Baishakh 7, 1427 BS

Your Right to Know

Shaban 25, 1441 Hijri



BANGLADESH UPDATE New cases in 24hrs New cases in 24hrs Total cases Deaths











2,355,676 Total cases

Worries Over Boro Harvest

Flash floods may deal a double blow

RASHIDUL HASAN and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Farmers in the haor region of Sylhet may have to count losses due to damages by flash floods, forecast for later this week, right at the beginning of boro harvest.

The vast lowlands in the regions are a major source of rice for the entire country, and the damages could affect the national supply, experts fear. The rice growers have already suffered a blow because of coronavirus

Flood Forecasting and Warning Center (FFWC) on Friday said the northeastern region and many areas of India's Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura states may witness moderate and heavy rains between April 17

As a result, water levels in four of the local rivers may cross the danger level and cause flash floods in parts of Sylhet, Sunamgani, Moulvibazar and Habiganj districts, it warned. At least 11 rivers in the region may swell. FFWC in a bulletin yesterday said water levels at 30 of 39 points being

monitored have been on the rise. Meanwhile, only about 10 percent of the harvesting was done until yesterday, said Srinibas Debnath, additional director at Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Sylhet division.

Paddy was cultivated on 4,74,195 hectares of land in the region this year, he said, adding that the boro harvest season had begun last week and would probably continue until the first week of next month, he told The Daily Star vesterday.

The farmers have already been complaining of shortages of workers due SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



their produce from flood, they face huge losses. Inset, a farmer

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

B'BARIA GATHERING Health minister blasts the local administration

ASP, 2 other cops withdrawn; people in 8 villages asked to stay home STAR REPORT

Health Minister Zahid Maleque slammed the Brahmanbaria administration over the failure to stop the gathering of thousands of people at the namaz-e-janaza of an Islamic party leader ignoring the shutdown.

"We observed the mass gathering in Brahmanbaria where thousands of people assembled at the funeral. At this time, holding such a gathering is very damaging; we fear many people might have contracted [coronavirus].

"Such an irresponsible incident should not have happened. Here, administration failed to control the situation," the minister said while briefing the media online over Covid-19 situation.

Ignoring the government orders to maintain social and self-SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Dhaka remains worst-hit region

76pc of total cases are in this division; 312 new infections recorded, 7 die in last 24 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country yesterday recorded 312 confirmed cases of

Covid-19 with seven deaths due to the disease. The total number of infected patients rose to 2,456 while the death toll reached 91, health minister Zahid Maleque said in a bulletin from his residence.

Later, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director of the directorate general of health services, shared her analysis on the new deaths and cases.

The capital has been the country's worst affected region with 44 percent new cases being reported here, followed by Narayanganj with 31 percent, she said.

Till now, 1,869 confirmed cases, which is 76 percent of the total infected population, have been reported in Dhaka

Three of the seven deaths were reported in Dhaka, while four in Narayangani, she said yesterday during the daily bulletin on the coronavirus situation.

Five of the deceased were male and two were female. Age distribution of the deceased, however, was not disclosed in the briefing.

Of the new cases, 66 percent are male and 34 percent

Nasima said people aged between 31 and 40 were the worst affected by the outbreak followed by those aged SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

REPORTS ON OMS Case against two editors

carrying his crops on a boat.

Doc served show cause notice over FB post

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Editors of two online news portals have been sued under the controversial Digital Security Act (DSA) after the media outlets ran reports on misappropriation of OMS rice in Thakurgaon's Baliadangi upazila

recently. Mominul Islam Bhasani, president of the upazila unit of Swechchasebak League, filed the case on Friday night against Toufique Imrose Khalidi, editor-in-chief of bdnews24.com, and Mohiuddin Sarker, acting editor of Jagonews24.com, for "deliberately publishing

Two Facebook users named Shawan Amin and Rahim Shuvo were also accused in the case filed with Baliadangi Police Station.

false and defamatory news

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Incentives for those on the front line

Govt to announce 2 months' basic salary, up to Tk 10 lakh insurance for health workers; admin, police staff too to get insurance coverage

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The government will provide two months' basic salary as incentive for doctors and other health workers who are on the front line in the war against Covid-19 pandemic. The health professionals will also get an insurance coverage of up to Tk 10 lakh.

Government officials and law enforcers, who too are putting their lives at risk to make the ongoing shutdown effective and curb the spread of coronavirus, will get insurance coverage, said a finance ministry proposal.

According to the proposal, if anyone catches the infection, there would be a health insurance coverage of Tk 5 lakh, Tk 7 lakh or Tk 10 lakh depending on ranks, position and grade, said finance ministry officials.

If anyone dies, the amount of the health insurance coverage will be five times higher, said the proposal sent on Saturday to the Prime Minister's Office for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's approval, the officials added. They also said that since the government ordered the closure of all offices since March

25 till April 25, doctors, nurses and other health workers, who are working amid this shutdown, will get an incentive worth two months' basic salary. 'We will make an official order soon after we receive the prime minister's approval," a

top finance ministry official told The Daily Star. They estimated that around 50,000 to 55,000 doctors, nurses and other health workers are now fighting against the deadly disease at government hospitals.

In a televised address to the nation, Hasina, on April 13, ahead of Pahela Baishakh, said that doctors, nurses and other health workers are continuing to provide treatment to Covid-19 patients from the front line, ignoring the constraints of resources and the risk

"Yours is a challenging profession," she said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

The Republic of Korea is a shining example of how to effectively deal with the outbreak of the highly contagious virus Covid-19. In an interview last week, the Korean Republic ambassador to Bangladesh, Hu Kangil, talks with The Daily Star's Mohammad Al-Masum Molla about how his country has successfully managed the situation so far and how it can extend its support to Bangladesh in this critical juncture.

The 'secret' of South Korea

TDS: What is the current situation in South Korea?

Hu Kang-il: The epidemic in Korea has been largely concentrated in a specific region of the country and within specific religious group. By quickly identifying those infected through exhaustive testing and aggressively tracking down their contacts to prevent further spread



of the virus, the situation in Korea has been much stabilised The number of newly confirmed cases per day has shown sharp decline since hitting a peak at 909 on February 29. Recently, newly confirmed cases per day dropped to around 30, over 50 percent of which were infections from abroad. As of April 13, the cumulative number of Covid-19 patients in Korea recorded is 10,537, with 7,447 recovered and 217 deaths.

We continue to remain vigilant as there are still sporadic infections in some parts of the country as well as confirmed cases coming from overseas.

TDS: What is the secret to the success of effectively containing the spread of the virus? SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Beware of fake news

Impersonators of The Daily Star spreading rumours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For the past four months, the global coronavirus pandemic has affected institutions, challenged conventions and presented an ever growing array of problems that need decisive solutions.

In these trying times, The Daily Star's credibility, authenticity and authority as a source of legitimate, verified news are being challenged by rumours and impersonators publishing fake news.

Recently, a page on Facebook titled "Bangladesh Sangbadik Samity" ran rumours about one of our reporters being "Covid-19 positive" and "escaping quarantine".

We urge our readers as well as our esteemed colleagues in the news industry to be watchful of such rumours and keep their trust in us.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



A physician, wearing personal protective equipment (PPE), collecting sample at the Fever Clinic in capital's Shahbagh for coronavirus testing. The photo was taken vesterday.

AMRAN HOSSAIN

Row Over Covid-19 Origin

Wuhan lab denies link

Trump warns China of consequences; Europe virus toll tops 100,000

AFP, Beijing

A laboratory in the Chinese city at ground zero of the global coronavirus outbreak has rejected as "impossible' US theories it is the cradle of the pandemic, as President Donald Trump warned Beijing of consequences if it was "knowingly responsible".

The denial came as the world's top musicians -- from the Rolling Stones to Taylor Swift, Stevie Wonder and teen superstar Billie Eilish -- joined forces for a virtual mega-concert, hoping to spread cheer to billions under lockdown.

The six-hour online event aimed to cultivate a sense of community during a pandemic that has ravaged the global economy and killed at least 157,000 people worldwide, with nearly 2.3 million confirmed infections.

"Was it a mistake that got out of control or was it done deliberately?" Trump said at a White House briefing Saturday, questioning the origins of the disease, which first emerged in the city of Wuhan in December.

"If they were knowingly responsible, yeah, then there should be consequences," he said when asked if China should face repercussions for the pandemic. The highly contagious disease was likely first

transmitted to humans at a market where exotic animals were slaughtered, according to Chinese scientists. SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Beware FROM PAGE 1

At the same time, we ask our readers to be cautious of any web portal that carries a likeness to The Daily Star -- in name, structure or presentation -- as we do not have any other online

presence aside from our official website, www.thedailystar.net, or our verified social media channels.

Dhaka

between 21 and 30 as 23.4 percent and 22.3 percent of the confirmed cases belong to this age groups respectively.

In the 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, nine patients have recovered, taking the tally to 75.

During the same period, samples of 2,634 individuals were tested.

Up to yesterday, all the 19 testing labs across the country have tested 23,825 samples.

Globally, more than 1.6 lakh people have died of Covid-19 as of yesterday, according to the health

On March 8, the authorities reported the first three cases of Covid-19 while the first patients died of the disease on March 18.

ICU SUPPORT PROVIDE NO **GOOD RESULT**

Zahid Malegue said doctors have suggested that the oxygen support has been proved to be more useful than ventilation support at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

"Results in the ICU was not good. Sadly, eight of the nine patients, who were given ICU support, have died," the minister said, quoting doctors.

He said, "We have ordered for 3,500 oxygen cylinders. Currently, we have some 10,000 cylinders at government hospitals across the country."

About the ineffective lockdown, he said, "The lockdown is not functioning as they expected. And people are moving to different parts of the country from the coronavirushit areas. As a result, community transmission is increasing.

Urging people to maintain the lockdown, he said, "So far, the number of new cases has remained steady around 300. If this does not increase, then we are lucky; otherwise, worries are there."

He claimed the country is in a better situation in the "seventh week" of the first reported cases compared to the countries where the virus has wreaked havoc.

NEW TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meanwhile, the health ministry yesterday issued a circular forming a 17-member "National Technical Advisory Committee".

The committee would suggest the government about the measures required to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

It will also suggest the government if there is a need to increase the standard of service in hospitals and the measures to improve the skills of doctors who are treating Covid-19

Led by Prof Mohammad Shahidullah, president of Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council, Prof Nazrul Islam, virologist and former vice chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Prof AK Azad Khan, president of Bangladesh Diabetic Association, Gynecologist Prof Shahla Khatun, and Prof Mahmudur Rahman, former director of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) have been made the members of the

committee, among others. Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of IEDCR, has been made member secretary of the committee.

Virus fears keep **Orthodox Easter** worshippers at home

AFP, Moscow

More than 260 million Orthodox Christians celebrated Easter Sunday, with church leaders asking worshippers to stay at home to avoid spreading the novel coronavirus.

Orthodox Christians, the world's third largest group of Christian believers, this year celebrate Easter a week after Catholics and Protestants because they follow a different calendar.

Last week's Easter celebrations took place in empty churches while Pope Francis livestreamed his traditional message from the Vatican as the pandemic that has killed more than 150,000 made massed worship too

Most Orthodox Christians will also skip traditional midnight services, even though Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union where most live have relatively low numbers of confirmed cases of the virus so far.

Moscow Patriarch Kirill, who leads 150 million believers, has urged the faithful to pray at home and not go to church until he gives his blessing.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is dropping his usual attendance at an Easter service and will go to a chapel in the grounds of his residence outside

Moscow. In Moscow and the surrounding where most Russian COVID-19 cases are concentrated, churches will hold services behind closed doors with broadcasts online or on television.



People buying everyday commodities in the capital's Malibagh Bazar maintaining physical distance. Members of Bangladesh Army ensured distancing in the market.

The 'secret' of South Korea

Hu Kang-il: Korea's Covid-19 control strategy consists of robust testing to identify confirmed cases, tracing their contacts to prevent further spread, and treating those infected at the earliest possible stage, while actively engaging the public in participating in social distancing and other preventive

One of the innovative methods the Korean medical community adopted was "Drive-through Testing Stations". By allowing drivers to go through the testing process without having to leave their vehicles, we could reduce the time needed for sample collection to less than 10 minutes and also limit the exposure of frontline medical workers.

Another method that a number of private hospitals in Korea adopted was a phone-booth type testing facility that enables "walk-through" of potential patients while protecting frontline medical workers who collect specimens behind clear acrylic panels. Incheon International Airport has introduced "open-air walk-through" testing stations that utilise the naturally windy outdoor environment for ventilation.

TDS: How can South Korea extend its support to Bangladesh?

Hu Kang-il: Since the outbreak

But conspiracy theories that the virus

came from a maximum-security

virology lab have been brought into

the mainstream in recent days by US

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

said an investigation was underway

into how the virus "got out into the

us," Yuan Zhiming, the head of the P4

laboratory at the Wuhan Institute of

Virology, which is equipped to handle

dangerous viruses, said in an interview

"I know it's impossible," he added.

Amid the tensions, Australia

"There's no way this virus came from

government officials.

with state media.

Wuhan lab denies link

been communicating closely with respect to their domestic situations, immigration and aviation policies, and possible measures to jointly tackle the challenge.

While exerting every effort to curb the epidemic domestically, the Korean government is prudently reviewing the numerous requests from partner countries for test kits, PPEs, and financial support. We are actively sharing best practices and technical expertise with our partners, including Bangladesh, and at the same time seeking effective ways to help Bangladesh secure necessary medical equipment in this difficult time.

TDS: What should the Bangladesh government be doing right now to contain the spread of Covid-19?

Hu Kang-il: It is encouraging that the government of Bangladesh is making full use of available resources to tackle this formidable challenge. Honourable Prime Minister Hasina seems to be fully engaged in the nationwide fight against Covid-19, making frequent public announcements and directives.

Particularly, I would like to highlight the importance of keeping up the number of testing, not only in the capital city but also in rural areas

of Bangladesh and Korea have enhance the effectiveness of tracking TDS: What could be the economic and treatment measures. Korea's experience proves that rigorous testing is one of the most important components of a successful response.

In the meantime, it is extremely important that everyone does their part to limit further spread of the virus by strictly adhering to government directives including social distancing, wearing masks, and frequent hand disinfection.

TDS: How is this virus outbreak affecting Korean companies operating

Hu Kang-il: Most Korean companies in Bangladesh, many of them in the RMG sector, have ceased operations in their factories in compliance with the Bangladeshi government's directives to temporarily shut down all public and private offices. As is the case with the majority of local industries during this economic slump, these Korean companies face the risk of liquidity crunch as the government holiday is

In this regard, it is imperative the Korean companies be eligible for tax breaks and low-interest loans laid out in the government's latest financial stimulus packages. Local and foreign companies alike must be kept afloat

impact of the virus outbreak and how can Korea join in helping Bangladesh recover?

Hu Kang-il: The Covid-19 pandemic will negatively affect the global economy in a wide range of areas including export industries, domestic consumption, jobs and income, food security, and inequality.

We do not yet know how long this global pandemic will last, but one thing is for sure. The sooner we defeat the virus, the sooner we will start seeing economic recovery. As a trusted partner, Korea will stand by Bangladesh during its fight against the disease and will continue to seek ways to provide assistance in a variety of areas.

TDS: Do you have any special message for the Bangladeshi people on overcoming the crisis?

Hu Kang-il: Korea has shown the world that it is possible to curb the spread of Covid-19 by setting priorities straight and allocating resources in the right places. The Bangladesh government too has responded swiftly with a nationwide shutdown and strict implementation, public health directives, and a series of aggressive stimulus plans. Therefore, I would like to advise the people of Bangladesh to of the country. This will enable the in this difficult time lest they be count on their government and follow government to see a more accurate driven out of business to aggravate the the directives in place in order to

Incentives FROM PAGE 1

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

She said health officials would be given special honorarium, and Tk 100 crore was being allocated to this end, while Tk 750 crore was being allocated for the coverage of health and life insurance, she said.

Finance ministry officials said in a rough estimate they found that around 2.5 lakh officials are working across the nation.

Doctors, nurses, and health workers are facing an overwhelming workload with no end of this situation in sight. On many occasions, they are doing such a stressful job while they are under-protected, overworked and vulnerable to the infection themselves.

To make matters worse, many patients reportedly hide their health and travel histories.

On the other hand, other officials who are performing their duties to ensure essential services and social distancing to make shutdown effective, are coming in contact with so many people, which increases their risk of infection, as the virus is now spreading within communities.

The government is going to announce the incentives against the backdrop of Dr Md Moyeen Uddin, assistant professor of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital -the first doctor in the country to die from Covid-19 on April 15.

A total of 115 doctors and at least 50 nurses across the country have already tested positive for coronavirus till Saturday, Doctor Md Shahed Rafi Pavel, chairman of the Bangladesh Doctors' Foundation, told The Daily

He said that two months' basic salary was not a main reason to work. "Doctors should be given proper treatment if they get infected by coronavirus and they should be given a handsome amount as insurance coverage," he said.

He also said that doctors should be given WHO-recommended protective gear and facilities at hospitals while treating patients. Officials said that at least 67 police

and several government officials were also infected with coronavirus till Sunday. The government has already

announced various stimulus packages worth Tk 95,619 crore, which is 3.3 percent of the GDP. On April 15, Bangladesh Bank

announced that bankers will get a month's basic salary if they work at least 10 days during the ongoing shutdown.

The central bank order also said that contractual staffers at banks will get 65 percent of their salaries as special incentive, which will range from a minimum of Tk 30,000 to a maximum of Tk 100,000.

US says China should stop 'bullying behaviour' in S China Sea

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

The United States called on China on Saturday to stop "bullying behaviour" in the South China Sea and said it was concerned by reports of Beijing's provocative actions" aimed at offshore oil and gas developments in

the disputed waters. Three regional security sources told Reuters on Friday that a Chinese government survey ship was tagging an exploration vessel operated by Malaysia's state oil company Petronas in those waters.

