robbers while she was on her way back home from office. As she struggled to defend herself, the criminals stabbed her. Bankers, like some other professionals in selected sectors, are working during the lockdown. But it is unfortunate that these people have to face various troubles while on the roads. This is unacceptable. The security of those providing emergency services must be ensured. Moreover, the law enforcement agencies need to be aware about those who have the permission to commute and those who don't.

Malik Muntasir Reza, Dhaka

Managing schools, learning and student wellbeing during Covid-19



MANZOOR AHMED

SCHOOLS throughout the country, with some 3.7 million students and over a million teachers, are closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. The ongoing shutdown is likely to continue beyond the approaching Ramadan until the end of May. So what can we say about the millions of students, their learning and their wellbeing?

A BRAC survey of 2,675 households in 64 districts using the network of microcredit groups, carried out between March 31 and April 6, shows that the average monthly income of the sample households has dwindled from Tk 14,599 to Tk 3,742. The bread-earners of these families include rickshaw pullers, factory workers, hotel or restaurant workers, and non-farm day labourers, many of whose income has been reduced to zero. Fourteen percent of the low-income families have no fund left and no job to earn any income. Children from these families are also in school, thanks to the expansion of access to school education.

As part of its relief and support measures, the government has announced a plan to provide a monthly cash aid of Tk 2,000-3,000 to each of 3.4 million families. Cash will be sent out starting from April for three months through mobile fund transfer. Economists argue that at least ten million families need this support to survive through the crisis. Many fear that hunger, not the coronavirus, will kill them.

The school education authorities have so far responded in two ways. They have started broadcasting via TV subject-wise lessons for primary and secondary schools, using the spare BTV channel designated for broadcasting national parliament proceedings. Secondly, being concerned about the disruption of the school calendar, they have suggested some changes in the public and school-based exam schedule.

The education responses to the coronavirus have laid bare the deep-seated problems and shortcomings of our education system. The TV broadcast of lessons, though well-intentioned, are largely ineffective. Half of the children do not have a TV at home, according to a BBS/Unicef survey in 2019. The channel used (Shangshad TV) does not cover many parts of the country. Watching a sample of the lessons, both for primary and secondary school subjects, showed that these were an imitation of the usual classroom lectures—a teacher standing by the blackboard and giving lectures to the students, often with poorly presented visuals.

Watching a sample of the lessons also revealed a deeper problem of the content of learning and the pedagogy practiced in our schools. Very often it is merely a listing of or narrative about factual information that students are encouraged to memorise, rather than an incentive to think, raise questions and figure out answers. Basic facts, terminologies and definitions are important for

understanding a subject, but it cannot be just factual information without a sense of how these relate to each other, and how they are useful to solve a problem or answer a question.

The uncertainty about how the coronavirus rampage will play out in Bangladesh and other poor countries causes deep anxiety. Is the trajectory likely to be different from that of Europe and the USA? If not, we will be in deeper trouble in two to four weeks. Children feel this anxiety as they are urged to remain confined in their homes; as they see neighbours, friends and relatives infected and even dying; and as more districts and localities come under lockdown. There are reports of increased violence against women and children in families arising from heightened tension and anxieties. All this arguably is a snapshot of the life experience of families

proposed that the public exams be simplified and shortened to include, for grade 10 (SSC), single papers on Bangla, English, science and social studies, completing the examination in four two-hour sessions. Also for grade 12 (HSC), the suggestion was that there could be additional single papers for science, social science and business subjects. It recommended that school-based evaluation should be relied on for other curricular and co-curricular contents.

Similarly, it was suggested that basic competencies in languages, math and science could be tested with a combined one paper for each subject in grade 5 and grade 8 public examinations; school-based evaluation should be used for regular school subjects and co-curricular learning.

However, bureaucratic inertia and change in the ministry leadership

simplified testing should be announced for the next round of SSC, JSC, PECE and equivalent examinations; 3) The terminal examinations in schools should be cancelled for this year and instead the time should be used for lost teaching time when the schools reopen; and 4) The education boards should initiate a programme to work with schools to communicate with and counsel grade 9 to 12 students about their academic, health, safety and personal concerns and anxieties. Similar communication with parents and children should be undertaken by DPE at the primary level.

For the longer term, beyond 2020-21, the following suggestions are made for consideration: 1) The shortened and simplified public examinations should be made permanent and complemented by school-based evaluation both at primary and secondary level; 2) A major initiative



In this file photo of The Daily Star, children attend a class wearing protective masks at a school in Dhaka.

who are poor and disadvantaged in other ways, but now it is magnified many times by the coronavirus devastation.

The ideas about re-arranging exam and admission schedules betray a sense that the temporary disruption will be over and we can soon go back to the normal routine. The assessment of student learning and public exams has always been problematic and a subject of much discussion among education researchers and experts. But there is resistance to change from inertia or just fear of change.

One may recall that a review committee, comprising education experts and academics, was appointed by the Ministry of Education in 2017. It was asked to advise the ministry about enhancing school curriculum relevance and effectiveness and making assessment of learning to support better learning experience. Among other recommendations, the committee

prevented any action on the expert recommendations. The reforms proposed, including some curricular restructuring suggestions, should still be considered following further consultation. But the basic ideas regarding simplifying public exams can be considered as an urgent response under the current extraordinary circumstances.

In the short term, for 2020-21, in view of the current situation and its ripple effects over the next several months, the following four steps are proposed: 1) Announcement should be made now that the 2020 HSC and equivalent examinations would be held when the emergency is lifted, but the timetable would be shortened by having tests with one 100 marks combined paper for each of the languages and math and also one combined paper for each of the science, social science and business subjects; 2) A similar shortened timetable and

should be taken for using distance, digital and internet-based learning with attention to connectivity, hardware and software availability, accessibility, and affordability in all institutions for all students and teachers; and 3) Redesigning curricula, textbooks, and supplementary learning material, now characterised by factual information and rote learning, should aim at enabling students to engage in thinking, reasoning, understanding and creativity—supported by teacher preparation, change in learning assessment and use of relevant digital learning content by students and teachers.

A lot has been packed into these proposals. These have to be unpacked and fleshed out to make sense of these and to take necessary action. Let the present crisis be the opportunity for much-needed change in school education.

Dr Manzoor Ahmed is professor emeritus at BRAC University.

