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Your Right to Know

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**BANGLADESH  
UPDATE**

**306**  
New cases in 24hrs

**2,144**  
Total cases

**84**  
Deaths

**66**  
Recoveries

**GLOBAL  
UPDATE**

**156,076**  
Deaths

**2,273,986**  
Total cases

THEFT OF SUBSIDIZED FOOD

## Rogue dealers with political links to blame

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and RASHIDUL HASAN

Irregularities in distribution of subsidised food items among the poor continue mainly due to political interference in selection of dealers though the government has apparently taken a tougher stance to stop such malpractices amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Most of the dealers selected for distributing food items under the food ministry's Special OMS (Open Market Sale) and the Food Friendly programmes have ties with local ruling party leaders, say a number of government officials.

Though irregularities in food distribution under the two programmes are nothing new, a good number of cases of misappropriation of subsidised food items came to light recently due to the proactive role of local administration and law enforcement agencies in different parts of the country, they said.

The administration and the agencies swung into action following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's strong warning against misappropriation of food items meant for the poor who are going through a very difficult time due to the coronavirus outbreak, they mention.

Besides, many of the aspiring candidates for the union parishad polls slated for early next year are keeping a close eye on food distribution in their respective areas and are informing the local administration of anomalies in the programmes, they point out.

Between March 30 and April 16, law enforcers seized 297 tonnes of rice (5,959 sacks containing 50kg rice each)

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Crowds of people buying perishable goods from vendors near DIT Road in the capital's Rampura despite the risks of contracting and spreading coronavirus. Most of the people are wearing masks but maintaining social distancing is a far cry in such a setting. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Don't despair, tackle crisis courageously

Says PM at shortest ever JS session

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Urging the people to face the coronavirus situation with courage and patience, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said they should not be disappointed with or afraid of the situation.

In her concluding speech to the seventh session of the 11th parliament, the PM said the Covid-19 situation in Bangladesh is better than in many developed countries.

She urged all to stay indoors and maintain social distancing to fight coronavirus.

"I would like to urge the people, including the elected public representatives and party leaders and workers, to obey the directives on health that are being given time and again in view of the Covid-19 outbreak in the country," she said.

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## Outbreak keeps gaining pace

9 die, 306 new cases in 24 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The coronavirus outbreak threatens to spiral out of control as the authorities reported nine more deaths and 306 new cases of infection in 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday.

The death toll is now 84 and the total number of cases 2,144.

The capital continues to remain the worst affected region with highest 32 percent of the new cases being reported here, said Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

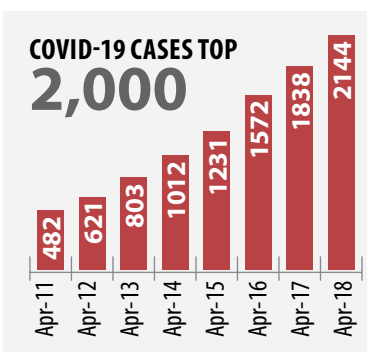
Six of the nine deaths were reported in the city, while two in Narayanganj and one in Savar, she said yesterday in the daily bulletin on the coronavirus situation.

Four of the deceased were aged over 60, one aged between 51 and 60, two between 41 and 50 and one between 30 and 40. Nothing was mentioned about the age of the other victim.

Till yesterday, the number of Covid-19 patients in the country stood at 1,994 while that of recovery cases remained unchanged from Friday at 66, said the IEDCR director.

Of the current cases, 564 were undergoing treatment in hospitals while the others were being treated at home, she said, adding that 27 patients

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## BRAC RAPID SURVEY 47pc garment workers yet to be paid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Forty-seven percent of 159 garments workers, who were interviewed for a study by Brac University's James P Grant School of Public Health, reported not receiving their wages and felt uncertain about their current job status with their respective employers.

After a rapid survey among the workers, the study found that half of the respondents did not know whether they still have their jobs since they were on forced leave without pay.

Only a quarter of the respondents were on paid leave.

Approximately half the respondents also reported complete loss of income -- meaning there were no earning members in their families at the time of the survey, which was conducted between April

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## APRIL 16 DEADLINE

## 370 RMG factories didn't pay workers

REEAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

At least 370 garment factories have failed to pay their workers' salary within the stipulated time of April 16, said the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE).

The DIFE will serve the defaulter factory owners with show-cause notices soon, it warned, adding that if the owners fail to respond, their licences may be suspended for renewal which is scheduled in July this year.