The vessel HaiyangDizhi 8 was earlier this week spotted off Vietnam. where it had last year conducted suspected oil exploration surveys in large expanses of Vietnam's exclusive

economic zone. "The United States is concerned by reports of China's repeated provocative actions aimed at the offshore oil and gas development of other claimant states," the U.S. State Department said in an emailed statement in response to questions on the HaiyangDizhi 8's

presence in Malaysian waters. "In this instance, (China) should cease its bullying behaviour and refrain from engaging in this type of provocative and destabilizing activity," it said.

China's actions threaten regional energy security and undermine the free and open Indo-Pacific energy

market, it added. Earlier in the week, when the survey ship was off Vietnam, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman had

said the ship was conducting normal activities and accused U.S. officials of smearing Beijing. China claims almost all of the resource-rich South China Sea, also

a major trade route. The Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Malaysia and Taiwan have overlapping claims. The HaiyangDizhi

still within Malaysia's exclusive economic zone, Marine Traffic data showed on Saturday. The area is close to waters claimed by both Vietnam and Malaysia as well as by

yesterday called for an independent with death tolls over 20,000, followed investigation into the global response The small but spreading movement

to the pandemic, including the World Health Organization's handling of the Its foreign minister said the country

would "insist" on a review that would probe, in part, China's response to the

of any country, with more than 735,000 confirmed infections, and by yesterday had lost 39,000 people to the virus, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University.

Progress was marked in some places and New York state reported the lowest number of deaths in weeks, which Governor Andrew Cuomo attributed largely to social distancing. But as Americans and others around

the world chafe after weeks under stayat-home orders, resentment is rising.

Anti-lockdown protests Saturday drew hundreds of people at the capitols of states including Texas, Maryland, New Hampshire and Ohio. Many demonstrators waved American flags and some carried arms.

drew encouragement from Trump, who tweeted that three states should be "liberated" from the stay-home

He has called for a rapid return to normality to limit damage to the US economy -- while largely leaving the The US has the highest caseload final decision on easing lockdowns to

state officials. With 22 million Americans out

of work seemingly overnight as businesses closed under the lockdown, families are turning more and more to food banks to get by. "We have gone for months without work," a woman who gave her

name only as Alana said at a food distribution centre in Chelsea in suburban Boston. Mounting evidence suggests that social distancing has slowed the pandemic after more than half of

humanity -- 4.5 billion people -- were confined to their homes. Stay-at-home orders have been enforced in Italy and Spain, both still the hardest-hit countries in Europe,

by France, which has recorded more than 19,000 fatalities. As governments around the world grapple with when and how to ease lockdowns, Spain on Saturday extended its nationwide shutdown to

Yesterday, the country registered

565 a day before. The total fatalities in Spain have reached 20,453, the health ministry said. Infections rose to 195,344, with 4,218 new cases in the past 24 hours. Japan, Britain and Mexico have all expanded their movement restrictions.

a sharp drop in the daily death toll,

with the number falling to 410 from

Yet elsewhere, signs that the outbreak could be easing prompted Switzerland, Denmark and Finland to begin reopening shops and schools

this week. Germany is set to follow suit with some shops back in action Iran also allowed some Tehran businesses to reopen Saturday despite the country being home to the Middle

East's deadliest outbreak. Israel has also approved some easing to its tight restrictions -- while

pointedly avoiding announcing the first stage of an exit from lockdown. Many of the world's 260 million

Orthodox Christians marked Easter yesterday without attending church

Health minister blasts the local administration

isolation, people from different areas flocked to Bertola village in Sarail upazila on Saturday to attend the namaz-e-janaza of Maulana Jubaer Ahmed Ansari, naveb-e-ameer or vice-president of Bangladesh Khelafat

From Jamia Rahmania Madrasa, where the funeral was held, the crowds spilled onto the surrounding areas and a 14-km stretch of the Dhaka-Sylhet highway. The gathering took place although

the entire district has been under lockdown since April 11, when one person died from coronavirus and seven others tested positive in a day.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Brahmanbaria Civil Surgeon Ekram Ullah said the incident increased the risk of coronavirus spreading in the

a joint statement expressed concern over the mass gathering, fearing it might raise the risk of further spread.

Meanwhile, 22 eminent citizens in

people in the country has exceeded 2,000, and more than half the country has been locked down and when the government is announcing its tough stance on it, the question remains -how the local administration allowed such a public gathering.

"Considering public health, we urge the government to take urgent actions in this regard," read the

The signatories to the statement include National Prof Anisuzzaman, President Pankaj Nap Bhattacharya, Sammilito Samajik Andolon President Ziauddin Tariq Ali, General Secretary Saleh Ahmed, Liberation War Museum Trustee Sarwar Ali, Theatre Personality Ramendu Majumdar, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad President Fawzia Moslem, Women Leaders Khushi Kabir and Rokeya Kabir, Dhaka University Prof Azizur Rahman, Prof MM Akash, and Prof Rubaiyat Ferdous.

COPS WITHDRAWN The assistant superintendent of police HOME QUARANTINE

officers of Sarail Police Station were withdrawn following the incident.

Police Headquarters took the action against ASP Masud Rana, Officerin-charge of Sarail Police Station Shahadat Hossain Titu and Inspector (investigation) Nurul Haque for failing to take proper steps to stop the mass gathering, said Imtiaz Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Special Branch of Brahmanbaria police.

Of the three, the ASP and the OC have been attached to the Chattogram range of police, Imtiaz told our Brahmanbaria correspondent.

In another development, a threemember committee, led by additional deputy inspector general (admin and finance) of Chattogram range, has been formed to investigate the incident, said Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general (media) of Police Headquarters The committee has been asked

to submit its report by April 22, he

When the number of affected (Sarail-Ashuganj circle) and two police The people of eight villages --

Shantinagar, Sitaharan, Baraibari, and Bertola villages in Sarail upazila and Khariala, Bogair, and Mashair villages in Ashuganj upazila, and Malihata of Sadar upazila -- have been asked to stay in home quarantine for 14 days since Saturday evening, said Anisur Rahman, superintendent of Brahmanbaria police, adding that additional police have been deployed

The SP said so far as they know, most of the funeral attendees was residents of the eight villages.

Locals see it as a failure of the administration. They said people reached Bertola

village by roads and waterways. "But how people came by these roads? Were there no checkpoints to stop them?" asked a resident of

Abdun Noor, vice-president of Brahmanbaria Sachetan Nagarik Committee, said if the local administration had been more active, such a mass gathering would not have happened.

Bertola.

'We'll get you home soon'

Govt assures stranded Bangladeshis in India; flights for treatment seekers to start stoday

With several thousand Bangladeshis passing days in hardship in stranded situations in India for over a month, the government yesterday urged Bangladeshi citizens to have patience, assuring them of their gradual repatriation after bringing back patients from South India.

In a major development, US-Bangla Airlines will start operating eight special flights from today to bring back over 1,000 stranded Bangladeshis who went there for treatment. Six flights will be operated from Chennai from April 20 to 25 while two from Kolkata will be operated on April 21 and April 23, Kamrul Islam, general manager (public relations) of the airline, told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, for several hundred Bangladeshis stranded in Malaysia, the government has said the Malaysian government is assisting the expatriate Bangladeshis as the Bangladesh high commission is closely working in this regard with the Southeast Asian country.

In a video message on Saturday night, State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahriar Alam urged the stranded Bangladeshis in India to have patience.

"We will not put any of our citizens abroad in unbearable sufferings," he said. He urged the Bangladeshis, including students, not to create any untoward

situation there, saying Bangladesh's positive image is linked to their behaviour.

Shahriar said the ministry and Bangladesh high commission in India were in constant touch with the Indian authorities for the Bangladeshis' wellbeing, especially around 300 students of Lovely Professional University in Punjab.

He said the Bangladesh government has already brought back some citizens from India by road via Kolkata and sent them to quarantine with help of local administration.

According to the state minister, Bangladeshis including students of some universities, tourists and those who went for medical treatment remained stranded in several Indian cities including Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai.

India has been under lockdown since March 25 which was extended till May 3.

Sources said of the stranded Bangladeshis, around 600 are Tabligh Jamaat men; at least 1,000 in Chennai and Vellore who went mostly for medical treatment, and there are several hundreds more in Bangalore and Hyderabad. Many Bangladeshis in India are suffering from financial crisis in the current situation.

Meanwhile in Malaysia, some 250 to 300 Bangladeshi students had been stranded and also passing days in financial hardship due to air communication suspension

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Conservancy workers under Dhaka North City Corporation sort and pick up garbage in a truck, without any gloves. Though some of them are wearing masks, that barely offer any protection from Covid-19 that may arrive with someone's household waste. This photo was taken in Mirpur's Senpara area on Saturday afternoon.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

CONTAINING COVID-19

PM to hold video conference with officials of 8 dists

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will hold a video conference with the public representatives and officials of eight districts of Dhaka and Mymensingh divisions today on the present coronavirus situation in the country.

"The video conference will start at 10am at the prime minister's official Gono Bhaban residence,," PM's Press

Secretary Ihsanul Karim told the news agency yesterday. The districts are Manikganj, Gazipur, Tangail and Kishoreganj of Dhaka division and Jamalpur, Sherpur, Netrakona and Mymensingh of Mymensingh division.

Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar and private TV channels and radio stations will broadcast the video conference live, the press secretary said.

Earlier, the prime minister exchanged views with the public representatives and officials of 40 districts of Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna, Sylhet and Barishal divisions in three

During the meetings, the premier announced various stimulus packages and steps to overcome the Covid-19 fallout as well as gave different directives to contain the spread of the virus.

Lack of ICU beds remains a worry in Sylhet division

Three out of four districts have none

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

While it may sound reassuring to hear that Sylhet division has 589 beds dedicated to treating Covid-19 patients in isolation centres. However, that enthusiasm might start to fade in the face of some details -- out of these 589, only two are ICU beds.

Both of these are located at the Corona Isolation Centre" in Sylhet city's Saheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital.

Though nine more ICU beds and four ventilators are being installed at this dedicated Covid-19 treatment facility, medical experts say this will not be enough if the contagion continues to

According to the divisional health office in Sylhet, there are a total of 103 CU facilities in Sylhet, which includes 15 functional beds at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, while the rest are at private medical colleges and hospitals in the district.

However, there is no ICU facility available across Sunamganj, Moulvibazar and Habiganj districts; not even at the Sheikh Hasina Medical College Hospital in Habiganj.

According to the fourth version of 'National Guidelines on Clinical Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19)', critically ill patients should be treated in intensive care units

Professor AFM Nazmul Islam, former head of the department of medicine at Osmani Medical College, said, "A patient's vital functions are respiration, circulation, blood pressure and oxygenation, all of which are functions of the lungs and heart. Those who cannot maintain vital functions need to be taken to intensive care. Around five percent of the total Covid-19 infected get to a critical stage where this care is

required."

Considering the population density of the country, if we estimate one lakh infected cases, at least five thousand of them will be critical, and at least one to two thousand of them will need ICU facility. It's time to plan beforehand as cases keep rising every day," he said.

So far, only seven people have tested Covid-19 positive in the division, including a deceased doctor and an elderly. Moreover, one was detained in Sunamganj after fleeing from Dhaka after testing positive.

Among them, three are being treated at Sylhet Saheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital, two in Sunamganj Sadar Hospital and one in Habiganj Sadar

Contacted, Civil Surgeons of Sunamganj, Moulvibazar and Habiganj all said that they have sent requisition for

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

BAF flight with testing kits, PPE returns to Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An aircraft of Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) carrying medical aid returned to Dhaka yesterday from China.

The supplies were transported by BAF C-130J transport aircraft under 'In Aid to Civil Power' by Armed Forces Division, a press release issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said.

detection kits, 12,22,000 surgical masks, 7,500 N-95 masks, 130 thermometers, 2,000 gloves, 10,200 medical safety glasses, 200 goggles and 10,459 personal protective equipment (PPE). More healthcare aid (PPE, masks and

The supplies include necessary coronavirus

sanitisers etc) collected from China were brought by the same aircraft to provide to various entities engaged in combating coronavirus in Bangladesh under the initiative of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce.

On Friday, a total of 16 crew members of Bangladesh Air Force departed from Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram for China by BAF C-130J aircraft.

Air Commodore Md Zahidur Rahman GD(P) of Bangladesh Air Force led the team, added the

Deprived of wages for 12 weeks, some 1,000 workers of Kaliti tea garden yesterday brought out a 7km long march towards Kulaura upazila in Moulvibazar from their workplace, as they have been facing food crisis amid the ongoing shutdown. They gave a 24-hour ultimatum to the owner to meet an 11-point demand including

A simple act of kindness

Bangladeshi woman making masks in USA

Tamanna Khan

On March 25, The New York Times ran a story about Americans stepping up to face the coronavirus pandemic by sewing masks for their healthcare providers as well as the general public.

Nayeema Ahmad, a non-resident Bangladeshi living in Oak Ridge, Tennessee for the last 32 years, is also making a contribution during these trying times.

The retired high school science teacher, now in her 60s, has made more than 100 masks since March 17 and sent them to doctors in Massachusetts, Virginia and California.

Talking to this correspondent over WhatsApp, she said the first request came from the daughter-in-law of a friend.

"She is a pediatrician at an emergency clinic in Massachusetts," Nayeema said, adding that the doctor sent her a message with a link that had instructions on making masks, and requested Nayeema to make

some to meet the urgent demand.

Using leftover fabric she had at home and some elastic and wire from the store, Nayeema could easily produce some masks

She mailed the masks to hospitals and clinics. She uses different patterned and coloured cotton fabric for making the two-layered mask with a small pocket-like opening, where users can insert coffee filters for added protection.

"They are washable and reusable," she said, explaining that the doctor in Massachusetts used hers over an N95 mask, to prolong its longevity. In the USA, there is a shortage of N95 masks that can effectively filter out coronavirus.

After Nayeema sent the first batch of masks to Massachusetts, more requests came in as information about her small initiative spread through word of mouth.

"I also gave a couple of masks to my general practitioner," she said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

RMG workers take to streets for arrears

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

Our Correspondent, Savar

payment of the arrears and repair of their houses. Inset, they demonstrated after

reaching School Choumuhona area in the upazila.

Around 400 workers and employees of Mars Design Ltd in Savar's Hemayetpur demonstrated in front of their factory yesterday, demanding overdue salaries.

They said four months' salaries of factory employees and two months' salaries of workers are still pending. Authorities promised multiple times to pay their dues, but to no avail, they said. They only paid a lump sum amount of money through bKash several days ago, said

"During the protest, the factory owner rushed to the spot around 1pm and assured us again of paying our salaries by April 27," said a worker, adding that Industrial Police also requested them to go back.

The demonstrators left the spot around 3pm. Jane Alam Khan, assistant superintendent of Dhaka Industrial Police-1, told The Daily Star that workers kept calm after the assurance.

Khairul Mamun Mintu, organising secretary of Garments Shramik Trade Union Kendra, said they will go for tougher movement if the factory authorities do not follow the deadline.

This correspondent could not reach the factory administration manager Mohammad Nahid as his phone remined switched off.

From farm to doorsteps

Buying directly from farmers, Swapno Chaka delivers to middle-income families in need

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Voluntary organisation Swapno Chaka has taken an initiative to deliver food among middle-income families for free, who cannot publicly seek support over the financial crisis following the coronavirus

But more importantly, the organisation is buying the food items, which include a variety of vegetables, directly from farmers to help them sustain during the crisis

The organisation delivers essentials like rice, lentil, potato and oil among 100 families in different areas of Dhaka between 10am and 4pm daily.

"We have two hotline numbers --01766622202 and 01766622204. Once someone seeks support from us by calling these two numbers, we send the food items through our eight riders," KM Abul Hasnat, founder of Swapno Chaka, told The Daily

Hasnat said the service was primarily introduced in Gulshan in support of the Gulshan Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, but people from all over Dhaka are now calling for support.

Sudip Chakraborty, deputy commissioner of Gulshan Division Police, deputy said, "We are trying our best to come up with innovative ideas with the help of different volunteer groups to provide support to city dwellers so that they can stay home safely.

Asked about helping the middle class, Hasnat said, "We have decided to provide assistance to the middle-income families, who often hesitate to come out to the

streets to seek support."

Regarding financial support, Hasnat said they have a club called "Ninety Six-Ninety Eight", which now has 800 members. "We have collected funds from our friends and are using that to support the families in

SUPPORT FOR FARMERS

Meanwhile, the organisation has also decided to extend its support for the rootlevel farmers who are not getting proper prices for their vegetables during this crisis

Swapno Chaka started buying vegetables directly from the field and they would distribute three kilogrammes of vegetables for free along with rice and lentil to the needy families in Dhaka from today (April 20), said members.

"The farmers are forced to sell their vegetables like tomato, cucumber and bottle gourd for Tk 1 per kg. Many are even unable to sell any," said Razib Al Masud, a member of Swapno Chaka. "We have selected a union in Dinajpur district to collect the vegetables. Through this process, we will be able to help farmers and the needy people," said Razib, also the deputy commissioner of Detective Branch of DMP.

Apart from distributing vegetables, the organisation plans to sell a portion of it to members of the club and friends so that they can cover the expenses, added Razib.

"We have already bought 10 tonnes of vegetables and we would distribute five tonnes of it for free among the needy families and we would sell and deliver the rest after making 20kg packages each," said



A volunteer of the organisation delivering food packages for elderly sex workers in Narayanganj's Kashipur area recently.

PHOTO:

Ferdousi Lina passes away



Actor Ferdousi Ahmed Lina took her last breath on April 18 at the age of 63. She had been suffering from kidney complications for a while and was undergoing dialysis.

Lina first appeared on television in an advert in 1975. A couple of years later, she began her journey as an actor with tele-fiction Kalo Kokil, which aired on Bangladesh Television (BTV). Soon, she made her way to the film industry by playing the role of Obhoya in Bulbul Ahmed's Rajlakshmi Srikanta (1987). Her last film was Devdas (2013), directed by Chashi Nazrul Islam.

She acted in many well-received television drama series, including Gulshan Avenue, Nandini, Ghotok Pakhi Bhai and Neel Jochonai Kalo Shaap. Alongside acting, she also served as an official at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy until 2017.