The dilemma between hunger and a pandemic



SABINA FAIZ RASHID

READING different narratives, survey results, and media reports and articles on the coronavirus pandemic, one is overcome with a range of emotions: depression, paralysis, anger, denial, helplessness—emotions that are reflective of being privileged, of having the luxury to dwell on them. For the vast number of poor microbusiness owners, labourers, transport workers, informal-sector employees, and many other groups who depend on daily wages/earnings and have no social safety net, there is now only the pain of hunger, not figuratively, but literally. With the shutdown now extended to a month, these groups are under the real threat of starvation.

There are international conventions and declarations on the right to food, on the right to be free from hunger. Yet an estimated 9 million people in the world are dying of hunger and hunger-related diseases annually, more than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. It is the world's biggest health problem, and with entire countries and economies now under lockdown, it risks getting a whole lot worse for those who live in difficult environments.

The poor and the vulnerable with their erratic and meagre earnings somehow manage to keep fighting and living. Every day is a battle, of continual unpredictability and uncertainty—be it economic or health or both. Being confronted with illnesses and deaths is not uncommon for many of the most marginalised. While there is the fear of the coronavirus, there is also the acceptance that it is yet another addition to an already long list of health challenges that they face. Furthermore, with access

to their sparse resources being severely constrained or denied as a result of the shutdown, for many the immediate threat to consumption for survival—and not necessarily the pandemic—is becoming a greater concern. BRAC's rapid perception survey on Covid-19, conducted between March 31 and April 5, 2020, found that 18 percent and 10 percent of urban and rural respondents respectively had no food stored at home, while 37 percent and 21 percent respectively had only 1-3 days' food reserve.

The shutdown or lockdown model has been imported from Western or developed economies with stronger economic bases and better social safety nets for those in need.

Health bodies and governments in different countries have been promoting different measures to contain the pandemic that focus on individual behaviour with little attention to the social, economic and contextual factors. Public health interventions are based on the virus, and individual determinants of health, whereas for millions the stark social and contextual inequalities and realities of how and where they live prevent them from following such precautionary recommendations. Guidelines on social distancing, washing of hands with soap, and staying at home are all very well for the privileged who

can afford to do so. For the poor with 5-6 members crammed in one-room dwellings, sharing irregular water supply and limited latrines in some of the dirtiest and densest places on earth, such messaging must surely feel like some sort of a cruel joke. Add to this the restrictions of the shutdown, and one becomes witness to a dystopian nightmare.

Bangladesh, like many other countries, has rolled out an economic stimulus package to address the severe economic and business fallout from the pandemic. The government is also in the process of unveiling support for the poor. This scheme will also include support for farmers who are critical for ensuring the food supply chain for all of us—the rich, the middle class, and the poor. While this package should really have been the first step taken by the state, it now needs to be implemented efficiently, systematically, and equitably. There are numerous articles and reports detailing the mismanagement and lack of coordination among different bodies involved in distributing the initial state-funded food and/or cash aid programmes. This has to stop. While there is no easy solution or strategy, for Bangladesh and its high proportion of vulnerable population, continuation of the shutdown has to be accompanied with strong political resolve to ensure that people do not go without basic meals and have basic health information and support, given the existing structural constraints. Otherwise, it will be the final nail in the coffin for the poor and maybe even beyond. The trauma and enormity of what will unfold if this is not done properly cannot be emphasised enough.

The shutdown or lockdown model has been imported from Western or developed economies with stronger economic bases and better social safety nets for those in need. But is it the only way forward? China, Hong Kong, Singapore, countries that were successful in containing the first wave of the

coronavirus, are now facing the threat of its resurgence largely due to infections coming from overseas travellers, and some countries have begun reinstating containment measures again. How long can a shutdown be sustained? While this is an entirely unknown territory, Iran's president, for instance, had declared that "low-risk" economic activities would resume from April 11 in spite of the virus not being contained. The Iranian government is thus balancing the risks of the pandemic versus further wrecking a sanctions-battered economy. Sadly, countries with large pools of poor populations may soon be forced to confront a similar tradeoff, with all its moral and ethical implications, if there is no solution soon in sight.

The poor and the vulnerable already live on the edge. The added stress of the pandemic combined with prolonged shutdowns will further amplify their despair and hopelessness. Therefore, while health is a very real concern, for Bangladesh to sustain the shutdown requires all of us to focus all of the country's resources on ensuring that no one goes without food. We have to believe the rest will follow, once this is ensured. If not, as Nobel Laureates Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee highlighted with respect to the situation in India, the poor and the vulnerable will be left with no choice but to break the shutdown for their livelihood.

The last interview of an adolescent street peddler that I read shared, "how much longer? We heard four more days. We have no food, no money." These narratives are typical for most of the poor families we interviewed. Try imagining, if you can, the gut-wrenching panic and anxiety when many of them learn it will be an additional 10 days or more.

Sabina Faiz Rashid is Dean and Professor, BRAC James P. Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University. All views expressed are solely of the author and do not represent the views of any other entity whatsoever.

IN MEMORIAM

A Comrade Fallen

SONIA NASREEN AHMAD

It often takes the life of one man for a nation to wake up or to gather the courage to call a spade a spade.

Dr Md Moyeen Uddin, an assistant professor at the Department of Medicine of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College, a colleague, a friend, beloved to all who knew him, passed away on Wednesday. I don't want to go into the details about the circumstances of his death, so let me just say that we all grieve in different ways—there are those of us who knew him well, those not so well, and then there were those who got the feeling of knowing him through the reports of the print/electronic media.

I got to know Dr Md Moyeen Uddin through my husband, when they were both studying for their postgraduate exams. Tucked away in the reading room of the DMCH library, they would both be there studying along with some others.

With time, everyone went their own way, but the few times we went to Sylhet, we did drop in on him in his chamber. Once we went on a family trip with our parents and he and his family hosted a river-cruising dinner for us on the Surma River. Our children got on well, playing together. And now when I tell my son to observe a special prayer for an uncle who has just passed away, he quizzes me, "don't you remember, this uncle came to

our house, and Abbu reminded me that he was the boat uncle!" Children remember things when you least expect them to. I'm certain there are many more people out there who have a treasure of memories to share about Dr Moyeen.

All will agree on the fact that he was a rare gem of a person, polite and modest. But will his death go in vain?

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19, and with the measures being put in place in Bangladesh, my husband and I (like many other doctor couples) discussed what would we do if either of us got infected with the virus. We discussed quarantine and isolation measures, how to examine patients and so forth. We even touched lightly, in our weakest moments, on the topic of succumbing to the virus.



Dr Md Moyeen Uddin

It must be acknowledged that the doctors are doing a tremendous job at the moment despite various limitations, especially those in the hospitals/labs designated as Covid-19 centres. All doctors, whether in the public sector or private, are doing their best to carry out their practices defying risks and odds.