Shibnath Roy, inspector general of the DIFE, yesterday said, "If the owners of the respective factories cannot come up with satisfactory replies, we will recommend the Ministry of Labour and Employment to file cases against the defaulters with the labour courts."

According to the DIFE official, a total of 158,091 workers worked in those 370 factories.

He, however, did not specifically mention when the show-cause notices would be served. Besides, the amount of the due salaries could not be known as most of the units were shut for coronavirus outbreak.

Of the factories, 122 are in Dhaka district, 120 in Gazipur, 30 in Narayanganj, 58 in Chattogram, 11 in Mymensingh, three in Pabna, six in Narsingdi, one in Munshiganj, three in Dinajour, two in Rangpur, five in Cumilla, four in Faridpur, two in Rajshahi and three in Khulna, as per the DIFE.

Meanwhile, some factories went for layoffs to avert the labour unrest, Roy said, adding that the DIFE was investigating whether the layoffs were executed lawfully.

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## Half the world locked down

Trump backs anti-lockdown protests, says China hiding toll

AFP, Washington

Coronavirus deaths have surged past 154,000 worldwide with nearly a quarter of them in the United States, where President Donald Trump lent his support to protesters rallying against lockdown orders.

Evidence is mounting that social distancing successfully slowed the pandemic after more than half of humanity -- 4.5 billion people -- were confined to their homes.

Governments around the world are now grappling with when and how to ease lockdowns that have crippled the global economy, even as the Covid-19 death toll climbs further in hard-hit countries.

Demonstrators in three US states rallied in public this week to demand an end to the restrictions, with the largest protest in Michigan attracting 3,000 people -- some of whom were armed.

Trump has largely left decisions on easing lockdowns to state officials even as he laid out guidelines for a staged reopening of the national economy.

But his call to "liberate" Michigan, Minnesota and Virginia in a series of tweets late Friday were quickly rebuked by the Democratic leaders of all three states.

"I do not have time to involve myself in Twitter wars," said Virginia governor Ralph Northam.

The US accounts for nearly a third of the 2.2 million coronavirus infections reported globally.

It has also recorded around 37,000 deaths, more than any other nation,

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## NAMAZ-E-JANAZA

## Thousands gather, ignoring lockdown

Police, admin watch on

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Defying government orders to maintain social distancing and self-isolation, thousands of people from different areas flocked to Brahmanbaria's Sarail yesterday to attend the namaz-e-janaza of the leader of an Islamic organisation.

Maulana Jubaer Ahmed Ansari was nayeb-e-ameer or vice president of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, an Islamic organisation.

The mass gathering happened although the entire district has been under lockdown since April 11, when one person died from coronavirus and seven others detected positive in a day.

From Jamia Rahmania Madrasa at Bertola village, where the funeral was held, the crowds spilled over the

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Thousands of people ignoring orders to remain indoors join the namaz-e-janaza of Maulana Jubaer Ahmed Ansari, leader of Islamic organisation Khelafat Majlish, in Brahmanbaria's Sarail upazila. Inset, Jamia Rahmania Madrasa at Bertola village where the funeral was held yesterday.

PHOTO: MASUK HRIDOY

## UV hope for PPE

Bangladeshi-Australian's initiative may facilitate reuse of PPEs, much to relief of health workers

TANVEER AHMED, from Sydney

With coronavirus seemingly unstoppable, global powers are in a rush to stock quality PPE (personal protective equipment).

And if it is posing such a strain on the world's best healthcare systems, the potential pressure on Bangladesh's hospitals is understood to be catastrophic. The deaths of Dr Moyeen Uddin and dozens others from Covid-19 have already sent chills down the spine of medical service providers.

Amid this grim situation, a Bangladeshi-Australian chemical engineer has come up with a mission to equip Bangladesh hospitals with germicidal ultraviolet radiation (known as UV-C) facilities to rapidly sterilise PPE, allowing its repeated use.

Dr Md Arifur Rahim has assembled a committee in Dhaka whose members are desperately meeting with officials, in an attempt to have the ultraviolet disinfectant facilities approved for usage. The project has already been given the green light by the government's health authorities at what Rahim says was unprecedented in speed. The challenge is now to have it taken up by individual hospitals.

One of the committee members, Dr Mahmudul Faisal Al Ameen is a computer scientist based in Japan attempting to help with the project. Last week, he met with administrators at Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital to allow for a testing of the facilities, as part of a pilot project with several other hospitals in Dhaka. If the trial

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