Officials and employees of KSRM donated a portion of their salary to Chattogram's Deputy Commissioner's fund to assist those who are suffering amid the coronavirus outbreak. The cheque, amounting to Tk 30 lakh, was handed over to DC Md Elias Hossain yesterday by KSRM's General Manager of HR and administration, Syed Nazrul Islam.

Lack of ICU

ICU facilities to the Directorate General of Health Services but received no further instruction.

They also said they have no option but to refer positive patients in critical condition to Sylhet or Dhaka.

Dr Anisur Rahman, assistant director (disease control) of Sylhet divisional health office, said, "We are considering

using private hospitals' ICU facility if needed, but this privilege is not available for the other districts where no such facility is available."

Besides the lack of ICU beds, the region is also suffering from a lack of expertise. "We are in acute shortage of anesthesiologists in Sylhet. Without trained experts, there will be no meaning of installing ICU," he said.

From farm to

FROM PAGE 3 Hasnat, the founder.

The price for a 20kg fresh vegetable package is Tk 400, which includes tomato, eggplant, cucumber, pumpkin, bottle gourds,

bitter melon and green chili, he added.

Like this organisation, a volunteer group called Moghbazar is also working to support the middle class families. "They collect information of in-need families, and then inform the local police to arrange support for them," said Hafiz Al Faruk, additional deputy commissioner of Tejgaon Division police.

An admin of the Facebook page Moghbazar, Arafat Hossain Sifat said they have given a list of 25 volunteers in their area, who will help police in this crisis period.

A simple act

FROM PAGE 3

Expressing her gratitude to Nayeema, pediatrician Mohsina A Karim, from Worcester, Massachusetts sent her a message, where she wrote "I used the mask you made, today. But most importantly it protected my N95 mask, so I can use that one longer."

Naveema, however, remains modest about her contribution.

"Everybody is doing what they can," she said, giving examples of how a fabric shop in her city is distributing free kits to citizens with all the materials needed for making masks.

At present, Naveema is busy sewing masks for a group named Muslim Community Knoxville, which is collecting face masks door-to-door to distribute among healthcare workers.

While cotton masks, like the ones Nayeema is making, are not a substitute for N95 masks, it is still useful for general public, and for doctors who want to prolong the longevity of the specialised masks.

We'll get you

between Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur.

The condition was even worse for many of those Bangladeshi students who had been involved in part-time jobs to meet their educational and living expenses, since their income opportunities had stopped because of the Malaysian government-enforced movement control order (MCO) from March 18, which has since been extended until April 28.

A top official at Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur on April 13 said Dhaka is handling the situation of the stranded students and taking steps regarding their repatriation. "The students are desperate to return to Bangladesh but could not move in the present situation, said the official, wishing not to be named.

Talking about the students' condition, Prof Muhammad Abul Bashar, a Bangladeshi teacher at Malaysian Allied Health Sciences Academy University, said apart from concern over coronavirus infections, a significant number of Bangladeshi students are also facing financial

"Students' safety is the biggest concern. However, their financial condition is also a major worry now since many of them, especially those who study at private universities, heavily depend on their parttime income to meet their expenses," he told this newspaper over

According to a government handout issued yesterday, in an emerging situation, the Malaysian government is providing all kinds of support to Bangladeshi nationals in the country.

They are working with the Bangladesh high commission in Kuala Lumpur in this regard, according to a letter sent by Malaysia's Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Tun Hussein to Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen.

LABOUR COUNSELLOR IN JEDDAH TESTED COVID-19 POSITIVE In another development, Aminul Islam, Bangladesh labour welfare counsellor in Saudi Arabia's Jeddah, has been infected with Covid-19. Expatriates' welfare ministry made the disclosure in a release yesterday.

Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad has prayed for his quick recovery and urged other officials and staff members of Bangladesh missions abroad to take precautionary measures, following coronavirus-related health guidelines while doing their professional

A cadre from Bangladesh Civil Service's 20th batch, Aminul recently worked closely with Saudi authorities since the pandemic emerged, to ensure that some 4,000 Bangladeshi migrants in a Madina dormitory go through Covid-19 tests, according to the press release.

Take us on board

ensuring that incentives reach farmers and that they can harvest Boro paddy before

going for Aush is very important." Jasim Uddin also said the micro-finance NGOs are now passing tough days, with all their money in the hands of their members who are now unable to pay the installments during the shutdown.

He sought government financing for the restart of microfinance operations to help boost rural economic activities.

Nurul Alam Masud, chief executive of Participatory Research & Action Network, said the government is considering Covid-19 only a health issue, and until now only the administration and some partisan people are being involved in tackling it.

"The government should now activate the Disaster Management Act, involve the NGOs at national and grassroots levels for strong coordination and transparency," he

Nayeem Gawher Wahra, member secretary of Disaster Forum, said shutdown is likely to remain in place for some more days, but the economic activities and food production need to continue under certain

Citing the example of Kerala, he said the government could divide the geographical areas in some categories and allow certain level of economic activities in the green zone.

He said health awareness exists mostly among the urban and middle class people, Trust moderated the press conference.

not the grassroots. He suggested using community radio as an effective tool to create mass awareness on social distancing

and hygiene. Abul Haseeb Khan of NIRAPAD said the government assistance has yet to reach many remote areas and availability of food is becoming an issue of concern. With no income, moderate poor are getting into the bracket of ultra poor.

Independent researcher Abdul Latif Khan said UN agencies and INGOs should limit their role to monitoring and providing technical assistance to the local NGOs. And they should provide direct funding to the national and local NGOs as localisation should be promoted to increase cost efficiency amid this global crisis when the developed countries too are affected.

He suggested the government involve NGOs and civil society organisations in implementing the activities at the grassroots level under the government stimulus package declared to tackle Covid-19 impacts.

"To face the post-corona crisis, the economy must continue with their production maintaining the social distancing and local NGOs and micro finance institutions should be allowed for operation as they are the key players in this regard," he said.

Latif suggested increased focus on stronger health system in the rural areas. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury of COAST

Iran partially reopens capital as deaths hit one-month low

Iran allowed some businesses in the capital Tehran to re-open on Saturday as the country's daily death toll from the new coronavirus fell to 73, its lowest in more than a month.

So-called low-risk businesses - including many shops, factories and workshops resumed operations in Tehran, a week after re-opening in the rest of the country, state television said.

where employees handed out gloves to

month, came as official figures showed daily deaths from the new coronavirus fell to 73 on Saturday, the lowest since March

That brought the total death toll to 5,031, health ministry spokesman KianushJahanpour said. Saturday marked the fifth consecutive day with a death toll under 100 in Iran, one of the worst-hit countries in the Middle East.

The total number of people diagnosed with COVID-19, the disease caused by the new virus, reached 80,868 as the country recorded 1,374 new cases in the past 24 hours, the spokesman said on state TV.

Meanwhile, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a fatwa, or religious ruling, that believers may abstain from fasting during the Muslim holy month of

Flash floods may deal

to the travel restrictions and nationwide shutdown, our correspondents in the districts said.

once a year. But flash floods at this time of the year are not uncommon and damage to

the embankment, we will be in deep trouble," Jwati Mohon Das, a farmer of Dashmontapur village in Sunamganj's Jamalganj, told our correspondent in Sylhet. Jwati, who started harvesting on Saturday

at his four-acre farm, urged authorities to take proper care of the protection embankment. In 2017, flash floods submerged hundreds

of acres of paddy fields in Sylhet, Sunamganj, Habiganj, Netrokona, Kishoreganj, Brahmanbaria and Moulvibazar, destroying

Plan for Haor Area" prepared in 2012, "The total rice area of Bangladesh is 11.35 million hectares, of which 15.3 percent falls

accounts for over 50 percent of the country's total production, DAE officials said. FLOOD FORECAST

Citing data from Bangladesh and Indian meteorological departments, EU-based ECMWA and US-based NOAA, the Flood Forecasting and Warning Center said Sylhet, Sunamganj, Netrokona, Habiganj and Moulvibazar may witness between 220mm and 320mm rains.

and Kushiara may see sharp rise in water, it said. On April 23 and 24, the Jadukata, Sarigoain, Manu and Khoyai rivers may flow over what officials call the danger level, resulting in flash floods in all four districts of Sylhet division, it said.

in all major rivers in the northeastern region is increasing, which may continue for 72 hours. It, however, ruled out any flash floods in the next 24 hours.

Department on Friday forecasted that iIsolated heavy rainfall is very likely over Assam and Meghalaya on April 17, 18 and 21; Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura on April 17 and 18 and Sub-Himalayan West Bengal and Sikkim on April 19 and 21, according to its website.

Talking to The Daily Star, Arifuzzaman Bhuiyan, executive engineer at FFWC, said they are forecasting flash floods in the Northern region, especially in areas of Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj and

"It's raining in these areas now-a-days as the monsoon has started. The amount of rain in this region is high this year compared to last year, which may create

of India close to Sylhet, worsening the possible flood situation.

Arifuzzaman said they shared the flood forecast and warning information to the government departments concerned and also to field officials so that early measures to save paddy can be taken.

Saying that heavy rainfall has already started in haor areas, he said, "We have advised farmers to harvest within the next three or four days. Otherwise, they might face trouble.

"We have forecast that the intensity of heavy rainfall might increase in a day or

WHAT GOVERNMENT DOING

The Daily Star that officials have started a war-like situation to complete the harvesting in haor areas.

"After mobilising workers from different parts of the country, especially from the Northern region, we sent around 50,000 people to the haor areas to harvest paddy," the minister said, adding that people were working tirelessly.

Admitting shortage of workers, Srinibas Debnath of DAE said they have already

as possible," he said, adding that officials of the Water Development Board are also working to strengthen embankments that keep floodwater out.

Meanwhile, Ahmad Kaikaus, principal secretary to the prime minister, held a video conference with the officials concerned in

harvesting," Srinibas said.

Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder yesterday told this newspaper that everyone, including the prime minister, was concerned about harvesting the boro paddy, especially in haor areas.

measures," he said.

5 more die

quoting local doctors.

The youth came to his village on Saturday from Chattogram and was quarantined at the school, said Dr Purna Jiban Chakma, residential medical officer (RMO) of Khagrachhari General

Hospital. died yesterday He morning after developing fever, abdominal pain and diarrhoea, he said.

Sample collection from the body for Covid-19 test was underway, the doctor added.

Those who came in contact with the deceased have been asked to stay in quarantine, the RMO said.

In Gopalganj, an 8-yearold girl suffering from fever, cold, cough and respiratory problems died yesterday morning at her house in Tungipara upazila.

Her sample was collected and sent for coronavirus Faridpur our correspondent reported quoting Md Jashim Uddin, health and family planning officer of the upazila.

The girl's father had returned from Dhaka five days ago, said the doctor. The family members

of the victim have kept in home quarantine until the report of her test arrives, AFM Nasim, officer incharge of Tungipara Police Station, said. In Noakhali, a 55-year-

old woman died early yesterday after suffering from fever and breathing problems in Chatkhil upazila, our district correspondent reported quoting doctors. The woman, who was

diabetic patient, was suffering from fever and breathing problem for the last seven days, said Dr Shahidul Islam, RMO of Chatkhil Upazila Health Complex. Samples of the woman,

her son and daughter and a community medical officer of Mohammadpur union have been sent for tests, said the doctor.

The medical officer had provided treatment to the atient, he said.

The woman's son had recently returned after his madrasa in Dhaka was closed following the government announcement countrywide the shutdown, the RMO said.

Administration quarantined 18 families of the area after the death of the woman, said Didarul Alam, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Chatkhil.

In Bogura, a 70-year-old man died, after exhibiting Covid-19-like symptoms in Shajahanpur upazila on Saturday night.

"The patient had a history of chronic lung disease. However, we have collected his samples after his death," Gaosul Azim Chowdhury, civil surgeon of Bogura, told our local correspondent.

"We have locked down some houses and shops yesterday morning after the death of the elderly man, Mahmuda Parvin, upazila nirbahi officer, said.

Cabinet holds wide-ranging

he wrote during his recent visit to North Bengal.

SKELETONS UNEARTHED

NEAR ROKEYA HALL A large number of human skeletons are unearthed from behind Rokeya Hall of the Dhaka University. The skeletons are believed to be of those killed by the Pakistan army on the night of March 25 in 1971. A wristwatch is found among the skeletons, which is identified as having belonged to Nasir Uddin, an employee of Dhaka University who was killed on March 25, 1971. The skeletons are taken to the

Dhaka University Mosque where janaza

prayer is held. After janaza the skeletons

are buried in the university burial ground.

BHUTAN-BANGLADESH **COMMUNIQUE**

seven UP members were suspended on April 12 and April 15 respectively over the same allegation.

Since March 30, law enforcers and civil administration officials have recovered over 310 tonnes of rice, 5 tonnes sugar, 8,048 litres of edible oil and 25 sacks of chickpeas. Besides, 56 people were arrested in different districts in this connection, according to media reports.

The drives for recovering rice and other food, which was meant for the poor, are

continuing in different districts In Rajshahi, law enforcers arrested a local ruling Awami League leader and seized 3.23 tonnes of rice from his home in Godagari upazila's Pakri union on

Saturday evening. The arrestee is Alal Uddin Swapan, president of Pakri union AL and dealer of government's "rice at Tk 10 per kg" programme meant for the poor.

He was appointed to distribute the rice among 500 card holders, who are hit-hard by poverty in the union.

Later, he took rice from the government's warehouses twice -- on March 8 and April 6. But he did not distribute the rice and instead filled the register with fake signatures of poor people. He lied to government officers about distributing rice while storing it in his house to sell illegally at high prices, said Nazrul Islam Sarker, Godagari upazila nirbahi officer (UNO).

On information, a team from the local

Bangladesh and Bhutan declare their firm determination to work unceasingly for stability, progress, peace and prosperity in the region. In a joint communique issued today on the conclusion of a six-day visit by Bhutanese Foreign Minister Lyonpo Tsering to Bangladesh the two governments also declare their determination to adhere to the policy of non-alignment. The foreign ministers of the two countries also express their desire to take positive steps to develop trade between the two countries. It is also noted that the possibility of the development of water resources through joint ventures can open up opportunities

SOURCES: April 21, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and

for fruitful cooperation between the two

3 UP chairmen, nine members administration, led by the UNO, raided

the house and seized the rice. The team

also recovered a register filled with 200 fake signatures. In Kishoreganj, Rab recovered 588 litres of edible oil, one sack of pulse and one sack of sugar of Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) from Sotal bazar

The oil was supposed to be sold among the poor at a low price by a dealer

appointed by the government. On information, a Rab team raided three shops in Sotal bazar and recovered the food items. The law enforcers also arrested four people in this connection.

The arrestees are Md Mahtab Uddin, 48, Md Abu Taher and Md Abdul Hakim, 45, owners of the three shops, and Md Oliullah, 28, the TCB dealer. (Our Correspondents from Rajshahi and

Mymensingh contributed to the story.)

Build good FROM PAGE 12

knock on your next door for help, all the while maintaining the distance," she said. World Health Organisation Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also stressed on this, saying people may feel

"Supporting other people in your community can help you as much as it does them. Check in on neighbours, family and friends. Compassion is a medicine," he said.

stressed and talking to others could help.

that Muslim prayers during Ramadan and for the

Pray at home

subsequent Eid al-Fitr feast should be performed at home if the coronavirus outbreak continues.

Saudi Arabia has reported 8,274 cases of Covid-19, the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus, and 92 deaths so far, the highest among the six Gulf Arab states where the total has reached 24,374 with 156

The Saudi government in mid-March stopped people performing their five daily prayers and the weekly Friday prayer inside mosques as part of efforts to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

Last week, the Prophet's Mosque in the holy city of Medina said it was banning events that dispense evening meals in the mosque to those in need during Ramadan to break their daily fast.

Drug dealer

FROM PAGE 12

In response, people boarding the boat opened fire on the law enforcers, forcing them to retaliate that triggered a gunfight,

he said. Later, they found one bullet-injured person inside the boat while others managed to flee, the CO said, adding that they took him to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared

him dead. BGB recovered two lakh vaba pills worth around Tk 6 crore and a firearm from

the boat, said Faysal. The body was sent to Cox's Bazar General Hospital for autopsy, he said, adding that BGB filed a case in this regard, he added.

Bangladeshi

territory and asked them to leave the place. As they protested saying that they were on their land, the BSF man shot the 16-year-old in his abdomen, Paresh added.

As the villagers rushed to the spot hearing the firing, the BSF man escaped and returned to Indian territory, he further added. The boy passed away at

Rangpur Medical College

Hospital around 8:30pm,

chairman of Chaklahat

confirmed Forhad Hossain,

Union Parishad. Contacted, Lt Col Mamunul Haque, commanding officer of 56th BGB battalion in Nilphamari, said they started investigation and would send a protest note to BSF authorities asking them to explain the incident.

Television footage showed health inspectors visiting shops and reminding a baker that he was required to wear a mask despite working near a hot oven. Others inspectors were seen controlling stores

The re-opening, announced earlier this Ramadan if it threatens their health.

Thousands of people grow paddy on the low-lying wetlands of the Sylhet region just the crop becomes severe at times. "If the flash flood happens and damages

and damaging the crop. According to the government "Master

in the haor areas. Paddy harvested in the boro season

As a result, 11 rivers, including the Surma

In yesterday's bulletin, FFWC said water

Meanwhile, Indian Meteorological

Sunamganj by the end of this week. He said the floods may harm the paddy in vast haor areas if the farmers fail to

harvest them beforehand.

flash floods," he added. Heavy rains may occur in different parts

Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque told

engaged labourers of sand lifting, stone lifting and tea gardens to harvest the paddy. "We will harvest all ripe paddy as soon

Sylhet over the harvesting and other issues "He directed us to take steps for quick

Minister AKM Enamul Hoque Shameem of the Water Resources Ministry in a meeting yesterday suggested transporting workers from one district to another for harvesting paddy.