We doctors have had a lot of negative media coverage in the past, and until recently, the general public had more or less the same impression too. But when nearly the whole world is in lockdown, with the privileged finally robbed of their luxury of escaping to some

"highly developed" medical centre overseas for a "full body check-up", do they now regret that our own medical system is not up to par?

In all these years, with all the medical experts that we have grown both at home and abroad, could we not have improved our own healthcare sector?

Could we not have put our egos and political differences aside, and followed the advice of the experts and professors who, time and again, stressed on the importance of building our own capacity?

Could we not have developed a good emergency service delivery system in all government and private hospitals to properly triage patients as they come in?

Could we not have utilised the experience of experts in the field of emergency?

Could we not have invested more in the health sector so that government hospitals in all the districts of Bangladesh could have the same level of experts and logistics at hand, so that no critical patient would have to waste valuable time in the transport?

Could we not have used the funds and resources that come to us from home and abroad to procure and ensure proper utilisation of medical equipment instead of leaving them to rust and rot in some godforsaken place? Could we not have ensured that the

condition of private medical college hospitals was improved to an extent that their services would be on a par with the best government hospitals?

Do I write out of anger, out of despair? No, I write because my sense of mortality is actually staring at me in the face. What I should have written in the past to address these points is no longer valid now. At home, we have elderly parents and young children. The constant worry about what will happen to us all is now no longer a new issue. It's our daily reality. It's the air we breathe. Any one of us may die tomorrow, and the coronavirus is not the only reason we may die. And so we, doctors, will have to continue to look after our own safety and go to our hospitals and chambers to fulfil our duties. We will all have to justify our actions to our Creator when the time comes. Just as the doctors who go to hospitals and their chambers to help their patients with or without adequate safety measures, they can hold their heads high and say, "I stuck to my sworn oath", the same way bureaucrats, politicians and the media personnel and even the general patients might take a moment now to think, "what shall I say when I meet my Creator?"

Let the death of our fellow comrade not go in vain.

Dr Sonia Nasreen Ahmad is an Assistant Professor of Medicine at the Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College and a director at Dr Nizam Medical Center.

Could we not have put our egos and differences aside, and followed the advice of the experts who repeatedly stressed on building our own healthcare capacity?

MUJIBNAGAR DAY

A milestone in the War of Liberation

ZAHID HOSSAIN

TODAY is April 17—Mujibnagar Day. On this day in 1971, the Mujibnagar government was formed by the elected leaders of Bangladesh as the rightful constitutional, logical, and realistic step forward towards the full realisation of our dream of an independent country of our own.

The formation of the Mujibnagar government and its pronouncement to the world at large on April 17, 1971 was really a red-letter event in our national history, especially after the thumping victory of the Awami League in the elections of 1970 under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The 167 MNAs and 293 MPs who composed the Constituent Assembly, fulfilling their constitutional obligation to the electors, made the dream of an independent Bangladesh a reality. From this point of view, Mujibnagar Day is a landmark in our struggle for independence as well as in our national history.

The Mujibnagar government was formed at the Baidyanathtala mango grove of Meherpur, a former subdivision of Kustia district, following the April 10 proclamation of independence order of Bangladesh. The oath-taking ceremony was witnessed by hundreds of foreign journalists who had assembled there to hail the birth of a new nation.

The president of the new nation was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; Syed Nazrul Islam became the acting president in the absence of Bangabandhu. Tajuddin Ahmed was the Prime Minister; M. Mansur Ali, the Finance Minister; M. Quamruz Zaman, the Home, Relief and Rehabilitation Minister; and Khandakar Mustaque Ahmed, Foreign Affairs and Law Minister. General M.A.G. Osmani, who was then a retired colonel and MNA elected from Awami League, was made the C-in-C of the Bangladesh armed forces.

It was a Herculean task. Organising civil administration and the freedom fighters, securing arms for the latter and training them, mobilising international support for the Liberation War through

intense diplomatic action, ensuring speedy communication and effective coordination of various activities at a hundred different levels, and above all, keeping the morale of the freedom fighters high throughout the dark, difficult days of the war, called for extraordinary wisdom, dedication, patience, foresight and courage on the part of the Mujibnagar government and all those connected with it.

The formation of the Mujibnagar government had great significance for the nation as the great men who led the war in the absence of our supreme leader and continued the

a formal introduction to the rest of the world of the political leadership that was set to guide the nation into a concerted and organised war of independence.

Bangabandhu had never preached armed revolution and it had never been part of his platform either. Therefore, when the assault of the Pakistani military machine came, it remained for him to inform his associates that a long and hard struggle on the battlefield had become necessary. The declaration of independence which he gave moments before his arrest by the Pakistani



The Mujibnagar monument with 23 pillars and a brick square in the centre, which marks the spot where the Mujibnagar government ministers took their oath.

PHOTO: MASUM AL HASAN/WIKIMEDIA

armed struggle over the following eight months, having allowed no breach in the unity of their people, fought valiantly involving everyone and kept our leader alive in the minds of every freedom fighter as if he were fighting side by side with them.

The creation of the government, in fact, gave the total war effort a fuller meaning. It cemented the unity of the people, brought the world closer to the freedom fighters, made the war effort blossom in its full focus, and above all ensured the presence of Bangladesh in the comity of nations. It was in effect

military forced upon his associates the need for armed struggle. And that was proof that while he awaited uncertain and terrible incarceration, he had briefed his associates on what needed to be done. The dispersal of the leadership out of Dhaka as the army went into action was a sign that there was to be no turning back from the course that Bengalis had set for themselves. And thus the formation of Mujibnagar government was a decisive step by the trusted and capable associates of the great leader.

The establishment of the Mujibnagar

The creation of the government cemented the unity of the people, brought the world closer to the freedom fighters, and ensured the presence of Bangladesh in the comity of nations.

government was an absolute necessity for another reason. Had it not been put in place, diffuse and disorganised guerrilla movements would have spawned all over the country without any form of central control. The danger inherent in such a development lies in an absence of legitimacy. And in Bangladesh's politics at that point in time, the absence of the Mujibnagar government would only have given the freedom struggle a clearly secessionist hue, to the delight of the Pakistanis and to the consternation of a Bengali population directly in the military's line of fire. Seen from this angle, the presence of Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam and Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed with their colleagues in Meherpur in April 1971 was a clear, unequivocal statement of intent: that the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh had taken it upon themselves to give shape and substance to an independent statehood for them.

It was thus that the global community was left with hardly a choice. The initiation of the war of national liberation, given the fact that it was being waged by a leadership privy to the electorally acknowledged support of the nation, could not be dismissed as an insurrection or a secessionist enterprise. Moreover, the military's excesses and barbarities assisted the cause greatly. The killing of unarmed civilians, the razing of villages and townships, and the atrocities against women only strengthened the cause of the provisional government. In the months between March and December

1971, the flight of ten million people to India convinced the global community of the importance of the Bengali cause, and helped the Mujibnagar government to inform the world that there was no alternative to an independent Bangladesh.

The provisional government undertook the onerous responsibility of moulding international opinion in Bangladesh's favour: the effort was assisted to a great extent by the momentum of declaration of allegiance to the national struggle by Bengali diplomats stationed in Pakistani missions abroad. Placing the entire diplomatic efforts in the hands of a well-respected personality like Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury was yet another factor for the success of the efforts of Mujibnagar government in mobilising world opinion in our favour.

The speeches and statements made by the Acting President Syed Nazrul Islam, Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmed and other leaders of the Mujibnagar government at the formal oath-taking ceremony and other subsequent occasions were widely appreciated the world over as those reflected the democratic and progressive principles of the new government. The guiding principles and the state policies announced from time to time by the exiled government were all fully democratic, based on universal human rights principles and other widely accepted international norms and protocols.

Finally, the formation of the Mujibnagar government saw the real birth of a new nation, a nation imbued with the spirit of democracy, nationalism, secularism, and socialism, and drawn by the call of a man whose stature as a statesman had surpassed that of any in his time and most of his predecessors. He united the Bengali-speaking people of the land and raised a nation so steadfast in its commitment that it went ahead to face the fierce army of Pakistan, equipped only with the strength of their conviction.

Zahid Hossain was associated with the Mujibnagar government as the Chief of Psychological Warfare, Ministry of Defense. This is an abridged reprint of an article originally published by *The Daily Star* in 2005.

QUOTABLE Quote

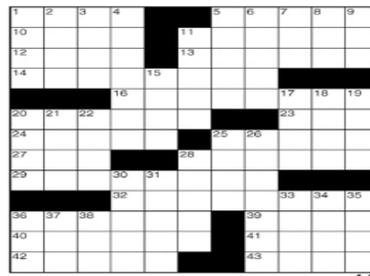


ANNIE DILLARD (Born 1945) American author

How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Throws in
 - 5 Pal, to a pirate
 - 10 Database option
 - 11 Convict's hope
 - 12 Eye drop
 - 13 Beautiful boy
 - 14 Nile diverter
 - 16 Prized prosciutto
 - 20 Punctual
 - 23 Pitcher's stat
 - 24 Paris sight
 - 25 Studio sign
 - 27 "Very funny!" in a text
 - 28 Throat danglers
 - 29 Fleeing
 - 32 Patriotic symbol
 - 36 Disinclined
 - 39 Steak choice
 - 40 Western writer
- DOWN**
- 1 Nick and Nora's dog
 - 2 Some deer
 - 3 Tie
 - 4 Fasten one's seat belt
 - 5 Palindromic address
 - 6 Kitchen come-on
 - 7 Great weight
 - 8 New Haven student
 - 9 "Sure thing!"
 - 11 Mission man
 - 15 Newborn's need
 - 17 Get better
 - 18 Diva's piece
 - 19 Earth neighbor
 - 20 Ibsen's home
 - 21 Very bright
 - 22 Incline
 - 25 Egg outline
 - 26 XVI, for one
 - 28 Peptic problem
 - 30 Cheboygan's lake
 - 31 Follow as a result
 - 33 Long story
 - 34 Son of Zeus
 - 35 Disorder
 - 36 Imitating
 - 37 Kilmer of "The Doors"
 - 38 Punk rock offshoot



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



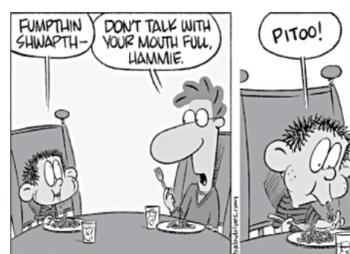
BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.



Left, a severely damaged section of the Meghakhali Bailey bridge on Kalihati-Borochozna road in Kalihati upazila. Right, a vehicle passing a subsided section of Haripur bridge on the same road.

PHOTO: STAR

Three crumbling bridges posing threat to community

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

The three out of the five Bailey bridges, constructed in the 90s, on Kalihati-Borochozna road in Kalihati upazila are now in a ramshackle state.

Around 3,000 vehicles of all sorts, from motorbikes to heavy trucks, cross the bridges every day. Moreover, several thousand students from at least 12 educational institutions, including Kalihati RS Pilot High School and Shahjahan Siraj College, use these bridges several times a day.

A fatal accident is waiting to happen any moment and the authorities need to take swift measures to repair the bridges urgently, said concerned citizens in the area.

One of three dilapidated bridges is in Meghakhali area, built on the Jhinai river in Sadar upazila. The other two – in Haripur and Rajafair – are also on the same river.

The steel span of the Meghakhali bridge is damaged in at least three places, while that in the Haripur bridge caved in at several spots. Almost half of the joints holding the metal sheets on the Rajafair bridge are falling apart.

Tailbacks near the bridges have become a common occurrence during most parts of the day as vehicles have to move at an exceedingly slow pace while crossing those.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw long queues of vehicles, including cargo vehicles loaded with essentials and agricultural goods, on the three risky bridges. A large number of pedestrians were also seen crossing the bridges.

Mohammad Rezwan, a resident of Pachh Joair village and a seventh grader at Kalihati RS Pilot High School, said students of his school have to use the bridges when the school is open.

It is a frightening ordeal to cross the risky bridges and the students often get late for their class due to traffic congestion on both sides of the bridges, he also said.

Battery operated auto-rickshaw driver Abdul Halim said the condition of the Haripur bridge is the worst.

On many occasions, passengers of his vehicle have to get off and push the vehicle when it gets stuck in the subsided sections on the bridge, he added.

The bridges were repaired a few times before, but their condition deteriorated again. Now minor accidents are happening on the bridges every now and then, but a fatal one might happen any moment, said Mohammad Helal, a resident of Rajafair village.

Truck driver Nazrul Islam frequents the bridges to deliver different goods in the region. He said people have to risk their lives as well as

property while crossing these bridges.

The bridge at Haripur ran down a while ago and the other two, at Meghakhali and Rajafair, became rickety not too long ago, he added.