"We asked field-level authorities to provide necessary farming tools and to ensure enough labourers to harvest the paddy while maintaining health safety

Spainish PM seeks 'flexible' lockdown

REUTERS, Madrid

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has said he would ask parliament for a 15-day extension until May 9 of the lockdown imposed in one of the world's worst coronavirus' outbreaks, but said the restrictions would be more flexible.

"We have left behind the most extreme moments," Sanchez said at a press briefing. But he added: "These achievements are still insufficient and above all fragile. We cannot put them at risk with hasty solutions".

Spain's death toll from the coronavirus rose at a slower pace on Saturday but surpassed 20,000 fatalities, the Health Ministry said. It increased by 565 deaths, down from 585 on Friday, while the number of coronavirus cases rose to 191,726 from 188,068.

Spain began this week to ease a strict lockdown imposed on March 14 by opening up some sectors of the economy, including manufacturing. But most people are still confined to their homes except for essential outings such as food shopping, and not even children are allowed out for exercise.

The country with the third highest coronavirus death toll will move slowly, carefully and progressively towards the "new normality", Sanchez said.

But he warned it would be a complex task and that the economic consequences of the outbreak will be "very negative"

Asked if citizens would be able to have regular summer holidays, the Socialist leader said he hoped so but that he could not give an answer, signalling the uncertainty on the scope of any de-escalation phase.



Anti-lockdown protesters gather at the Texas State Capital building in Austin, Texas, on Saturday. Hundreds protested Saturday in cities across America against coronavirus-related lockdowns -- with encouragement from President Donald Trump -- as resentment grows against the crippling economic cost of confinement.

India's virus cases nears 16,000

Maharashtra allows some economic activity REUTERS, New Delhi/Mumbai

India's Maharashtra state, the country's largest regional economy, will allow a limited number of sectors to resume business today, after a weeks-long shutdown to slow the spread of coronavirus left millions

Maharashtra, home to financial centre Mumbai, has the biggest share of India's caseload of 15,713 infections, including a large number now ripping through its densely-packed slums.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray yesterday told a news conference on that some activity would be permitted in the least-affected parts of the state while observing a strict lockdown in the red zones that have the maximum number of cases.

"We need to start the economic wheels again. We are giving selective permissions from tomorrow, especially in orange zones and green zones," he said, referring to areas with lower levels of infection.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has extended the nationwide lockdown that began late last month until May 3, but the federal government has allowed states to restart activity as amid economic distress in rural areas.

MEGA-ONLINE CONCERT FOR HEALTH WORKERS

\$127M raised for WHO fund

Some of the world's top stars have helped to raise nearly \$128 million for the World Health Organization during the coronavirus pandemic by performing in a concert broadcast globally. Dozens

of celebrities and musicians, including Lady Gaga, Stevie Wonder and the Rolling Stones, took part in the 8-hour show called 'One World: Together At Home." Global Citizen, an international

advocacy group that organized the event, said early Sunday on Twitter that \$127.9 million had been pledged Following the live broadcast,

Global Citizen tweeted: "\$127.9 million for COVID-19 relief. That is the power and impact of One World: #TogetherAtHome.

Lady Gaga responded to this tweet,

saying: "I am so humbled to have been a part of this project.'

The proceeds will be given to the WHO's Covid-19 Solidarity Response



The concert was divided into two parts, a 6-hour "pre-show" and a main 2-hour show hosted by Jimmy Fallon,

Jimmy Kimmel and Stephen Colbert. "To all of our frontline healthcare workers, we are with you. Thank you for being there for us," an on-screen caption read at the start of the show.

Those who performed also

added their tributes, with Lady Gaga expressing her thanks for medical workers who are "putting their lives at risk for us right now. Other musicians also spoke about

the need for solidarity during the pandemic. Before performing "Lean on Me" in tribute to his late friend Bill Withers, Stevie Wonder said: "During hardships like this, we have to lean on each other for help."

Taylor Swift, Elton John, Paul

McCartney and Jennifer Lopez were among others who gave performances from their homes.

"Tonight, through the universal language of music, we salute the bravery and sacrifice of health heroes and others," said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in a clip played during the broadcast. "And please join our call for a global ceasefire to focus on our common enemy -- the virus."

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



DEATH TOLL CROSSES 160,000 The worldwide death toll from the novel

coronavirus pandemic rose to 160,952 vesterday. according to a tally compiled by Johns Hopkins University at 1000 GMT. More than 2,331,099 declared cases have been registered in 193 countries and territories since the epidemic first emerged in China in December. In the United States, now the epicentre of the pandemic, the death toll stood at 39,090 with 735,287

infections. Italy is the next most-affected country with 23,227 deaths from 175,925 infections. It is followed by Spain with 20,639 fatalities from 194,416 confirmed infections, France with 19,349 deaths and 152,978 infections and Britain with 15,498 deaths from 115,317 cases.

'LOWEST' DEATHS IN NY

New York state, the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic in the United States, has experienced its lowest one-day death toll in two weeks, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced Saturday. Cuomo said 540 people had died in his state of 20 million inhabitants in the preceding 24 hours, and he suggested New York may now be on the downslope after a recent plateau in deaths.

ISRAEL EASES RESTRICTIONS

Israel on Saturday approved some easing to its tight coronavirus restrictions while pointedly avoiding announcing the first stage of an exit from lockdown. In a televised address, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu outlined "a responsible and gradual" plan which would allow the return of some workers to offices and industry. He also promised to reopen some high street shops and allow a return to school for children with special educational needs, in groups of up to three.

ONLY 8 CASES IN S KOREA

South Korea yesterday reported single digit new coronavirus cases for the first day in two months with eight new infections. Of the new cases, five were imported from overseas. The figure brings its total infections to 10,661.

'CAPTAIN TOM' RAISES \$31M

Captain Tom Moore, a 99-year-old British war veteran, has now raised more than 25 million pounds (\$31.3 million) for the health service by walking 100 laps of his garden. The World War Two veteran, who has used a walking frame with wheels since breaking his hip, set himself the target of walking the 25 metres around his garden 100 times before his 100th birthday on April 30. He completed his task on Thursday.



coronavirus, in Kathmandu, yesterday.

Several killed in Libya clashes

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Libya's internationally-recognised government has said its forces have killed eight fighters loyal to eastern-based renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar.

The announcement by military spokesman Mohamed Gnunu on Saturday came as forces aligned with the United Nations-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) ramped up their offensive against Haftar's forward bases in western Libva.

GNA troops have in recent days retaken a string of strategic cities located west of Tripoli, including Sabratha, Surman and al-Ajaylat.

Libya, a large oil producer, has been engulfed in chaos since 2011 when longtime leader Muammar Gaddafi was killed in a NATO-backed uprising.

It is now split between two rival administrations: The Tripoli-based GNA, led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, and the House of Representatives allied to Haftar and his self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA).

Pakistan bows to clerics' pressure

Pakistan has lifted restrictions on congregational prayers at mosques, but coronavirus in the country, a statement said on Saturday.

the world, imposed the restrictions less than a month ago, allowing only

President Arif Alvi and religious leaders, comes less than a week before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

mosque visitors to wear masks. Pakistan has registered 7,638 cases of the virus and 143 deaths and health experts warn that congregations pose the biggest threat to the

According to the statement it was also decided worshippers would maintain a 6-foot (2-metre) distance from each other instead of the

usual Muslim practice of praying shoulder-to-shoulder and that mosque administrations will disinfect premises regularly.

Case against two editors

In the case statement, Mominul said the authorities recovered 68 sacks of rice, meant to be sold among the low-income people at Tk 10 per kg, in the upazila's Palashbari a couple of days ago.

The next day, Upazila Food Controller Nikhil Chandra Barman filed a case with the same police station accusing six people, including local rice dealer Amirul Islam, his brother Jamirul Islam and wife Kulsum Akhter, in this regard.

"I have no connection with the accused and they are not my relatives. But the two news portals ran two stories linking me to the misappropriation and claiming that the accused were my relatives... I asked their local correspondents to run a rejoinder, which they did not," he said.

He said one of his brothers Aminul Islam, not Amirul, is the chairman of Boro Palashbari Union Parishad.

In the case statement, Mominul also said the two other accused, Shawan and Rahim, uploaded two posts on Facebook branding him a rice thief.

He said the accused tarnished his image and that of his party and defamed him by spreading false and fabricated information involving him in the misappropriation.

Habibul Haque Prodhan, officerin-charge of Baliadangi Police Station, told our local correspondent that the case was filed under section 25/29/31 of the Digital Security Act and that they were looking into the matter.

CMSD'S THREAT The Central Medical Stores Depot

sue those publishing reports and spreading information "defaming" the health minister, his son, the health services secretary and the director general of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) over the supply of ordinary masks in the name of N95 ones.

In an advertisement published in newspapers, CMSD said the persons were in no way involved in the purchase and that the propaganda was "intentional" and had "vested interests". "It is being warned the perpetrators

will be charged under the Digital

Security Act if they do not stop such

actions," said the advertisement published on April 17. Supply of the ordinary masks in the name of N95 masks stirred protest and condemnation, mostly from

doctors, on social media. Many doctors believed that the supply of substandard masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was leading to Covid-19 infection among healthcare service providers. DOCTOR SERVED SHOW-CAUSE

NOTICE A doctor at Noakhali 250-bed General Hospital has been served a showcause notice for one of his Facebook posts in which he criticised the health

secretary for not providing N95 masks

and PPÉs to physicians. Farid Uddin Mohammad Chowdhury, deputy director of the hospital, issued the notice on Saturday asking Abu Taher, an assistant surgeon (anesthetist), to respond in writing

within three days. In his Facebook post, Taher wrote the standard of PPEs and masks.

neither he nor his colleague got any N95, KN95 or FFP2 masks. "Then why the health secretary was lying that the masks have been distributed at hospitals?" he wrote.

He also alleged that only two sets of PPE were given to his department with eight employees in the last one month. During that period, he carried out more than 150 surgeries, he said.

Talking to The Daily Star, the doctor said, "I only wrote the facts... The health ministry's secretary was saying there was a reserve of N95 and KN95 masks at the hospitals. We haven't been given any. Where do those go?" Taher said as a citizen of the

country he has every right to express his opinion. He said he would reply to the notice. The issuance of the notice

sparked protest among the medical community. Many took to social media to criticise it. NURSES ASKED NOT TO TALK TO

Meanwhile, the government has asked nurses not to speak to the media after some nurses reported shortage of food for health workers at Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government

staffers under the Department of Nursing and Midwifery cannot even speak publicly without permission from the higher authorities in line with the Public Service Act, its Director General Siddika Akter said in an office order on Friday. The order came after a number of media outlets, quoting nurses, published reports on the shortage of food and questioning

Lifts limit on mosque congregations

AFP, Islamabad

put in place a host of safety conditions to avert the further spread of the The South Asian nation, the second most populous Muslim country in

three to five people at mosques for prayers. The decision to lift restrictions, taken in a meeting between Pakistani

"Mosques are given permission conditional to taking due precautions," a statement following the meeting said, adding that it was mandatory for

limited healthcare infrastructure of a country of more than 200 million

The government had been under pressure to reverse the congregation restrictions, and clashes between mosque attendees and police had been reported in Karachi, the country's largest city.

Addendum-1

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Directorate General of Health Services

Office of the Director, Stores & Supplies Central Medical Stores Depot 30, Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Sharoni, Tejgaon, Dhaka-1208

Corrigendum to the IFT

IFT No. CMSD/GR-1909/ICT/2019-2020/D-10/89 dated: 04-03-2020 Procurement of Patient Bed, Acrylic

The bidding document & Invitation for Tender IFT No. CMSD/GR-1909/ICT/2019-2020/D-10/89, dated: 04-03-2020 is hereby amended to read as under:

IFT Para No. 9-11

36.1:

42.2:

Tender

submission date

opening date

Clause Reference	Existing entries	Amended entries								
IFT Para No. 9: Tender last selling	19-04-2020 (During office	12-05-2020 (During office hours)								
date	hours)	100 12 mg 1 12 20 4 1 1 7 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1								
IFT Para No. 10: Tender closing date	Time: 11:00am 20-04-2020	Time: 11:00am 13-05-2020								
and time										
IFT Para No. 11: Tender opening	Time: 11:30am 20-04-2020	Time: 11:30am 13-05-2020								
date and time										
Section-2: Tender Data Sheet										

11:00 Hours Bangladesh Standard Time

11:30 Hours Bangladesh Standard Time

(BST=GMT+6hrs.) on 20-04-2020

(BST=GMT+6hrs.) on 20-04-2020

Brigadier General Md. Shahidullah

11:00 Hours Bangladesh Standard

Time (BST=GMT+6hrs.) on 13-05-2020

11:30 Hours Bangladesh Standard

Time (BST=GMT+6hrs.) on 13-05-2020

Director, Stores & Supplies DGHS, CMSD, Tejgaon, Dhaka Tel: 9129231; Fax: 9126547

e-mail: cmsdstore@dhaka.net

ASIAN MARKETS



DHAKA MONDAY APRIL 20, 2020, BAISHAKH 7, 1427 BS o starbusiness@thedailystar.net

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

CURRENCIES

83.95

90.29

104.15 11.73

Friday Closings

SHANGHAI

SINGAPORE

Kamal marshalling development partners to help with COVID-19 wreckage

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

STOCKS

CSCX

DSEX

COMMODITIES

Bangladesh has turned to multilateral lenders in earnest to pull the country out of the wreckage of COVID-19, which has left the country's tremendous growth momentum of recent years coming crashing down.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal is leading the country's efforts to mobilise the funds. He got down to work in the first week of April, writing to all the multilateral development and bilateral partners seeking whatever support they can extend.

On Thursday, he held a meeting with Hartwig Schafer, vice president for South Asia of the World Bank, over video-conferencing, on the sidelines of the virtual World Bank-International Monetary Fund (IMF) Spring Meetings. The three-day meeting ended on

Kamal sought budget support from the Washington-based multilateral lender.

The WB has already allocated \$100 million to Bangladesh for health services and is set to provide another \$250 million by June this

The government had been in talks to get the \$250 million by September. Now, it has



requested to make the funds available by June. Bangladesh has also requested the WB to give its consent to three projects involving a

total of \$1.07 billion.

The WB has asked Bangladesh to send the list of the projects by the first week of May following approval from the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnec) if they are to be placed in the board meeting of the lender in June.

As the Ecnec meeting is not taking place owing to the lockdown, the finance ministry would take the approval from the prime minister about the projects and send them to

The government has sought \$500 million from the WB's global fund dedicated to fighting the impact of coronavirus.

"We have sought \$1 billion in additional budget support from the WB for the next fiscal year as we will need money to help the economy recover," Kamal told The Daily Star vesterday.

The government will focus on implementing the annual development programme to create jobs as well as implement the stimulus

Among the development partners, the Asian Development Bank will release

\$600 million immediately. Kamal negotiated for \$100 million a few days ago and for \$500 million yesterday.

The finance minister is due to hold a video-conferencing with ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa today.

The government would look for avenues for whatever support it can get from the \$6.5 billion



Govt's request for funds from multilateral lender



Budget support: \$**1.75**b Projects loan: \$1b



Budget

support:

\$**700**m

Health services: \$**100**m **Budget support:** \$**500**m



Budget support: \$**500**m

The IMF has made available about \$50 billion through its rapid-disbursing emergency financing facilities for low-income and emerging market countries that could potentially seek support. Of the IMF fund, \$10 billion is available at zero interest for the poorest members.

Bangladesh has sought \$700 million in the first tranche against the country's quota.

The IMF and the finance minister would hold the negotiation this week and the proposal may be placed at the board in May, said a finance ministry official.

The crisis lender has assured Bangladesh of another \$700 million in the next fiscal

Kamal is seeking \$500 million each from the Islamic Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank and would hold talks with the presidents of the development partners over video-conferencing between April 25 and April 30.

Bangladesh is not only looking for monetary support from the development partners. For example, it is seeking any kinds of supports, including those for the health sector, from the bilateral partners, which have also been affected by the COVID-19.

Bangladesh has turned to the development partners as the country has been hit hard by the coronavirus impacts.

The virus has forced the government to go on lockdown since March 26, shutting factories and industries, suspending transport movement and enforcing social Owing to coronavirus, the GDP growth

would be 2 per cent growth this year, the lowest since 1988, according to the IMF.

Nagad to fall in line finally

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM and AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

ad, a mobile financial service provider of the Bangladesh Post Office and a private entity, has received an interim licence from the Bangladesh Bank, as part of its push towards digital money amid the pandemic. The central bank would carry out

inspections on the operator before awarding the final licence, a senior official of the BB's payment systems department told The Daily Star on Sunday. The development comes after the

fledgling MFS provider applied to the central bank in March for a full-fledged licence, prompted by a BB move that left it hamstrung.

On March 5, the BB asked banks to stop the operation of trust-cum-settlement accounts maintained by organisations that are giving MFS and digital wallet services without its approval.

Subsequently, several banks suspended such accounts of Nagad, making it difficult for the company to run its operations.

Before the temporary licencing was

that was not running as per BB rules.

It even didn't follow the "one national identification card per account allowing it to attract a huge number of customers, industry people say.

As part of its bid to get the full-fledged licence from the BB, Nagad will now have to cut the additional transaction limit it enjoys compared with other MFS operators.

Currently, a user of Nagad can transact Tk 2.5 lakh per day under the Postal Act, whereas it is only Tk 30,000 for the other MFS providers.

Tanvir Ahmed Mishuk, managing director of Nagad, welcomed for those who operate as per BB rules. the BB move, saying the operator's existing offers would continue as the central bank hasn't imposed any restriction on them.

"When the Bangladesh Bank finalises the guideline and if any restriction is imposed, we will comply with that," he told The

Daily Star yesterday. The interim licence did not mention any

of the postal department.

"If we are asked to cut the transaction ceiling, we will do that," he added. a senior BB official However,

contradicted both Mishuk and Bhadra, saying Nagad has to follow the rules and regulations applicable for other MFS providers.

"If the operator doesn't follow the rules, it would face the music," he added.

Earlier, a good number of MFS providers requested the central bank to figure out the problem, as separate transaction limits were unfair

The BB also raised questions at various 2018. platforms, including the finance ministry

about Nagad's service delivery process, while the Anti-Corruption Commission pointed out that the company's accounts are used for illegal transactions because of the higher limit and lax compliance.

The issues were discussed at several

given, Nagad was the only MFS operator conditions, said SS Bhadra, director-general meetings of the central bank, the ACC and the finance ministry.

However, Mishuk said the operator working with the Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) of the BB and the BFIU hasn't received any complaints against Nagad. The BB will have to take approval

from its board before granting the fullfledged licence to Nagad as only bankled model for MFS is now followed in Bangladesh.

Nagad is a joint venture between the Bangladesh Post Office and Third Wave Technologies. The postal department owns a 51 per cent stake.

It rolled out commercial service on March 26 last year although the operator has been in operation since September

Riding on the huge transaction limit benefit, Nagad made a good start and has

so far added 1.84 crore active accounts. A few hundred crores of taka change

hands every day through the digital platform but it is not reflected in the central

FMCGs playing their part in flattening the curve

Budget

support:

\$**500**m

In the fight against coronavirus, two important facets have come out to help protect against the highly contagious, lethal pathogen: hand hygiene and the hygiene of frequently touched surfaces.

And fast-moving consumer goods companies are racing against time to roll out products or ramp up production of existing disinfectant products to make the routine convenient and hassle-free. Last week, Indian FMCG Marico announced its forav into

the hand sanitiser category, whose demand has escalated all around the globe following the outbreak of coronavirus. If soap and water are not available, health professionals

say hand sanitiser can be used as long as it contains at least 60 per cent alcohol and the gel is squirted onto the hands and rubbed briskly all over them for about 20 seconds.

Called the Mediker SafeLife, the hand sanitiser, which comes in two sizes of 40ml and 75ml costing Tk 100 and Tk 150, will be sold at a discounted retail price for six months and any profit coming from its sales will be contributed towards prime minister's relief fund, said a statement.

least we can do to help consumers protect themselves during the COVID-19 crisis," said Ashish Gopal, managing director of Marico Bangladesh. Mediker SafeLife, which has 70 per cent alcohol, is one

"We believe that as a responsible corporate this is the

of Marico's quickest launches, brought to the forefront in record-time, to address the surging consumer demand given the current pandemic, the statement added

Marico has also brought out a hand wash by the same

In a similar vein, local FMCG giant ACI accelerated the rollout of Savlon Disinfectant Spray to easily remove

germs from high contact surfaces such as doorknobs, fridge handles, kitchen counters, switches, furniture, sofa and so on -- areas through which germs are transmitted and can increase chances of infection.

"This product is a new brand idea in Bangladesh," said Syed Alamgir, managing director of ACI Consumer Brands.

The easy-to-use spray, which comes in cans of 125ml and 300ml costing Tk 150 and Tk 350 respectively, kills germs around the home, including virus, bacteria, moulds and fungi. It also kills commonly contagious viruses such as H1N1, Rotavirus and Norovirus.

The high-contact areas need to be sprayed once and allowed to air dry; there is no need for a subsequent wipe down. Along with bringing the new products, ACI has also ramped up its hand sanitiser production by 8 to 10 times, Alamgir added

The other local companies also ramped up their productions of hand sanitisers.

Square Toiletries is now making 15 to 20 tonnes of hand sanitisers daily, up from 10 tonnes last month, said Jesmin Zaman, head of marketing of Square Toiletries, which sells Sepnil' brand hand sanitisers.

The demand for hand sanitiser hit the roof following the announcement of first confirmed cases of coronavirus in Bangladesh on March 8.

So hysterical was the demand that supermarkets had to take them off the shelves and keep them at the counters and ration them to one each customer.

The demand though has levelled off after the announcement of countrywide shutdown from March 26 as people are staying indoors and have access to soap and water, she said.

Exporters are a bundle of nerves now

Bangladesh's export earnings await a massive blow in the coming months as the global coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc on orders and shipment while sending factories to a near standstill, exporters and experts said.

Earnings already took a hit in March, plunging 18.29 per cent year-on-year to \$2.73 billion, because of a drop in shipments of major commodities like garment, leather and leather goods and frozen foods, according to the Export Promotion Bureau.

"The impact of the pandemic was not reflected on the export figures of March as those were based on the shipments made earlier," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of Policy Research Institute.

The coronavirus outbreak started affecting production from the beginning of April when most of the industrial units in Bangladesh were shut down.

Mansur's observation was aligned with the outcome between April 1 and April 15, when apparel exports nosedived 83.74 per cent to \$194 million from a year earlier, according to data from Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Shipment of garment, which accounts for about 84 per cent of Bangladesh's total exports, declined 26.70 per cent year-on-year to \$1.97 billion in March

The pandemic started affecting apparel export as most retailers kept their shutters down in the US and Europe, and cancelled work orders worth more than \$3.11 billion so far. The worst-affected countries such as Italy, the UK, the US, France, Spain and Germany are the prime destinations of Bangladeshi garment items. The US imports apparel items worth \$6

billion a year from Bangladesh, while Germany also sources almost the same amount. The country exports about \$3 billion worth of garment items to Italy and the UK each, and .5 billion to Spain and France each.

Garment,

said Bangladesh should keep exporting its Association of Bangladesh, said international products, if necessary, on a limited scale, as there is a demand for Bangladeshi products in the international markets.

Bangladesh can resume production at its factories after April 25 by taking appropriate safety measures as many countries like Spain and China have opened their factories and markets, he added.

Saiful Islam, president of the Leathergoods Under the present circumstances, Mansur and Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters

EXPORTS AT A GLANCE

Exports dropped **18**pc to \$**2.73**b in Mar

leather and frozen foods received a blow

Earnings fell **6.24**pc to \$**28.97**b in Jul-Mar

Garment shipment declined **7.12**pc to \$**24.10**b in the nine months

Exports will drop further for coronavirus pandemic



buyers have cancelled work orders worth \$316 million so far.

Shipment of leather and leather goods, the second biggest export industry after garments, fell 10.78 per cent to \$688.51 million in the July-March period of the fiscal year, while the sector fetched a total of \$1.02 billion in fiscal

"We will face further challenges in the international markets as our rivals like China, Vietnam and Cambodia are opening their factories gradually," Islam told The Daily Star over the phone. Since the factories in Bangladesh are

closed now, buyers are not even placing any queries, he said, adding: "So, the future is bleak for the sector." The total export receipts in March were

28.61 per cent short of the monthly target at \$3.82 billion. The overall exports earnings fell 6.24 per cent year-on-year to \$28.97 billion during the July-March period of the fiscal year. The amount is 14.52 per cent below the periodic target of \$33.89 billion. During the period, the shipment of frozen

foods declined 3.91 per cent to \$402.6 million, agricultural products 0.1 per cent to \$721.98 million, terry towel 29.12 per cent to \$30.04 million and home textile 7.59 per cent to \$598.19 million.

However, the shipment of jute and jute goods rose 23.49 per cent to \$775.63 million, pharmaceuticals 6.50 per cent to \$106.22 million and footwear 25.17 per cent to \$242.07 million.

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Ensuring food security during pandemic



AHSAN H MANSIIR

It is believed that around 1.3 crore people have become jobless in the country so far due to the ongoing global coronavirus pandemic and the resulting lockdown.

Over a two-week period, the poverty rate in Bangladesh also shot up to about 30-35 per cent range from an estimated 20 per cent plus level in 2019.

Much of the remarkable gains achieved on the poverty reduction front over the more than one decade have been reversed, at least temporarily, in just a few weeks.

Thus, ensuring food security for the newly poor households, along with the previously poor and vulnerable ones, is a major challenge for the government.

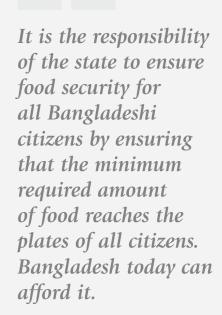
On the overall supply side, although Bangladesh was almost self-sufficient in terms of main staple rice in 2019, we are still skating on thin ice because any major or even moderate shocks like a flood at national and regional levels or cyclone can make the supply situation precarious, as we have seen very recently in 2018 and earlier in 2008.

The coronavirus-induced mass unemployment and the resulting income loss is also likely to create a major mismatch between effective demand (backed by purchasing power) and the overall supply of food, including rice, vegetables, fruits, fish, eggs and poultry, milk and livestock.

Managing the mismatch will be critical for ensuring food security for all.

In the past, in our battle for food security, we generally dealt with supply shocks of various origins, and none of those events was associated with a concurrent massive nationwide demand shock as it is happening this time.

This makes the current situation



unprecedented

Complicating the matter further, there is the nationwide lockdown that is disrupting not only normal life but also the flow of essential foods from farmers and producers to the ultimate consumers across Bangladesh.

Under these circumstances, food security can only be ensured if: (i) we have enough domestic production of essential foods to meet domestic demand; (ii) we ensure that normal marketing chains continue to operate effectively and uninterrupted to bring foods desperate moment for the farmers.

However, the problem is lockdown -- which does not allow the conventional mechanism for the flow of workers to function.

The intervention of the government is urgently needed.

If the reported shortfall in boro acreage target is true, which should be verified independently and not through the Department of Agricultural Extension that has the reputation of overstating the acreage and output, the government should make

Most business transactions including the payment of salaries are being held up due to the closure of banks.

Businesses cannot go on without payment of taxes, salaries, payments for transportations, and deposits and withdrawals of cash in banks.

Most mobile financial service (MES) agents

and deposits and withdrawals of cash in banks.

Most mobile financial service (MFS) agents
cannot function without cash liquidity at

Ensuring the supply of essential products stuck at Chittagong port, which are already paid for, cannot wait -- these essential imports

Only through effectively functioning market networks the farmers will be able to get necessary price support and that is the best incentive for ensuring future food supply.

The distribution network has to reach up to the consumers while maintaining appropriate coronavirus-related norms and practices.

If we look at Dhaka, the heavy-handed approach by the law-enforcement agencies to close down all retail outlets of essentials by 6 pm is self-defeating.

Why cannot super shops like Shwapno and Agora or corner groceries remain open for 24 hours?

That will allow people to maintain the norms of social distancing better by shopping at their convenient times.

If anyone visits supermarkets in Gulshan area, he/she will find at least 40-50 people standing in line in front of the store and a crowded back to back people at the cash

Why should it be like that? What sort of social distancing is this?

All this crowding is happening because few groceries are open and the very short store opening hours.

Around the world, grocery stores and pharmacies continue to remain open for long hours so that people can go out any time and get their essentials while complying with the norms of social distancing.

What we are doing is further diminishing the level of demand that is already diminished.

All medical facilities, pharmacies and essential grocery stores must be allowed to remain open as long as it is commercially viable.

To ensure food security for all, we have look at the demand side along with the supply side considerations noted above.

With tens of millions of people unemployed in the last several weeks, most of them will not have the purchasing power to buy the food in the required amounts.

Just ensuring supplies at the right prices would not be enough to bring foods to the plates of hungry jobless households.

Massive income or food support programmes will be immediately needed to bring food to their mouth.

Otherwise, the resulting collapse in demand will keep crores of people hungry and starved, while agricultural product prices will collapse at the farm level and farmers will suffer badly.

There will be widespread hunger and malnutrition, which is not a desirable outcome under any circumstances.

It is the responsibility of the state to ensure food security for all Bangladeshi citizens by ensuring that the minimum required amount of food reaches the plates of all citizens. Bangladesh today can afford it.

But, for that to materialise the government has to provide income support for the millions unemployed and remain extremely vigilant on both supply and demand sides.

We have to ensure that no food -- be it rice, fruits, vegetables, milk or eggs -- is wasted while millions remain hungry.

while millions remain hungry.

We must keep the marketing chains open as part of essential services and work

towards removing the barriers to efficient marketing through better coordination among policymakers and law enforcement agencies. We have to let the marketing chains work

we have to let the marketing chains work uninterrupted supported by inflows of liquidity from financial institutions.

All necessary coordination issues related to income support, availability of monetary liquidity and opening up of the marketing chains must be resolved urgently to ensure food security.

The author is the executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh



near the neighbourhoods of consumers; and (iii) all citizens have the minimum income to meet their minimum food requirements, which in itself is a major undertaking.

A review of the current supply situation for rice indicate a generally satisfactory condition except for two concerns: (i) because of lower rice price last year, the farmers have reduced the cropping area for boro cultivation by about 10 per cent, which is likely to contribute to a corresponding shortfall in realising the boro output target, the most important source of rice in Bangladesh; and (ii) boro cultivation in haor areas has already started from mid-April, and if this crop is not quickly harvested it may be significantly lost to early flooding in those areas, which is a normal phenomenon.

The haor areas produce about 20 per cent of the marketable surplus of rice and the farmers generally depend on migrant labors from Northern and Southern parts of Bangladesh to complete the harvesting.

The government is reportedly preparing to send a few hundred harvesters to the haor areas, which is a commendable move. But it should be executed very quickly to salvage the CTOD.

Also, there may still be a need for about 500,000 guest labours to complete the harvesting in haor areas.

The government has to make sure that the workers are there when needed. This is an opportune moment for the workers and a hours.

advance arrangements for imports to cover the projected shortfall.

Outside the main crop of rice, if we look at the agriculture sector with a broader perspective, we are afraid of a massive shortfall in supplies despite abundant production at the farm level.

This is happening with vegetables, fruits, eggs and milk.

A few days back, I was watching an award-winning farmer from Gaibandaha crying on television because he could not sell his tomatoes for even Tk 3 per kg -- whereas tomatoes are being sold at Tk 90 a kg in Dhaka.

We are hearing stories of watermelons and bungees rotting in the fields because those cannot be transported to major cities and urban centres.

Egg price has shot up to more than Tk 150 per dozen, whereas the poultry farmers are getting only a fraction of that.

Hundreds of thousands of litres of milk are

being wasted every day due to lack of transport and local processing, whereas people are suffering from malnutrition. Hundreds of thousands of containers are

Hundreds of thousands of containers are piled up at the Chittagong port, waiting to be shipped to domestic markets, while Ramadan is less than two weeks away

Most bank branches across Bangladesh, including in district towns, are closed and those that are open are only open for 2-3

must reach the markets across Bangladesh before Ramadan.

Special initiatives must be taken to ship containers from our international ports to domestic destinations and to keep banks and MFS outlets open for the financing of essential business transactions.

We cannot afford to continue with this kind of induced market failure and liquidity shortage for long.

The season of mangoes, lychees and jackfruits are coming next month.

The livelihoods of millions of growers would depend on selling these fruits across Bangladesh and the fruits will also provide vital nutrients to all of us in the coming months.

We cannot afford to let these delicious and nutritious fruits rot.

Emergency measures have to be taken to allow the market mechanisms to function while complying with the basic norms of social distancing and associated hygiene.

We just cannot shut down all our village markets and prevent the middlemen from collecting the essential agricultural products from farmers.

Continuing to shut down local agricultural

markets and transportation will ruin our farmers as well as consumers.

We have to remember, farmers do not want credit, they simply want the right price for their products.

Indian state allows some economic activity after weeks-long shutdown

REUTERS, New Delhi/Mumbai

India's Maharashtra state, the country's largest regional economy, will allow a limited number of sectors to resume business on Monday, after a weeks-long shutdown to slow the spread of coronavirus left millions out of work.

Maharashtra, home to financial centre Mumbai, has the biggest share of India's caseload of 15,713 infections, including a large number now ripping through its denselypacked slums.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray told a

news conference on Sunday that some activity would be permitted in the least-affected parts of the state while observing a strict lockdown in the red zones that have the maximum number of cases.

"We need to start the economic wheels again. We are giving selective permissions from tomorrow, especially in orange zones and green zones," he said, referring to areas with lower levels of infection.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has extended the nationwide lockdown that began late last month until May 3, but the federal government has allowed states to restart activity as amid economic distress in rural

Farming, highway construction and manufacturing will be allowed in hinterland areas not heavily affected by the virus this week, the federal government said.

Thousands of migrant workers fled the big cities for their homes in the countryside, unable to pay for rent or food after the shutdown went into force.

But Delhi's chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal,

said there would be no easing of rules in the

capital, which accounts for over a third of cases.

"Currently, lockdown is necessary. No relaxations should be given in the hotspots in the city," he told a press conference, adding he would review the situation later in the

month.

There are fears that South Asia, home to a fifth of the world's population, could become a major new front in the global war against COVID-19. A big outbreak would overwhelm poorly funded health systems across the

On Sunday, the Indian government also revoked permission for e-commerce firms like Flipkart and Amazon.com Inc to supply non-

essential goods during the lockdown.

The decision came after the Confederation of All India Traders, which represents millions of small brick-and-mortar businesses, said allowing online firms to deliver non-essential products would give them an unfair

Trade Minister Piyush Goyal welcomed the federal government's decision. "This will create a level playing field for small retailers," he said.



Birds gather on the Chowpatty beach, typically filled with crowds, during lockdown in Mumbai, India.

 $8 \mid \,$ The Haily Star



LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA MONDAY APRIL 20, 2020, BAISHAKH 7, 1427 BS

Our abject failure in maintaining social distance

Cooperation of all, including religious leaders, necessary

" HILE people around the world have been meticulously trying to maintain social distance in a bid to fight the deadly coronavirus, it seems many people in Bangladesh just couldn't care less about it to contain further spread of the virus. The result is, we are noticing an alarming rise in the number of new infections and deaths from the disease across the country. After the first few Covid-19 cases were detected in the country, the first major risk of spreading the virus across the country was taken when the government announced a national holiday from March 26, before the start of which people in their thousands left the capital for their village homes. The second major risk was taken when hundreds of garment workers were made to come back to the city to join work at the beginning of this month. We have just started to witness the results of these two incidents. And what we have witnessed last Saturday—when thousands of people from different corners of the country gathered at Brahmanbaria's Sarail upazila to attend the namaz-ejanaza of a religious leader, defying government orders to maintain social distancing—could be described as the third major incident that would further spread the virus among

Apart from these unfortunate events, shutdown and social distancing measures taken by the government are often being ignored by people in general. Every day, hundreds of people gather at local bazaars, which are believed to be the hotspots of spreading and contracting the virus, to buy daily necessities and poor people queue up on the street to buy subsidised food without maintaining the safe distance. Unfortunately, the law enforcement agencies could do little to make people keep a safe distance from one another and also could not stop people from coming out of home unnecessarily.