Rice mill owner Abdul Jabbar said mill owners and rice traders in the area have been facing difficulty in hiring transportation for their goods at reasonable rates as most truck operators are reluctant to risk their vehicles due to the deplorable condition of the three bridges on the route.

All the three bridges now need to be replaced with modern and wide concrete bridges in the greater interest of people's safety and development of the region, he also said.

Contacted, Zahir Mehedi Hasan, engineer of Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED) in Kalihati, said they have been unable to repair the three bridges due to unavailability of spare parts and supplies required for a Bailey bridge.

Despite the fact, the LGED will seek support from Roads and Highways Department for the repair work as soon as possible.

In the meantime, the LGED has sent a proposal to the authorities concerned for the conversion of 19 Bailey bridges, including the three on Kalihati-Borochozna road, in Kalihati upazila into concrete bridges, he added.

Illegal structures on govt canal

Drainage problem feared at Kartimari Haat in Kurigram's Roumari

S DILIP ROY, Back From Roumari

A local Awami League (AL) leader is building illegal structures, filling up about 20 decimals of land of a government canal at Kartimari Haat, a village market in Jadur Char union under Kurigram's Roumari upazila.

The villagers and traders said they dared not protest the act of the alleged perpetrator, Suruzzamal Sarker, upazila unit AL's religious affair secretary, while the local administration is not taking any effective action even after being informed of the matter.

The government canal is the only way for drainage of water at Kartimari Haat, locals said, adding that if the illegal structures are constructed and the canal is filled up, the drainage system will be disrupted and there will be water stagnation in the market area, especially during the monsoon.

Suruzzamal had been cultivating fish in the canal for a long time without any valid papers and lately he started filling the canal with earth and building illegal structures there, showing political power, they said.

Contacted, Suruzzamal Sarker said, "I am the owner of the canal and I have all the valid papers. I am filling my canal with earth for building some shops but some people are hatching conspiracy against me."

Mosharaf Hossain, a trader at Kartimari

Haat and also president of Jadur Char union unit of Jubo League, said he and 53 other local traders have set up shops along the canal after taking permission from the authorities concerned.

The canal is a public property and it serves as the only way for drainage of water from the market area, he said.

Sohrawardy Hossain, an advisor to upazila unit AL and a resident of Kartimari area, said, "We do not have the courage to speak out against Suruzzamal Sarker. The government authorities should take action to save the canal for ensuring proper drainage of water during monsoon."

Golam Mortuza, assistant land officer of Jadur Char union land office, said Kartimari Haat and the canal connected with it are owned by the government.

"The canal was not leased to any person. If anyone builds structure by filling up the canal, it is illegal. I will inform the authorities about the matter after investigation," he said.

Roumari Upazila Nirbahi Officer Al-Imran told The Daily Star, "I have heard the matter. I will take necessary action after visiting the spot. No one will be allowed to fill up the government canal and build illegal structures there."

Locals demanded that the government authorities take necessary steps to save the canal, the only way to drain the water in Kartimari Haat from the illegal occupation.



PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Illegal structures being made, virtually killing this canal on a government at Kartimari Haat, a village market in Jadur Char union under Kurigram's Roumari upazila.



PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

Land grabbers have made this ridge on the western bank of the Sheakathi river in Jainkathi union of Patuakhali Sadar upazila to get the area filled with sand, which is dumped there through a pipe after digging out from the river by a BIWTA dredger.

Land grabbers feast on riverbank as admin busy to tackle Covid-19

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

While the administration is struggling to check the spread of Covid-19, some unscrupulous people did not miss the 'opportunity' to occupy land on the western bank of the Sheakathi river on Patuakhali-Galachipa route in Phedainagar area of Jainkathi union of Patuakhali Sadar upazila.

During visit to the spot a few days ago, this correspondent found that five locals are getting a portion of the riverbank area sand-filled after making an earthen ridge with an excavator.

They have continued filling the area with the sand extracted by a dredger of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) for around a month, said residents of the area.

BIWTA has arranged dredging of the Sheakathi river in the area as part of an initiative to maintain navigability of Galachipa-Dhaka river route via Patuakhali.

But the riverbank area is getting filled up as the extracted sand is dumped through a pipe just at the spot where the five alleged grabbers made a ridge.

Md Bulbul Ahmed, operator of the BIWTA dredger, said, "Dredging is going on as per the government directive, and we are dumping sand on the riverbank as there is no other suitable place for it."

One of the occupants, Alamgir Mridha said they want to build houses after filling the riverbank land which is in front of their ancestral land.

Another occupier, Monir Mridha said they are filling up their own land.

Asked how the riverbank can be their land, he said, "We regularly pay revenue to the government. Therefore, we are the real owners of the land in front of our property."

Meanwhile, another earthen barrier has been made with a soil-cutting device to separate around five acres of land beside the bank outside the embankment.

This correspondent saw that polyethylene sheets were set to keep the dumped sand inside the ridge area to fill it up.

"Some locals have occupied hundreds of acres of land along the river at Sheakathi and Bholkhal villages. Existence of the river will be under threat if the unscrupulous act continues," said Abul Hossain, a resident of the area.

The administration should take action to keep the river flowing, he said.

Jainkathi union parishad Chairman Md Firoz Alam said the matter will be brought to the notice of the upazila administration for taking action.

Contacted, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) Md Mamun Ur Rashid

said, "Now we are too busy with works to check the spread of coronavirus and the issue of river land occupation did not come to our notice."

"The government is committed to protecting the normal flow of the river. We will take action against occupiers after investigation," he added.

Poverty forces them to net fish amid Covid-19 shutdown

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

Poverty has forced hundreds of fishermen to catch fish in the Brishakhali and Sugandha rivers of Jhalakathi amid the ongoing countrywide shutdown to combat Covid-19.

Many fishermen said they are yet to receive any relief from the government.

During a visit, this correspondent found a huge number of fishermen netting fish in the rivers on small and large boats.

The fishermen said they are bound to catch fish in this time of coronavirus, a deadly new contagious disease, amid vigilance by Bangladesh Coast Guard as they have no food in their house.

They are struggling to feed their families in this time of crisis as there is not enough food in their house, said Abu Hanif, a fisherman of Nalbunia village in Nalchity upazila, adding that finding no other alternative, they were catching fish putting their lives at risk in this time of coronavirus outbreak.



PHOTO: STAR

Poverty forces hundreds of fishermen to catch fish in Jhalakathi amid the ongoing countrywide shutdown to combat Covid-19. A boy helps his father to net fish in the Bishkhali river.

"If we don't go for fishing, we have to stay in house without food," he said.

Hanif further said the price of fish has fallen drastically in the local bazars as customers and traders in the district cannot go outside home due to the Covid-19 shutdown. So, their income has gone down.

"I used to earn Tk 700 to Tk 1200 a day on average selling fish before the crisis time, but now I earn Tk 200 to Tk 300 only," said Shahidul Islam, another fisherman

of Badurtola Bazar in Rajapur upazila.

"It is very difficult to maintain my seven-member family with the small income," he added.

"Every day I have to incur loss as the number of customer has dropped drastically due to coronavirus fears," said Hasib, a fish wholesaler of Badurtola Bazar.

As the transport services have been suspended during the shutdown, he cannot send the fish to different district towns, said Hasib, adding that, he even cannot

store it due to lack of ice.

Nurul Alam, a member of Ranapasha Union Parishad in Nalchity, said hundred fishermen live in his ward but the authorities are yet to send any aid for them.

There are 5265 registered and 5000 unregistered fishermen in Jhalakathi, according to the fisheries department in the district.

Babul Krishna Ojha, deputy director of fisheries department in the district, said the fishermen are not given any food in this time of crisis, but 1500 families of fishermen are given 40 kg of rice a month each during the ongoing ban on jatka netting.

Hilsa catching is suspended from November to June to facilitate breeding of the popular fish.

Md Johor Ali, deputy commissioner (DC) of Jhalakathi, said the most affected people in the district have been given relief during the ongoing countrywide shutdown, but he is not aware that the poor fishermen are yet to get any aid.

They will take immediate steps to provide food to the fishermen, said the DC.



Underprivileged Mahali community of Mahalipara in Dinajpur's Phulbari upazila are facing a tough time as they are yet to get any relief during the countrywide shutdown amid the ongoing spread of highly contagious disease Covid-19. The photo taken a couple of days ago shows two members of the small ethnic group preparing bamboo-made items although there is not much hope of selling their product during the stagnation in social and economic activities.

PHOTO: STAR



'We had freedom as selectors'

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

GM Nausher Prince, the former Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) national selector had worked with some of the best talents in the country. As a former cricketer who has worked with the likes of Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad during their stints in age-level teams through to the national team, Prince is aware of the processes needed to prepare an organic cricket culture. His knowledge also gives a glimpse of the history and the present of Bangladesh cricket.

He left his post in 2007 and is currently residing in Houston, Texas but the former cricketer, still in love with cricket, has continued his work with youth cricket.

"Me, together with Faruque [Ahmed] and Athar [Ali] worked tirelessly back then to develop the country's cricket. There is satisfaction when Bangladesh does well since I used to work with age-level cricket most of the time. The likes of Shakib, Tamim, Mushfiqur or Riyad were small kids back then and I remember how we used to tell them stories about growing up and self-discipline. The nodes of network and communication between the players and the members of the staff were very strong and we used to enjoy ourselves a lot," he said during a talk with The Daily Star.

"What a player does off the field is just as important as what they do on it. You get an idea of how far they can go."

There is an assumption that cricketers like Tamim or Shakib set themselves apart from the rest during their early years and Prince remembered memories of the theme that built successful

cricketers.

"Once, when I entered Mushfiqur's room, I noticed how his text books were all meticulously organised. I used to talk to people proudly about how he maintained everything. Discipline can take you a long way and it shows character."

"We harboured strong hopes of winning the 2006 U-19 World Cup in Sri Lanka. I remember how people used to come to the ground to watch Tamim bat because he once sent a ball to the second tier



of the Premadasa Stadium at that age. People in Sri Lanka became crazed fans of Tamim and there were more people in our fifth-place playoff match against West Indies than the final of the tournament. These players worked really hard and that's why they are continuing on for Bangladesh.

"We had a foresight about what to look for and worked on progress made. It wasn't like we were bringing in players on a whim and then omitting them. There was a goal. Every tour we would report on players' growth and their strengths

and weaknesses," Prince said.

The likes of Shakib or Tamim had the potential, the vision and the ambition -- traits we say are absent in others who do not make it -- but Prince reminded: "It wasn't about natural ability, some make it through hard work and it's not like Shakib was bestowed with god-gifted talent."

"They had to play so many matches against foreign opposition while at age-level and that is why it's partly easier for them. So, mentally

creating the culture was that the selectors had the independence to trust their own instincts and knowledge. "We never had to take permission from anyone. We had to have plan for what we want to do with the batch of players we had. My job was as a selector and manager. It was not my job to tell them how to play. It was about keeping morale up and the team management conveyed the same message; we knew what each of our task was."

Prince said that the current scenario is not like that. "A selector should be free and they have to be trusted. If someone says from high up or other position to field this or that player, then you are just bringing new faces and wasting your talent base. You exclude players but what are you doing about their rehabilitation?" he queried.

There had been talk about the role of national selectors and indeed who selects the eleven who take the field. Interference has led to a lack of values and ideas.

"We never had any bias. The current policies make me feel they [selectors] are not free. It appears to be some sort of king-and-subject dynamic in the current climate. During my time, no matter who the [BCB] president was, the atmosphere was friendly. I went to England to watch the World Cup (2019) and it seemed so different. Not only coaches or staff, everyone. And you can't look down on players who had to prove themselves to get to this point [playing in a World Cup]. There is no satisfaction in that work," he said.

With cricket being halted due to the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, the BCB has enough time on their hands to mull over the finer points of building a culture in order to resurrect the country's cricket.



India seal women's World Cup berth

AFP, New Delhi

India have qualified for the 2021 women's World Cup after the International Cricket Council declared that the points from a cancelled series against Pakistan would be shared.

The series, part of the ICC Women's Championship, was unable to be played after India's governing body, the BCCI, said it could not get government clearance to host Pakistan with tensions rising between the neighbours over the disputed Kashmir region.

The ICC declared the circumstances a "force majeure" event and awarded the teams three points each.

Two other final-round series cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic -- South Africa v Australia and Sri Lanka v New Zealand -- also saw the six points on offer shared.

The decision means India sealed the final automatic qualifying spot on 23 points behind Australia (37), holders England (29) and South Africa (25) for the 50-over competition next year alongside hosts New Zealand.

Pakistan, who finished four points below India, will now seek one of the three remaining places in the World Cup at a 10-team qualifying tournament in Sri Lanka originally scheduled for July 3-19, but which could be postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

BCCI officially suspends IPL

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA from New Delhi

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) yesterday suspended this year's Indian Premier League "till further notice" in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic which has claimed more than 400 lives and affected over 12,000 in the country.