And then there are thousands of garment workers who have been protesting on the streets for days to get their due salaries, risking their own lives, but are not getting anything except assurances from the garment owners.

We hope the government will be strict enough to enforce the shutdown and social distancing measures with the help of the law enforcement agencies. It should also seek the cooperation of civil society, including the religious bodies, to ensure that no social gatherings, religious or otherwise, take place in the country during this time of a national health crisis.

Novel innovation to protect against novel coronavirus

Put the cheap technology to use auickly

T is true that during the worst of times the best in us emerge. And that is what we have seen in many of the people in Bangladesh in various ways—the doctors in the lead, despite acute shortage of personal protective gear. And that includes expatriate Bangladeshis too.

The incremental rise in the number of people affected by COVID-19 is alarming, even more so in Bangladesh. We had been caught off-guard and the entire system, nationally and internationally has been overwhelmed by the disease. Unfortunately, along with the severe crunch in high-end medical equipment, the low-end materials like the PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) have also run out in most countries. And Bangladesh is feeling the crunch too. Given the rate of usage of this one-time use kit, no wonder every country is running out, or will soon run out, of it.

In the face of the frightening prospect of PPE getting exhausted, with prospect of replenishment grim, and given the mad rush all over the world to stockpile as many of these as possible, a Bangladeshi expatriate doctor living in Australia has come out with a novel idea of using germicidal ultraviolet radiation (UV-C) to disinfect and rapidly sterilise PPEs rendering them fit for reuse. His very welcome effort has crossed the first hurdle; the administration has approved the project with utmost speed. We would call upon the administration to speed up the next phase and instruct all concerned to put to use the new method of steriliasation. The authorities should also provide all necessary assistance to the hospitals as well as the team led by Dr Arifur Rahman, whose innovative idea it is, to implement the project.

Let us be under no illusion that the situation is foreboding for Bangladesh. There is a fear that if the number of infected by the virus increases, and with the frontline fighters—the doctors, nurses and other categories of health care workers—without protective gear, the situation can be more overwhelming than we expect. Here is an inexpensive technology that can save many lives. Put it to use without delay.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net Beware of swindlers

It has recently come to my notice that a dangerous group may be roaming our streets posing as emergency service personnel such as medical staff and law enforcement officials. They are insisting on entering buildings, claiming to have come for COVID-19 purposes, such as testing or transporting patients or victims. Often disguised in PPE and trying to take advantage of the situation, they are in fact burglars.

Therefore, I think it is extremely important that every household should remain alert. And in case if anyone does pay a visit, a verification mechanism to differ between the actual frontline workers from the frauds will surely be of value. Also, I think it will be beneficial if the law enforcement officials regularly patrol the empty streets area-wise, as the solitude tends to welcome

Rashif Ray Rahman, Dhaka

Vulnerable groups must not bear the brunt of the coronavirus crisis



pandemic and its economic impact will be felt very strongly by the poor. Most of our poor, whether they are day labourers working in the informal sector, semi-skilled employed by

the construction industry, small-scale vendors in the kutcha market, or rickshaw pullers, there is no question that they will take a major hit from the shutdown and the joblessness. With very little savings and a weak safety net to help during an emergency, the economic impact of the lack of work and income triggered by the coronavirus will be very similar to the prolonged absence, or death of the only bread earner in a family. Within a few days. each of these families will worry about their next meal and scramble around for household items they can sell or pawn for some extra cash.

The major categories of wage earners in Bangladesh are factory workers, mainly in the RMG; drivers, conductors, mechanics, helpers and office clerks in the transportation industry; skilled and unskilled workers in the micro and small industries, and owner-operators of small businesses in the informal sectors.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 will leave these workers in jeopardy. First of all, "social distancing", whether these workers live in the cities or in rural areas, is going to be difficult to practice. Our country is very densely populated, and the average size of living space per individual is only a few square metres. Garments workers typically live in group quarters or rooming houses where three or four people share a room or even a bed. The situation does not get any better when the workers return to their "village home". Now, they will become guests of family members who probably themselves are seeing an influx of "out-oftown" visitors.

Secondly, when RMG workers become sick they can get some basic medical care at the factory, or at a community clinic. Once they go back to their village, medical care might be difficult to find. Family members also might be prioritising their needs and flu-like symptoms is often ignored. This

will lead to a rapid spread of the virus, as well as absence of treatment. Sick people, when they first show symptoms associated with coronavirus, including temperature, coughs and tiredness are less likely to get the test if they are poor and even less if they move to the villages

Thirdly, many of the slum dwellers in the major cities are particularly vulnerable to any virus transmission. Living conditions in Dhaka's slums, large or small are dire and lack proper sanitation facilities. Without work, the crowding situation will get worse since most of the workers will stay home and move around in their limited perimeter. While the government

likely to have a chronic health condition. According the Chinese Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, coexisting conditions can make the coronavirus up to 10 times as deadly.

The New York Times recently reported on research that found that in an epidemic, poverty and inequality can exacerbate rates of transmission and mortality for everyone.

"They are also likelier to die from it. And, even for those who remain healthy, they are likelier to suffer loss of income or health care as a result of quarantines and other measures, potentially on a sweeping scale," the NYT in-depth report concludes.

An example from a supposedly rich country will reinforce the above point. A



Living conditions in Dhaka's slums, large or small are dire and lack proper sanitation facilities. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Market Sales (OMS) scheme under which rice will be sold for Tk 10 a kg, this does not benefit those who have lost their job.

The Daily Star Reported on April 3 that Sylhet's Mayor said the government allocated 52 tonnes of rice, which is insufficient to feed more than 2.5 lakh members of 66,000 unprivileged families in the slums.

Fourthly, poor people with underlying medical conditions are vulnerable during any epidemic season, such as dengue or cholera, and this risk goes up significantly when a pandemic starts making its inroads. Studies show that people at the lower ends of society are about 20-30 percent more

report on COVID-19 which is currently wreaking havoc in New York City found that distressed neighbourhoods like Elmhurst, Jackson Heights and Corona—densely packed areas of Queens, with lower-income families and large percentages of non-English speaking residents—were among the hardest hit by the disease.

Fifthly, lack of income affects the poor like a major epidemic. Income for the poor may come in various forms. In Bangladesh, any direct cash transfer for the poorest in times of crisis is non-existent. Some of the charitable organisations, religious bodies, philanthropists, and foundations

donations in kind. Rice, daal, potatoes, soap, and some other daily essentials. However, this will last only for a few days

One of the most vulnerable section of our population, women and children will be hard hit by coronavirus-induced lockdown and social distancing. The lessons from the recent history of pandemics are clear: they affect women as much as men even if the latter are the principal bread-earners. Some of the most studied cases are the Ebola crisis in three African countries in 2014; Zika in 2015-6; and recent outbreaks of Sars, swine flu, and bird flu. "Everybody's income was affected by the Ebola outbreak in West Africa," Julia Smith, a health-policy researcher at Simon Fraser University, told The New York Times this month, but "men's income returned to what they had made pre-outbreak faster than women's income." The distorting effects of an epidemic can last for years, said Prof Clare Wenham of the London School of Economics. "We also saw declining rates of childhood vaccination [during Ebola]." As a consequence, when these children contracted preventable diseases, their mothers had to take time off work.

International organisations, including the United Nations and the World Bank have already sounded the alarms. The financial impact of coronavirus will stop almost 24 million people from escaping poverty in East Asia and the Pacific, cautioned the World Bank. It warned of "substantially higher risk" among households that depend on industries particularly vulnerable to the impact of the virus, and this will include our export industries and remittances from abroad. The bank urged the region to invest in expanding healthcare and medical equipment factories, and to offer subsidies for sick pay that would help with containment and aid households. "Proven social protection measures like supporting job and income security, preventing poverty and unemployment, and strengthening economic and social stability and peace is critical," added Tuomo Poutiainen, ILO country director for Bangladesh.

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and works in information technology. He is Senior Research Fellow International Sustainable Development Institute

Addressing the rise in domestic violence during lockdown



of the world's population is under home-quarantine to contain the spread of the novel Covid-19 pandemic, another crisis is brewing behind closed doors-domestic

violence. Research shows that in emergencies be it conflicts, economic crisis or during disease outbreaks, there has been a repeat pattern of increase in domestic abuse, therefore abusers and their partners having to selfisolate together at home may lead to a rise in new and pre-existing abusive behaviour and violence.

The warning signs were first shown in China where domestic violence reports more than tripled. A similar pattern was reported in Singapore (33 percent increase), Australia (40 percent increase), Brazil (40 percent increase), and India (100 percent increase). With the spread of the pandemic to Europe, there is a surge in the "shadow pandemic" (as UN termed domestic violence) as reported by Italy (13.6 percent increase), Spain (18 percent increase), France (30 percent increase), and Cyprus (30 percent increase). The UK reported an increase of 25 percent and the USA reported upto 35 percent increase in

The situation undoubtedly is no different in Bangladesh if not worse. On April 15, the country saw its first domestic violence fatality since the lockdown began, when Obaidul Haque Tutul brutally murdered his wife, Tahmina Akhter, 28 with a sharp weapon at home while streaming on Facebook Live in Sadar upazila of Feni district. Obaidul then turned himself to Feni Model Police Station and confessed to the killing.

Violence against women and girls has always been a social, cultural and economic problem in Bangladesh. Nearly two-thirds of women have experienced gender-based violence during their lifetime. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 54.2 percent of married women face physical and sexual intimate partner violence. Bangladesh enacted the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act in 2000 targeting rape, trafficking, and kidnapping and the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act in 2010 criminalising domestic violence. Despite having legislation in place the implementation of the laws largely remains

It is well-documented that isolation is generally used by many perpetrators

as a "tool of control" and the conditions created by the pandemic is the perfect opportunity for domestic abuse to flourish. access permits to leave the city and In addition to physical violence, which may not be true in every abusive relationship, spending concentrated periods of time with the abuser potentially means constant surveillance and further restricting their

As reported by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), between January and March 2020, 42 women were murdered by their husbands in Bangladesh. Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) notes that more than 300 incidences of domestic violence, and 36 rape incidents occurred in March in three districts alone, namely, Bogura, Jamalpur and Cox's Bazar.

In response to mounting domestic violence cases, Italy launched a new app that will enable victims to ask for help without making a phone call and ruled that the abuser must leave the family home, not

> In response to mounting domestic violence cases, Italy launched a new app that will enable victims to ask for help without making a phone call and ruled that the abuser must leave the family home, not the victim.

the victim.

The United Kingdom introduced contacting options for help through websites which ensures no record of the attempt is left on the phone and anyone in immediate danger can call 999 and press 55 on a mobile if they are unable to talk. There have been calls to turn underused hotel chains and university halls into emergency accommodation and need for increased public messaging, through supermarkets, pharmacies and other appropriate avenues, to provide information on the means by which victims can alert the police for help; and special police powers to evict perpetrators from homes and for authorities to waive court fees for the protection orders. There are campaigns in the UK (#Listeningfromhome) and Germany that advises and educates people to be vigilant and encourages them to seek help if they hear or observe incidents indicating domestic violence.

In China, women in dire need of fleeing their homes were able to escape their abusers—with the hashtag #AntiDomesticViolenceDuringEpidemic trending on social media. India campaigns "Suppress corona, not your voice," and have launched a new domestic violence helpline and engaged female officers to handle cases.

The lockdown pertaining to the prevention of the covid-19 spread in Bangladesh has essentially shattered support networks, making it far more difficult for victims to get help or escape their aggressor. One immediate effect of being confined with the abuser is not only are women more vulnerable to domestic abuse but are also less likely to be able to make an emergency telephone call in fear of being overheard by the abusers.

Additional financial burdens due to increased unemployment, salary cuts, looking after children full-time and more hours at home with increased household labour adds insult to injury. Amid social distancing requirements, restricted mobility preventing relocation to family homes in other areas, and pressing financial constraints, staying with friends or relatives became impracticable. Research suggests that the heightened domestic tensions and concern of financial uncertainty brought by the pandemic only adds to the burden of violence. Victims could be denied medical attention and made to feel guilty for falling ill. Emotional and mental abuse may soon turn physical.

It is likely that in times like this, support groups and police would not be of much help to victims and will ask them to tolerate the violence reasoning this period of lockdown to be not the right time. It is an expected response as a pandemic such as this is unprecedented and the law enforcement agencies are overburdened. However, as with the response to the virus itself, delays mean that irreparable harm may already have occurred. Police need to train and transfer resources in emergency situations especially because it is extremely difficult for women trapped and controlled at home to reach out for help. The recent media coverage of police and military beating and punishing people who were out on the streets may also act as a deterrent to stepping out to report by

Experts warn that as the lockdown continues, the danger is likely to intensifyfear of the perpetrator inside the house and the virus outside. Soon homicide cases, like Tahminas will escalate amidst personal

It is therefore imperative that the Bangladesh government step in to provide leadership in this area. Urgent steps have to be taken to ensure that anyone

experiencing domestic abuse can seek protection during this Covid-19 crisis and be placed in a safe place. The government should say loud and clear that people should leave home if they need to do so for their safety and that services are open for

Dedicated and responsive emergency helpline numbers and websites need to be launched. Domestic violence services should be classified as "essential" and support workers should be classified as "key" workers. Organisations providing domestic violence support and services must get an emergency financial package from the government to ensure shelters and other support services remain operational. Avenues for help including helpline numbers and websites need to be advertised widely at all media platforms including social media platforms, electronic and print media, public messaging, through supermarkets, pharmacies and other appropriate areas. This must also include simple ways to

contact and alert the police of the need of urgent help, such as text messages or online chats, and the use of code words with doctors or pharmacists. Law enforcement agencies need to lodge complaints and take immediate and effective measures while maintaining confidentially and safety of victims. Cooperation between authorities, law enforcement agencies and support workers cannot be understated to tackle this crisis. Local authorities should turn vacant hotels and public university halls to emergency accommodation where victims could quarantine safely. The women and children who show signs of physical or sexual abuse or domestic violence need to be provided with medical treatment, psychological counselling, and other assistance, like legal aid.

In rural and remote areas of Bangladesh, where possession of mobile phone by households are uncommon or are limited to men, lighter-touch interventions, like less regular community meetings, and check-ins will curb the abusive behaviour of intimate partners as they would believe that they are likelier to get caught if they are abusive. These kinds of programmes are also fairly inexpensive and like the lockdown itself, these could be lifesaving

Being stuck at home because of coronavirus is difficult for everyone, but it becomes a real nightmare for victims of domestic violence. A crucial safety net therefore must be offered to some of the most at risk women, children and anyone vulnerable to abuse in order to triumph over the immediate and long-term impact of this corona virus crisis.

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WHAT THE SITUATION NEEDS

Insights on stimulus packages from a legal perspective

Imran Anwar

S COVID-19 continues to roll out and thwart the fates and fortunes of people $oldsymbol{L}$ in the doldrums, the government of Bangladesh is poised to take several initiatives to help combat the health and economic crisis that is sweeping across the nation. In response to the dire situation, it announced Tk 72,750 crores bailout package, about 2.52 percent of the national GDP, to help the economy rebound from a probable downturn. Compared to Italy and France, two of the worst victims of the outbreak, who declared schemes worth 2.3 percent and 1.8 percent of their respective GDPs, the stimulus package declared in Bangladesh seems generous. Yet there are uncertainties on how this outbreak will unfold in days to come and whether the bailout package will be adequate to address the upcoming challenges businesses are likely to face.

The government incentives are fundamentally symmetric in countries worldwide in that a large portion of the benefit is dedicated to cover up the debt liabilities of businesses due to lack of revenue streams and hardship in coping up with liquidity crunch as a result of the pandemic. On April 2, 2020 the Bangladesh Bank issued BRPD circular number 7 constituting a fund of Tk 5,000 crores to facilitate payment of wages of workers in export oriented industries. The circular enumerates the requirements of eligibility to avail the fund in the form of a non-interest bearing loan to the portfolio of the business entity through commercial scheduled banks.

While loan without interests is like a rose without thorns, there is still a scope of 2 percent service charge to be imposed by banks to carry out the administrative expenses in the process of disbursement of the facility. The banks must verify the eligibility of the applicant and disburse the amount directly into the bank account (including MFS account) of the workers. Although the availability of incentive is limited only to industries having an export portfolio of 80 percent of its net production and is limited for payment of wages to the workers only, and that too for a period of maximum three months, it is nevertheless a relief, albeit temporary, for businesses having shortage of cash inflows during this global crisis. The facility has been made available for active industry, which refers to those who have disbursed the wages of workers till the month of February 2020.

Notably, in order to be eligible for the facility, there is no requirement in the circular for the workers to actually work during the period of April to June, and in all likelihood, the scheme may have been designed to retain jobs of workers who have been asked to stop working, but who are being kept on the payroll. It needs to be pointed out that although the beneficiary of the loan are the workers, it is their employer who is having to repay the loan. Given the history of workers protesting for lack of pay in ordinary situations against their work, it remains to be seen whether business owners would like to assume the liability of loan while their workers indeed have not worked to generate any revenue.

This raises the question whether the businesses are at liberty to avail the loan. What if the business opts out in availing the benefit of scheme and instead lay off its workers? The circular does not force a loan on the business owners, rather it grants a privilege for certain industries to avail a facility to be repaid at a later date on certain conditions. The businesses will have a grace period of six months and will commence repayment from January, 2021 and complete repayment within a period of two years in eighteen instalments. It seems that the scheme is designed in a way where it is contemplated that the situation will turn around in months to come, as the repayment obligation will commence early next year with a potential 2 percent service charge on top, and the factories will resume work and repay its liabilities eventually.