"Due to the evolving global health concerns regarding COVID-19 and lockdown measures implemented by the Government of India to contain the spread of the pandemic, the IPL Governing Council of the BCCI has decided that the IPL 2020 season will be suspended till further notice," said BCCI secretary Jay Shah in a statement.

The IPL was set to start on March 29 and end on May 24 but it was first postponed till April 15 after a surge in COVID-19 positive cases in India.

"The health and safety of the nation and everyone involved in our great sport remains our top priority and as such, the BCCI along with the IPL franchise owners, broadcaster, sponsors and all the stakeholders acknowledge that the IPL 2020 season will only commence when it is safe and appropriate to do so," Shah added.

"BCCI will continue to monitor and review the situation regarding a potential start date in close partnership with all of its stakeholders and will continue to take guidance from the Government of India, State Governments and other State Regulatory bodies," Shah continued.

The only window left for the BCCI to host the tournament is September-November. For that to happen, India will have to skip the Asia Cup hosted by the Pakistan Cricket Board in Dubai or Cricket Australia and the International Cricket Council decide to forego the T20 World Cup to create an available window.

'Playing in empty stadiums is a possibility'

REUTERS



Predicting when soccer will resume in Europe is impossible in the current climate but there is no doubt that matches will have to be played in empty stadiums when it does, the deputy general secretary of European Leagues (EL) has said.

The EL represents professional soccer leagues in Europe and its members include the top flights of England, Spain, Germany, France and Italy, which have all been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Clubs across Europe have been hit hard by the stoppage and leagues are now looking at different ways to resume their seasons, the EL's Alberto Colombo told the BBC.

"There's no doubt games will be behind closed doors," Colombo said. "But, of course, it's impossible to answer the question: 'When will we be back playing?' Nobody has these answers."

"Ultimately, we all know the governments of the countries are the ones in charge for lifting the various restrictions that apply to sport."

The English Premier League has been suspended until at least April 30 and its clubs are meeting on Friday to review the situation although a resumption in the near future is unlikely with Britain still in lockdown.

German clubs returned to training last week with squads split into small groups and having to adhere to strict social distancing guidelines.

The Italian football federation wants to resume training as soon as the country's lockdown ends on May 3 and has recommended that players and staff be

The top US health and infectious disease specialist says the key to reopening professional sports leagues in America is to have the athletes play games in front of empty stadiums. Anthony Fauci, who is helping coordinate the US response to the global coronavirus pandemic, said reliable antibody testing and fast results are also crucial to the return of sports. "There's a way of doing that," Fauci told US Snapchat show "Good Luck America." "Nobody comes to the stadiums. Put (athletes) in big hotels, wherever you want to play. Keep them very well-surveilled, but have them tested like every week and make sure they don't wind up infecting each other or their families, and just let them play the season out."

tested and isolated in training camps.

"The priority so far has been on focusing on creating conditions to be able to resume competition during the summer should we be able," Colombo added.

"There is no doubt that players' health comes first, and also the health of all those involved in matches - staff of clubs, media, everyone has to be safe."

Belgium has cancelled the rest of the top-flight season citing health concerns and financial woes in the wake of the pandemic but Colombo said most leagues wanted to finish.

"The vast majority has been focusing 100% on the resumption of their competitions," he added.



TIME TO STUDY

Cristiano Ronaldo is always looking for his next challenge, constantly pushing himself harder than before. This quarantine period is no exception for the five-time Ballon d'Or winner, as he is now seen using this time to better himself: "Always challenge yourself! For me it's time to study!"

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Pollock reveals Sachin's weakness

PTI

Former South African captain Shaun Pollock claimed that Sachin Tendulkar had once told him that he found it difficult to tackle the "short-pitched" bowling in Australia but effectively managed with shots over wicketkeeper and slip-cordon.

"He talked to me once about going to Australia and understanding he couldn't take on the short-pitched deliveries anymore so he would ramp the ball over the wicketkeeper and slip," Pollock said in a podcast with Sky Sports.

Pollock said there was a time when all their plans would fall apart against Tendulkar and they would wait for him to make a mistake.

"There were times, especially in the subcontinent, where you thought, 'I'm not sure we can knock this guy over'. We were hoping he would make a mistake, rather than had a genuine plan," said Pollock.

Considered one of the greatest batsman to have played the game, Tendulkar ended his illustrious career after amassing 34,357 international runs across all the three formats.

IT'S TIME TO FIGHT COVID-19



Sofia Kenin, the current women's champion of the Australian Open, posted this old image of herself in Dubai on Instagram with the caption: "This picture reminds me how much I miss traveling the world! But in order to travel again soon, we must take all the measures to fight Covid-19! Take care of yourself and your family! Let's do our part by following the advice of experts and healthcare professionals so we can beat this virus and return to normal life as soon as possible."

Nadal expecting lengthy wait

AFP, Madrid



Rafael Nadal thinks the global nature of tennis means there is little chance tournaments will go ahead any time soon as sport continues to be paralysed by the coronavirus pandemic.

Novak Djokovic also anticipates a lengthy delay before tennis can be played even behind closed doors, with the world number one expecting players to have to wait a "few months".

The French Open, which Nadal has won a record 12 times, has been postponed until September, shortly after the US Open, while Wimbledon was cancelled earlier this month for the first time since World War II.

"Tennis is a global sport," Nadal told Spanish radio station Onda Cero on Wednesday night. "We go from country to country and a lot of people have to move around."

"It seems difficult to me for any big tournament to be played in the short or medium term."

Austria plans to allow athletes to train

AFP, Vienna

Professional athletes in Austria will be able to resume training before the end of April as the country eases restrictions to combat the coronavirus pandemic, the government announced on Wednesday.

There will be restrictions as the government is recommending football teams train in groups of no more than six players.

Sports Minister Werner Kogler told a press conference the aim was to restart the Austrian Bundesliga, which last played on March 8, behind closed doors.



PADMA BRIDGE RAIL LINK PROJECT IS BEING BUILT WITH BSRM
COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT **BSRM** building a safer nation

GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS RECOGNIZES
World's Largest VRM
SHAH CEMENT

Losses when profit was to be made

Batik businesses hit hard amid coronavirus outbreak



Mohiuddin Alamgir back from Narayanganj

Six months ago, Abul Bashar invested around Tk 1.5 lakh in setting up two new 40-yard tables at his home-cum-factory. He was targeting bumper demand of batik clothes ahead of Pehela Baishakh and Eid-ul-Fitr.