However, considering the uncertainty over the situation turning around any time soon and the overall availability of workforce in Bangladesh in ordinary times, the likelihood of businesses not availing the loan cannot be undermined. As a result, the possibility of workers not getting paid during this period cannot be ousted at all. But the industries are now at the crossroad of uncertainties, they must either embrace the unknown and avail the loan, or take a disgraced path of laying off its workers. Regardless of the sweet coating of the loan, credit must be given to the lobbying power of BGMEA that such a package was offered exclusively for the export oriented industries

Under the circular, the benefit is directed to the workers (excluding "officers") to be paid in their own accounts. On 8 April, 2020, the Bangladesh Bank issued another circular (BRPD circular letter number 14) stating that payment of wages to officers working in the factory will remain outside the scope of this facility without providing any definition of "officers" in the circular itself. It is to be noted that no distinction has been drawn in the labour laws of Bangladesh between officer and non-officer as long as they fall within the definition of "worker", which refers to any person employed in an establishment or industry without administrative, supervisory or managerial power.

a guarantee of 80 percent on each loan (subject to a per-lender cap on claims) by the government to give lenders further confidence in continuing to provide finance to businesses. In addition, for the SMEs, the government in the UK will also make a Business Interruption Payment to cover the first 12 months of interest payment and any lender-levied fees, so businesses will benefit from no upfront costs and lower initial repayments.

In India, on the other hand, a moratorium of three months on payment of instalments for all term loans was granted. In respect of working capital facilities sanctioned in the form of cash credit/overdraft, lending institutions are permitted to defer the recovery of interest applied in respect of all such facilities during the period from March 1, 2020 up to May 31, 2020. The rescheduling of payments, including interest, will not qualify as a default for the purposes of supervisory reporting and reporting to Credit Information Companies (CICs) by the lending institutions.

While the government of Bangladesh in the most recent stimulus package incentivised payment of interests in respect of newly for businesses in this dire situation and for that matter the SRO No 229-Ain/Income Tax/2011 (July 4, 2011) can consider raising the threshold for CSR expenses and include expenditure to address the pandemic in Bangladesh within the scope of permitted activities.

However, the history of delinquent borrowers in Bangladesh are not unknown. The country has already witnessed challenges from non-performing loans and with further loans being made available, the schedule banks must remain careful to whom they are disbursing the fund. While the circular does not relate the eligibility criteria to the credit portfolio of the applicant, the banks need to be careful in creating its exposure to delinquent performers. As the loan is collateral free and without any sovereign guarantee, the ultimate risk would lie on the commercial banks. While making exposure, the banks need to make a judgment call in deciding whether to extend loan to a classified borrower who might take a chance in the situation despite repeated reminders from the government not to take advantage of opportunities amidst crisis.

For the purpose of repayment, businesses

form of tax break and furloughing. Under the current labour law, furloughing is not contemplated. Government should also consider making provision in this regard so that in future the employer is not thrust into a disadvantaged position during a public holiday declared in special situation like this and workers should also not feel that they got paid holiday. Additional arrangement could be put in place to mitigate the loss of wages of workers and a proper balance needs to be struck between the rights of workers and employers so that none gets deprived of their respective rights to do business and to work.

More recently, the government announced further stimulus package covering Tk 30,000 crore to be provided to affected industries and service sector organisations as working capital through banks as low-interest loans where the government and the affected industry will equally split the payment of interest rate. The second package pertaining to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including cottage industries, would get Tk 20,000 crore as working capital. The interest rate of this lending facility will be 9 percent whereas the concerned industries and business organisations will pay 4 percent interest of that loan; the government will provide the remaining 5 percent as subsidy. The third package relates to enhancing Bangladesh Bank's Export Development Fund (EDF) to add up Tk 12,750 crore (USD 1.5 billion) to the EDF while its interest rate would simultaneously be brought down to 2 percent, which has now been done through FE Circular No 18 dated 07/04/2020.

Finally, the central bank would also introduce a new credit facility of Tk 5,000 crore as "pre-shipment credit refinance scheme" and its interest would be 7 percent. While implementing these generous packages, the government should find a workable solution to curve out a suitable framework for businesses. What would be the policy guideline for implementing these facilities aimed at different sectors will play a vital role in its success.

It may be pointed out in this regard that the only package declared so far having some set guidelines is apparently aimed at garments and allied export sector, whereas far larger amount of commitment has been made in the local industries and SMEs for which no specific guidelines have been made available yet. Until then, it appears that the stimulus package worth Tk 30,000 crores for industry and service sector is open for garments sector as well, and it remains to be seen how this distribution of incentive plays out for disadvantaged sectors in days to come.

Considering the leverage that relatively large industries, in particular the RMG manufacturers, has on the national economy and the policy decisions of the government, the likelihood of local industries and medium enterprises lagging behind in the race cannot be ousted altogether. If a decision to create exposure is left with the commercial banks, the larger undertakings are likely to get preference, much to the dismay of small entrepreneurs. The government again needs to take on the driving seat in formulating some definitive guidelines to ensure a fair distribution of incentives among all the players of the business ecosystem.

The world has embraced a unique situation and economists fear a depression in days to come if the situation persists. Digitalisation has been the key to overcoming many challenges as people continues to work from home. While isolation and social distancing is becoming the norm to address the situation, people have rather come closer in the virtual world. The crisis has proved once again that people need a digital landscape, a "Digital Bangladesh". A lot of activities in business and executive functions are now taking place online, not just in Bangladesh—all over the world. In judicial system, neighbouring India has taken a great leap very recently amid the outbreak by operationalising an "online only" format of functioning. It may be explored whether a similar initiative can be taken in Bangladesh to address the change in doing business.

Imran Anwar, barrister-at-law, Tanjib Alam and Associates. Fmail: Imran anwar@tanjibalam.com



A ferry crammed with mostly ready-made garment workers leaving Dhaka. Hundreds of workers walked for hours to reach the city after the authorities had decided to open the factories, but they had to travel back to their villages as the owners changed their decision following widespread criticism.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

The threshold for "workers" as developed in the jurisprudence of labour law is rather high and given the fact that the courts have been historically quite generous in granting the benefit of labour law to almost every employee except to the officer having the power of hiring and firing. Therefore, it may well be the case that a handful of "officers" will fall under the definition of "worker" pursuant to the labour laws but may be treated as "officers" under the circular. This runs the risk of these employees being laid off or losing wages due to not having been covered under the scheme of incentive.

It is indubitable that the package brings forth benefits in times of crisis but the underlying question remains who is getting benefited. The BRPD Circular No 7 appears to be a blend of facility intended to retain jobs while supporting the business. In the United Kingdom, there is two separate schemes for these two purposes—one is the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the other is the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme. The former is in the form of grant disbursed to the furloughed workers and the latter in the form of a loan through commercial banks with government support. The loan is paid out to the businesses with

availed loans within the scheme, there remains a possibility of corporations not being able to repay their existing liabilities obtained as loan. Will these businesses be classified in the usual course? It is high time the government may revisit the classification process to address this unique economic situation due to the outbreak. From a tax perspective, it may be noted that the United Kingdom and India have put in place few schemes aimed at giving tax incentives and VAT deferral support to help businesses at this moment of crisis. Although no tax incentive has been announced as of now, it may be noted that the Bangladesh Bank has exempted consumers from payment of credit card interests during the period of crisis.

card interests during the period of crisis.

In this regard, it may be noted that the situation requires everyone to come forward, not just the government and hence, to encourage such steps, the Indian Ministry of Corporate Affairs announced that COVID-19 spending would now be covered under the (general) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities pertaining to the promotion of health, preventative healthcare and sanitation and disaster relief. Similarly, in Bangladesh initiatives can be taken to render corporate social responsibilities lucrative

will face a challenge larger than ever, as they must find a way to earn so much so that it covers up the costs of instalments and it is likely that the workers may be asked to put in longer hours to make up for the disbursements. This raises the question whether the labour law needs to be revisited to address this situation as well as the individual employment contracts of the workers to accommodate this change in hours of work.

At present, total working hours of a worker shall not exceed 60 (sixty) hours in a week in a factory. The proviso of section 102 of the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 provides that the government may, in the cases of some particular industries, under conditions imposed by order in writing, relax the provisions of this section or exempt from the provisions of this section at a time for a period of not exceeding 6 (six) months, if it is satisfied that in the public interest or in the interest of economic development such relaxation or exemption is necessary.

If the employers are allured to keep their employee during this pandemic by paying salary from their own pocket by borrowing from the bank at a lower interest rate, additional sweetener will be needed in the

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



EXPLOSION ON THE DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL RIG April 20, 2010

On this day in 2010, an explosion occurred on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig—located in the Gulf of Mexico, some 66 km off the coast of Louisiana—leading to the largest oil spill in history.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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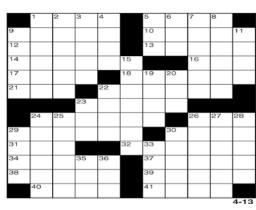
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TUESDAY'S ANSWERS

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BEETLE BAILEY





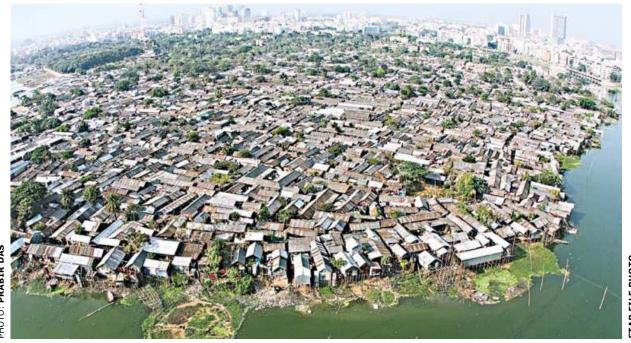
BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

BY MORT WALKER







(1) The workers of a garment factory at the capital's Kamalapur take position in front of their workplace on April 16, 2020 and stage a demonstration for their due wages. (2) This aerial view of the Korail slum shows how congested the place is. Garment workers mostly live in such slums across the city. It is almost impossible for these slum dwellers to maintain social distance. A coronavirus outbreak in the slums could spell disaster for them.

Pins and needles at the time of a pandemic

Learning from the RMG workers through a rapid survey

ATONU RABBANI, FARZANA MISHA AND AMINA AMIN

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the world's economy and has been the most pronounced public health disaster since the Spanish Flu which took place just about 100 years ago. The readymade garment sector, along with the migrant workers, has been one of the major drivers of the socio-economic development of Bangladesh in the last 40 years. The pandemic has put the four million workers and their families between a rock and a very hard place. The closedown of all major economies has halted the retail activities there. As a result, most major buyers have either cancelled or withheld existing orders placed before the local suppliers. According to the BGMEA data, the total value of RMG export orders cancelled or suspended by global buyers has neared USD 3.15 billion till Monday, April 13, affecting 2.26 million RMG workers directly and also stifling backward linkage industries depending on the ector. On the other hand, Bangladesh is facing rising cases of COVID-19 and this has resulted in sector-wide factory closures, with no certainty when they will be reopened.

In this backdrop, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC



Hundreds of people, mostly RMG workers, walking to Dhaka in flocks at Patgram of Mymensingh on April 5, 2020 to resume work. In direct conflict with the government's shutdown protocol, garment owners had asked workers to return to work, threatening with nonpayment of their wages and termination if they did not return to work. In the absence of transportation, hundreds of these workers were forced to walk back to the city on foot. However, upon admonishment by civil-society, garment owners withdrew the directive to return to work, expecting workers to then walk back to their village homes.

Figure 1: The number of coping strategies

None

19.0

Single

Multiple

37.3

Percent of Respondents

Figure 2: Decrease in Food Consumption by Broad Categories

19

33

340

Percent of Respondents

Figure 2: Decrease in Food Consumption by Broad Categories

19

33

340

AB

Rice and Pulse
Fish, Chicken, and Meat
Fi

University has undertaken a series of research studies to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected different populations. One particular group of people addressed in one of our studies was RMG workers. A major research activity included a rapid survey where we reached out to respondents from different surveys that the School carried out in the past. Many of these surveys collected phone numbers of the respondents. We followed a rigorous process of obtaining informed consent over phone calls. Each call lasted on average 45 minutes.

In this article, we focus on a cohort of RMG workers who were surveyed from September to December 2018.

In the original survey, there were 375 respondents, with 52 percent female and 48 percent male respondents. As a part of the rapid survey, we aimed to survey all the participants. The rapid survey started on April 5, 2020. We have successfully surveyed 159 respondents as of April 13, 2020. Coincidentally, this also overlapped with the period when confirmed cases soared exponentially in Bangladesh (for example, doubling time of confirmed cases dropped from three weeks on April 3 to three days by April 10, staying steady at the level). We wanted to understand a number of outcomes related to income, employment status, consumption, and practice and perception of different preventive measures to lower the risk of COVID-19 infection.

About 78 percent of the respondents reported living at the same place where they lived when the original baseline survey was conducted. About 44 percent reported living in Dhaka and about 30 percent reported living in Gazipur. These are the areas where most of the RMG factories are. So, at least the people we could survey were living mostly at the same place, possibly pear the factories

same place, possibly near the factories. While many of the respondents were living at places where RMG factories mostly clustered, most of the workers faced rising unemployment and income loss because of factory closures. Ignoring the 26 respondents who did not have a job even before the pandemic outbreak, 47 percent of the workers reported complete income loss and expressed uncertainty about job continuity and future payment. However, about 24 percent of the respondents were on leave with full pay and another 11 percent were partially paid even though they were on leave at the time of the survey.

The sector-wise closure had a significant impact on households' earnings as about 46 percent reported a complete loss of income. The loss of income is partially mitigated by having multiple earners in a family, as the complete loss of income was reported by 51 percent of the households with a single earner, while it was 40 percent among the families which reported more than one earning member.

Households reported using a number of strategies to cope up with the loss

of income because of the COVID-19 pandemic. About 46 percent of the respondents reported that they are now spending less to absorb the loss in income. About 52 percent reported coping up with the income loss with past savings and about 33 percent reported taking loans. These coping strategies are not mutually exclusive. As a matter of fact, as Figure 1 suggests, more than one-third of the households in our sample relied on multiple coping strategies to cope up with the income loss.

Most of the respondents, about 85 percent, reported having three meals. However, consistent with the reports of loss of income and lowering expenses, most of the respondents (87 percent) reported a decline in household food consumption. Only about 13 percent could maintain the same level of food consumption as pre-pandemic normal times

Not all categories of food items were affected adversely by the pandemic though. In particular, fish, chicken, and beef were seriously compromised because of the pandemic, as we can see in Figure 2. About 78 percent of the respondents reported that they have reduced their fish and meat consumption because of the pandemic. The other two food items also compromised were milk (30 percent) and eggs (33 percent) consumption. About 28 percent of the households also reported reducing consumption of vegetables or fruits. So, the pandemic has reduced the dietary diversity of the households significantly and, hence, they may be nutritionally compromised if the current situation continues. This will require a robust policy response in terms of food aid and cash transfer.

Among all the respondents (n = 158, i.e., not counting the missing valued ones), 49 respondents or 37 percent reported not stocking any food items nor did they want to. However, among the people who did not stock or hoard any food items (n = 141, 89 percent), 59 percent reported not being able to stock even though they wanted to. Overwhelmingly, these households reported not having enough money as the main reason for the inability to store food items in the current crisis even though they wanted to (96 percent).

The households who didn't store but could store if they wanted to report having foods to sustain 13 days or about two weeks, while the households that did not store even if they wanted to report the ability to sustain seven days or just a week. So, an important policy implication will be to provide liquidity so that they can sustain more.

Most of the respondents know the value of handwashing and they think they practise it well. However, they have much less confidence in the handwashing practices of other members of the communities. Most of the respondents (60 percent) reported being able to maintain the social isolation by staying home. Among the households that could not (39 percent), the frequent need for shopping was reported as the main reason for the inability to maintain social isolation. About 88 percent of the respondents had to travel outside the home for essential shopping.

People who were not able to maintain social isolation and had to travel outside the household reported higher psychological stress . So, helping the households with money to allow a longer period of sustenance can help with both the desired social isolation and raise the mental health among the households with RMG workers.

There are two major issues here: unemployment resulting in partial or complete loss of earnings and the immediate decline in daily food consumption jeopardising nutrition security for families depending on the RMG sector.

Keeping a steady cashflow to the workers of the sector can play multiple roles. This will ensure smoothing the consumption, providing nutrition security, and maintaining aggregate demand keeping the economy from imploding.

The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and the BGMEA have already taken up a number of measures to address these issues. Lately, the government announced a BDT 500 million stimulus package, of which the majority is earmarked for workers' wages and benefits.

The GOB has also instructed the garment owners to pay the wages by

April 16, even before the employers can take advantage of the stimulus package. This will help workers and their families to maintain the liquidity until factories re-open when the pandemic weathers and demand for local supply picks up by the third quarter of the current calendar year. However, without any production, it will be hugely taxing for the employers to keep workers on the payroll.

One of the major challenges is to actually get the cash in the hand of the workers who are not attending factories anymore. Mobile financial services (MFS) can be very effective here. However, though increasing, the adaptation rate of digital wage payment among the garments factories is still low. As of November 2019, only 1.5 million workers were brought under this mode of payment. Moreover, a large part of the workers still do not own their own mobile wallets. Addressing this bottleneck will require serious logistical

Another potential option is a mixed support package that includes wage and financial support distribution with partial food support. The immediate food support will help them meet the present food demand and the financial support will ultimately cushion them from any deficit in food consumption as a result of the further extension of the lockdown. In addition, it will discourage any possible congregation in the markets, which is to be avoided in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Still there are a number of caveats for such measures. Considering food support, the chances of leakage are higher and the distribution needs to be well-monitored by the factories themselves.

Another issue is the safety measures adopted by the factory owners. Once the outbreak starts receding and, albeit slowly, economic activities resume, the workers will still require assurance from the industry that their safety is one of the prime concerns. Thus the factories themselves need to take measures against any possible resurgence of such ailment among the workers. Such resurgences are now observed in China, and Bangladesh will need to learn from that.

Despite all these measures taken, concerns still loom, as extension of enforced measures like "social distancing" and "lockdown" is expected to have a far-reaching impact on the poor and low-wage earners. The government, the RMG industry and policy makers must weigh the risks in order to come to an informed decision. The workers are essentially the backbone of the RMG sector. Ensuring their workplace safety and economic sustainability during a crisis as such should be the main priority not only for the factory owners but also for the government itself. The RMG sector, which has been considered as the fuel driving the economy of Bangladesh for the past couple of decades, can eventually turn into its Achilles heel without timely adaptation of precautionary measures.

This article has been authored by Atonu Rabbani, Farzana Misha and Amina Amin on behalf of the BRAC JPGSPH Rapid Survey Team. Atonu Rabbani, PhD, is Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, and Associate Scientist, BRAC JPGSPH, BRAC University. Farzana Misha is Research Coordinator, BRAC JPGSPH. Amina Amin is Research Assistant, BRAC JPGSPH.

MUSHY TO AUCTION FIRST DOUBLE-TON BAT

Mushfiqur Rahim will auction the bat that he used against Sri Lanka in 2013 to become first Bangladeshi to hit a double hundred in international cricket. The proceeds will be used to help the less privileged during the coronavirus crisis, local media reported. "I am going to put the bat I used to hit my first 200 up for auction. I am thinking of auctioning it digitally. Let's see what arrangements can be made. I will request everyone who can manage to come to the auction and bid a high price. The money is going to be used fully to help out the needy. I am asking everyone to raise the price as much as possible," Mushfiqur was quoted as saying





A scarecrow created by Northwich Cricket Club members is pictured on the cricket field to represent an umpire on the planned day for the start of their cricket season, which has been postponed by the coronavirus pandemic. PHOTO: REUTERS

Wuhan football team make emotional return



Wuhan Zall, the Chinese Super League team from epicentre of coronavirus

pandemic, made an emotional return to their home city after more than three months torn from their families.

Zall endured a turbulent 104 days on the road -- including being stranded in Spain -- because Wuhan was sealed off in January when the virus killed and infected thousands there.

The city is now emerging from its weeks-long lockdown and hundreds of chanting fans met the After spending 104 days away Zall players when they arrived at Wuhan's train station late Saturday, state media said.

Wearing masks, the players had bouquets of flowers thrust into their hands as supporters clad in the team's orange colours held banners and sang.

"After more than three months of wandering, the homesick Wuhan Zall team members finally set foot in their hometown," the team said on the Twitter-like Weibo.

The squad, led by their Spanish coach Jose Gonzalez, will now spend a few days at home before resuming training on Wednesday. The squad's return home is the

final chapter in a long saga. They began training for the new



Wuhan Zall made an emotional return to their home city and ground zero of the coronavirus pandemic. They arrived at the railway station in Wuhan on on Friday.

Chinese Super League season, since was slowing markedly. postponed indefinitely, in early January in the southern city of Guangzhou. They flew to Malaga, Spain towards the end of January, by which time the city of Wuhan and its 11 million people were under harsh restrictions because of the coronavirus outbreak.

"They are not walking viruses, they are athletes," Gonzalez told media at the time.

But when the virus began taking hold in Spain in March, Zall made arrangements to fly back to China, where the number of infections

Wuhan was still sealed off so the squad, via a prolonged transit in Germany, flew to China's southern

They went into three weeks of quarantine, followed by training in the nearby city of Foshan, before taking a high-speed train from Guangzhou to Wuhan on Saturday evening.

city of Shenzhen on March 16.

Zall are preparing for a season that still has no start date. The CSL was supposed to begin on February 22 but could now kick off in late June, according to latest reports.

Hockey players hit hard



Rahmatgani GS

The general secretary of

Rahmatganj MFS, Imtiaz

Hamid Sabuj, has gone

into home quarantine after

distributing relief goods among 500 neighbours

at Hazi Ballu Road in

Rahmatganj area in Old

distributed 11 food items

among round 500 middle-

income families, following

footsteps of players from

different disciplines who

have earlier come forward

to help the under-privileged

sufferings of families in my

area, who have a monthly

members," Sabuj said,

quarantine after discussing

the matter with a physician

phone.

The sports organiser

distributes

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka on Friday.

food

When some top national hockey players joined Bangladesh Navy in 2013, an argument over the justification of their joining the services team had made

the rounds in the hockey fraternity.

The argument was that the national players can earn more from the Dhaka Premier League compared to what they would get from Bangladesh Navy. However, those players -- Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Mamunur Rahman Chayan, Imran Hasan Pintoo, Khorshedur Rahman, Sarwar Hossain and others -- stuck to their decision, and now they can consider themselves lucky as they get a regular stream of income from Bangladesh Navy during this nationwide shutdown.

The other players, though, have not had the luck as they solely depend on hockey to run their families, and with no league taking place in the last two years, they have been going through acute financial crisis following the coronavirus outbreak.

Bappy Kumar Ghosh, one of the unfortunate ones, had been helping his parents by earning money from premier hockey league in Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet apart from conducting coaching in Rajshahi and Cumilla. But now all his income sources have been cut off in the wake of Covid-19.

"My father gets only Tk 5000 salary and I provide most of the expenditure of our three-member family. But at the moment I can't help the family as there is no income. I used to get a small pocket money from coaching at Boikalin Sangha in Rajshahi and I used to earn by playing hockey leagues in Chattogram, Sylhet and Dhaka but everything is halted now. Besides, I was supposed to coach a unit of Bangladesh Army in June which is also uncertain now. I don't know what I will do in future and how to help the family," said the 28-year-old, who has been playing the premier league for the last 12 years -- a duration when only six editions of the league was held.

"If the league was held every year, I think I would have been far better off. As the Dhaka league is irregular, I bank on other district leagues and coaching profession to earn bread and butter," said Ghosh, who represented Sonali Bank, Shadharan Bima and Ajax SC in the league.

Former national striker Ashraful Islam Shishu is also going through similar crisis.

"Physically I'm fine but not financially. I depend on Bangladesh Army's coaching, which is now uncertain. I don't have any deposit to spend," said Shishu, who represented the national team from 2008

Former goalkeeper Rasel Khan Bappi, who played in the 2018 premier league the last time theleague was held -- admitted that many players, despite being in financial hardship, do not want to disclose their current condition due to their social status and prestige.

"Not only general players, many national players are in financial trouble as there has been no premier league in the last two years. I am getting many calls from players from outside Dhaka but I don't want to mention any names," said Bappi, who represented the national team from 1996 to 2006.

"When the financial status of hockey players is bad, how will the hockey players' welfare association help the current players? It is in fact a duty of the federation to help the players as they can't hold the league regularly," the former national custodian

"The federation officials are not attending phone calls. How can we approach them to help the players? I think if the federation could hold the league once in last two years, the players would not be in such trouble right now," said Bappi.



If the league was held every year, I think I would have been far better off. As the Dhaka league is irregular, I bank on other district leagues and coaching profession to earn bread and butter.

> **BAPPY KUMAR GHOSH HOCKEY PLAYER**



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Football back in unaffected Turkmenistan

AFP, Ashgabat



Turkmenistan is rebooting its football season on Sunday, with fans flocking back to stadiums in one of the few countries yet to declare a case of coronavirus. The reclusive Central Asian state followed

other countries around the world when it suspended its eight-team league in March just three games into the season. The national football federation cited recommendations

by the health ministry and the World Health Organisation for preventing the spread of the illness. A month later, and despite international concerns that

Turkmen authorities are underplaying the threat of the virus, football is returning, with supporters only too happy to follow the action from the stands.

"Joy boosts our immunity," joked Ashir Yusupov, a 34-year-old entrepreneur.

He said he would be watching reigning champions Altyn Asyr take on early table-toppers Kopetdag in the capital Ashgabat on Sunday.

Yusupov said he had no fear of crowded places, despite being aware of bans on sports events in other countries. "We have no coronavirus, so why not restart our league?"

Three ex-Soviet states have bucked the global trend for suspending professional leagues: Turkmenistan, Tajikistan

Global interest in the Belarusian league has surged on the back of its decision, while the Tajikistan's Super Cup final earlier this month attracted a curious multi-lingual online following.



Dwayne Bravo posted a picture with his son on Instagram yesterday, captioning it: "I'm not lucky I'm blessed!! #WeNotGivingUp #Champion" PHOTO: COLLECTED

'Big three' planning to help struggling players

A file photo shows hockey players taking a breather during practice.



Novak Djokovic said on Saturday that he, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal are organizing aid for players struggling with the paralysis of the game due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I spoke to Roger and Rafa a few days ago," Djokovic, the world number one, said in an Instagram chat with friend and rival Stan

Wawrinka on Saturday. "We had a long conversation about the near future of tennis, what is going to happen, how we can contribute and how we can help especially lower-ranked players, who are obviously struggling the most."

"The majority of the players who are ranked between 200, 250 in the world, and the 700th or 1,000th do not have federation support, do not have sponsors. They are completely independent and left alone," he said

"Guys who are ranked between 200-250, especially to 700...are thinking of leaving tennis right now.

He said players, the ATP and the four Grand Slams would all get together and will contribute to a player relief fund that ATP will distribute."

"It looks, hopefully, that there will something between \$3 million and \$4.5 million that is going to be distributed," he estimated.

"Maybe if we don't have any tournaments this season, we can take a certain percentage from our prize money form Australian Open in January," he said. "These guys are the grass roots of tennis. The future of tennis. We need to show them they still can rely on support of the

Neuer irked as contract talks stall

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich captain and goalkeeper Manuel Neuer told German media Sunday he has become "irritated" with negotiations to extend his contract, which have reportedly stalled in recent weeks.

"All talks I have had since I have been here have been confidential... nothing has ever leaked," the 34-yearold told Germany's most popular daily Bild. "But now, details about the current talks are constantly appearing in the media, and are often untrue. That irritates me. It's not something I am used to at Bayern.'

According to Bild, Neuer is demanding a 100-million-euro five-year

"I want to have a contract which is a win-win situation for me and Bayern. I want to perform, be there for the team... and give 100 percent," he said.

"The conditions have to be right (for that)," he



PADMA BRIDGE RAIL LINK PROJECT IS BEING BUILT WITH BSRM

COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT A BSRM



GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS RECOGNIZES

World's Largest VRM



Take us on board

NGOs want govt to involve them in tackling Covid-19 fallout

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPSONDENT

The non-government organisations want the government to engage them in tackling the crisis caused by Covid-19 which has far-reaching impacts on people, health and economy, especially on the poor and vulnerable communities across the country.

They said NGOs, which have their presence at the grassroots level and always worked hand in hand with the government in disaster management, should be incorporated in the activities for stronger coordination and

The suggestions came at a virtual press conference hosted by COAST Trust and attended by the leaders of different alliances of NGOs -- National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors, Bangladesh (NAHAB), Bangladesh CSO-NGO Coordination Process, Network for Information, Response and Preparedness Activities on Disaster (NIRAPA), Disaster Forum, Association of Development Agencies Bangladesh (ADAB) and Federation of NGOs Bangladesh (FNB).

"The season of flood, cyclone and dengue is upcoming. With any of these taking place alongside the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation will be grave. So, we need to be prepared," said ADAB Director AKM Jashim Uddin.

He said the government has announced stimulus packages and is providing relief materials, but there are already many allegations of irregularities. If the actual target people are not listed for the benefits, the government assistance is not going to work effectively.

"Food production is going to be a major task. So,



Ignoring all government directives on physical distancing, people still gathering callously to purchase essential commodities from TCB pickups. The photo was taken in the capital's Lalbagh area yesterday.

ANISUR RAHMAN

Pray at home in Ramadan

Saudi Arabia's top religious body urges Muslims worldwide

REUTERS, Riyadh

Arabia's highest religious body, the Council of Senior Scholars, urged Muslims worldwide to pray at home during Ramadan if their countries require social distancing to curb the spread of the coronavirus, state news agency SPA reported yesterday.

The holy fasting month of Ramadan begins later this week. During the month, believers usually break their fast with families and friends and perform an evening prayer, known as Taraweeh, in large gatherings at mosques.

"Muslims shall avoid gatherings, because they are the main cause of the spread of infection...and shall remember that preserving the lives of people is a great act that brings them closer to God," it said in a statement.

The kingdom's Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz Al al-Sheikh on Friday expressed the same sentiment, saying SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

THEFT OF RELIEF MATERIALS

3 UP chairmen, nine members suspended

AL leader arrested with 3.23 tonnes of subsidised rice in Rajshahi

STAR REPORT

The government yesterday suspended chairmen and nine members of three Union Parishads on charge of their involvement with irregularities in distributing relief materials amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Ministry issued separate notifications announcing their suspension orders yesterday.

The suspended chairmen are Makhdoom Kabir Tanmay of Kishoreganj's Niyamtapur Union Parishad (UP), Mohammad Abdus Sattar of Natore's Arjunpur Baramahati UP, and Mirza Ghulam Hafiz Sohag of Bogura's Mazihotta UP.

The suspended members are Md Reza of Arjunpur Baramahati, Md Zakir Hossain and Md Rokonuzzaman of Barishal's Kodorpur UP, Md Abdur Rob Patwary of Bhola's Hazirhat UP, Sheikh Mosharaf Hossain and Rony Begum of Narail's Joynagar UP, Md Rafiqul Islam of Sirajganj's Khaskaulia UP, and Al Amin Chowdhury and Ms Asia Khatun of

Earlier, a total of five UP chairmen and SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

Cabinet holds wide-ranging discussions



calls on Bangabandhu on April 20, 1972 to discuss wildlife management, particularly the protection of Royal Bengal Tigers in Bangladesh.

Guy Mountfort of the

World Wildlife Fund

Shamsuddoza Sajen

CABINET DISCUSSES DHAR'S REPORT Bangladesh Cabinet today discusses the report presented to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by DP Dhar, chairman

of the policy planning committee of the Indian external affairs ministry, on matters relating to the India-Pakistan emissary level talks. Bangabandhu presides over the meeting. The Cabinet also discusses the steps that are to be followed after Bangladesh's entry into the Commonwealth. Various other national problems also come up for discussion before the Cabinet.

\$21 MILLION SWEDISH AID FOR BANGLADESH Bangladesh and Sweden today sign an agreement on a 21-milliondollar grant to Bangladesh for reconstruction and development. The donation will be used by the government of Bangladesh for high priority imports of equipment, raw materials and food.
MULK RAJ ANAND CALLS ON BANGABANDHU Renowned Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand today calls on

Bangabandhu at Gono Bhaban and presents him a manuscript titled 'History of Bangladesh: On Ancient Art and Culture' which

5 more die with Covid-19 symptoms

STAR REPORT

Five people, including an eight-year-old girl, have died after showing coronavirus-like symptoms in Khulna, Khagrachhari, Gopalganj, Noakhali and Bogura since Saturday night.

In Khulna, a woman with fever and breathing problems who was undergoing treatment in the isolation ward of Khulna Medical College Hospital, died around noon vesterday.

The patient was admitted to the isolation ward on Saturday night and died around 12:00pm yesterday, Dr Shailendranath Biswas, spokesperson of the hospital, told our Khulna correspondent.

Her sample was sent to the PCR lab of the hospital to be tested for Covid-19, the doctor said.

In Khagrachhari, a 21-year-old male garment worker, who was quarantined at a primary school along with some others in his village of Gugrachari, died yesterday morning, our Rangamati correspondent reported SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

STAY HOME, STAY WELL

Build good relations with thy neighbours

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

In major cities of Bangladesh, people generally do not know much about their next-door neighbours even though they may have been living side by side In their busy metropolitan lives, people have

very little time to pay attention to their neighbours. But during the countrywide shutdown to curb the spread of coronavirus, life has come to a standstill as schools and restaurants are closed, and a huge swathe of the workforce are stuck at home either working remotely or not working at all.

Roads are almost empty and doors are closed, but in these tough times the next-door neighbour can provide some succour and human connection, while maintaining social distancing of course, said the country's eminent psychologist Farida Akhtar. She said neighbours can get to know one

another in conversations from their respective doorways while keeping the appropriate distance. The expert said this pandemic has prompted people to come closer in some ways, as they are

reconnecting with old friends and neighbours have started to become like family. "Humans have an essential need for social

connection and next-door neighbours can be a good option during this coronavirus pandemic,"

Farida said knocking on a neighbour's door to borrow a cup of sugar or some other essential item was once a common practice in Bangladesh, but it is not so these days.

"But this pandemic has changed the whole scenario, if you need anything urgently, you can SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

'Drug dealer' killed in 'gunfight' with BGB

Our Correspondent, Cox's Bazar

A suspected drug trader was killed in a "gunfight" with Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

The deceased identified as Zafor Alam, 30, from Nayapara village under Sabrang union, a BGB official said.

members BGB challenged a boat coming from Myanmar when it was trying to get ashore at Gholarchar ghat in Shahparirdwip area around 2:00am, said Lt Colonel Mohammad Faysal Hasan Khan, commanding officer (CO) of BGB Battalion-2 in SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



AZAN 4-35 12-45 4-45 6-24 7-45 JAMAAT 5-10 1-15 5-00 6-28 8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



A mobile court of Rab-10 yesterday fined a minimum of Tk 500 in the capital's Nayabazar area to those who unnecessarily went out of their homes amid the shutdown.

FIROZ AHMED

Bangladeshi teenager shot dead by BSF

Our Correspondent,
Thakurgaon

A Bangladeshi SSC examinee was shot dead allegedly by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) in Panchagarh Sadar yesterday.

The victim Shimon Roy, 16, son of Paresh Chandra Roy, a resident of Chaklahat union in the upazila, was a student of Panchagarh Government Technical School and College.

Talking to the Daily Star, the victim's father said, "They shot my son in front of my eyes."

Paresh, a schoolteacher by profession, said he and his son were erecting fence around their jute field near Shingroad Prodhanpara border around 4:00pm.

Suddenly, a BSF man entered inside Bangladesh SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