He is now resigned to the fact that he will have to write it off as a bad investment, with no chance of getting a return on it, at least in this year.

Bashar already had two other tables of the same length for laying out the fabric for printing. "This is usually our peak season for business. We get a lot of orders and have to finish these amid a tight schedule," said Bashar, who had dark circles under his eyes.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Woman day labourers, who have not been able to find work in over two weeks, sitting on a footpath in the capital's Badda yesterday, hoping that something would turn up and they would be able to make ends meet.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Workers forced to dismantle ships amid shutdown

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Chattogram

Dozens of ship-breaking yards in Sitakunda upazila of Chattogram have started operations since yesterday amid the countrywide shutdown that has been imposed by the government to contain coronavirus.

The owners of the yards directed their workers to be at work at a time when the workers were in fear of being affected by coronavirus as one of their co-workers died on 25 February with Covid-19 symptoms in Khagrachhari district.

Mohammad Abu Taher, president of Bangladesh Ship Breakers and Recyclers Association (BSBA), in letter issued on Wednesday asked the yard owners to begin their operations and make sure workers follow health advisory to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Although the government ordered them to shut down their operations following coronavirus outbreak earlier, the ministry of industry gave them go-ahead with ship-breaking operations in a meeting held on Sunday.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the letter that instructed the association members to follow three health guidelines including health advisory issued by the government, wearing PPE (personal protective equipment), and maintaining social distancing and keep their yards open.

Around five thousand shipbreaking workers got stranded at labor camps in Sitakunda since 24 March when government declared general shutdown.

One of the workers at Jiri Subedar area in Sitakunda upazila preferring anonymity told The Daily Star that there were around

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

Trump plans to ease lockdown

Says virus cases 'passed peak'; WHO warns Europe remains 'in the eye of the storm'

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump has vowed to unveil plans to reopen the world's top economy, following cautious moves in Europe, claiming the US had "passed the peak" of the coronavirus crisis despite a record daily death toll.

Since emerging in China late last year, the pandemic has turned the world upside down, forcing half of humanity indoors and catapulting the global economy towards a second Great Depression.

The death toll has topped 138,101 with more than two million infected, according to an AFP tally -- with nearly 2,600 dying in the past 24 hours in the US alone.

But a bullish Trump on Wednesday told reporters his "aggressive strategy" against the virus was working and that "the data suggests that nationwide we have passed the peak on new cases".

He promised swift "guidelines" on reopening parts of the country, suggesting less-affected states could ease restrictions before May 1.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

'Bangladesh will always stand by the oppressed people of Vietnam'

Coronavirus could cause upheaval across ME

Says Red Cross

REUTERS, GENEVA



A Bhutanese government delegation led by the Bhutanese Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering calls on Bangabandhu on April 17, 1972 at his official residence.

April 17, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

BHUTANESE DELEGATION CALLS ON BANGABANDHU

A Bhutanese government delegation led by Bhutanese Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering calls on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today at his official residence. They present Bangabandhu some traditional handicrafts of their country. Tsering also hands over a letter from the Bhutanese King to Bangabandhu, inviting him to visit Bhutan.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



STAY HOME, STAY WELL

Keep your body, mind fresh

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

In the days of shutdown and social distancing, many people are finding it difficult to stay calm and keep anxiety at bay, but proper meditation and practical exercise can be helpful, said a physical education expert.

People should exercise and eat a healthy and balanced diet to keep fit as a strong immune system is an added advantage in the fight against Covid-19, said Jashim Uddin Ahmad, principal of Government College of Physical Education, Dhaka.

He also said people can take brisk exercise, stop smoking, maintain good nutrition and mental health to reduce their chances of becoming severely ill from the virus.

"Any activity is better than none, and more activity provides more physical and mental health benefits," he said.

Jashim suggested that, as many people are working from home, one should take short breaks after 30 minutes working in front of the computer.

"Stair climbing is a very time-efficient way to maintain fitness. So, people can do it," he advised.

The physical education expert suggested that people can do jumping jacks, high knees, butt kicks, for 15 seconds each, then repeat the circuit five to 10 times, depending on individual stamina.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



PRAYER TIMING APRIL 17

Fazr Juma Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4:35 12:30 4:45 6:24 7:45
JAMAAT 5:10 1:15 5:00 6:28 8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Indian hospital segregates patients

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

In what many are calling a case of "apartheid" during a global pandemic, a government-run hospital in Ahmedabad, the main city in the western Indian state of Gujarat, has segregated coronavirus patients based on their religion, claiming the order came from the government.

"Generally, there are separate wards for male and female patients. But here, we have made separate wards for Hindu and Muslim patients. It is a decision of the government and you can ask them," Dr Gunvant H Rathod, the medical superintendent of Ahmedabad Civil Hospital, told The Indian Express newspaper in its report on Wednesday.

The Gujarat state is governed by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which also governs the country. Narendra Modi was the state's chief minister for

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2



An Indian Paradise, perched on the branch of a mango tree, flexing its wings as if it's rediscovering its confidence, as the humans have been staying inside their homes. The photo was taken last week at Chakzora village in Bogura's Shahjahanpur upazila.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

More relief rice recovered

Five held in 4 districts

STAR REPORT

In the wake of widespread allegations over theft of rice meant for the poor, law enforcers continue drives to recover such rice.

At least five people were arrested in this connection and 326 sacks of rice were recovered from four districts since Wednesday morning.

In most cases, local Awami League leaders are involved with stealing rice. But for the first time, a BNP man was arrested in Bogura on Wednesday for storing OMS rice at his house.

Since March 30, law enforcers have recovered over 297 tonnes of rice (5,959 sacks containing 50kg each) and arrested 49 people in 46 upazilas in these connections. They also seized 6,480 litres of soya bean oil, 18 sacks of sugar, and 25 sacks of chickpea.

Amid the allegations of relief rice embezzlement, the government has postponed the open market sale and taken an initiative to issue cards for people of lower-income groups across the country to sell them rice at Tk 10.

Our district correspondents report on the drives and the rice recovery.

In Barishal, a Rab team seized 184 sacks of rice from the house of Noor-e-Alam, AL-backed chairman of Kedarpur union in Babuganj upazila, early yesterday.

Jakir Hossain and Rokonzaman, two UP members, were sentenced to a month's imprisonment for their involvement with the embezzlement, said Babuganj UNO Suzit Halder, who went to the spot with Rab team as an executive magistrate.

He added that the chairman, along with two brothers, and an OMS dealer went into hiding after the incident.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1