



The Daily Star



REGD. No. DA 781 | Vol. XXX No. 103 | BAISHAKH 14, 1427 BS | **Your Right to Know** | RAMADAN 3, 1441 HJRI | 12 PAGES PRICE: Tk 12.00

Hidden cases now spreading virus

IEDCR says 23pc patients are without any symptoms; experts fear the number is far higher than that

PINAKI ROY and MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

Shafiqul Alam, a worker at a garment factory in coronavirus-hit Gazipur, returned to his village home in Pirojpur's Bhandaria upazila on April 15. Though he didn't have any Covid-19 symptoms, the upazila administration asked him to remain in home quarantine as a precaution and had him tested for the virus on April 22. The test results came positive. "I still have no symptoms... I don't feel unwell. Upon my return from Gazipur, I have been in isolation in one of the rooms in my house," Shafiqul (not his real name) told this newspaper over the phone on Friday. Including him, six of the seven people who tested positive for the virus in Pirojpur till April 24 had no symptoms, Md Hasnat Yusuf Zaki, civil surgeon in the district, told The Daily Star. Similarly, four members of a family in Tangail and two relatives of a virus-infected doctor in Brahmanbaria tested positive for the virus, but did not show any symptoms. Of the 5,416 coronavirus cases detected till yesterday, 1,250 didn't have any symptoms, according to official data. Experts see it as an indication of a big number of hidden cases who are silently transmitting the deadly virus across the country. An official of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), shared a similar view. "The IEDCR is conducting tests very selectively, mostly on those who have symptoms... It doesn't reflect the real picture as we are not carrying out enough tests," the official told The Daily Star yesterday, seeking anonymity.

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A garment worker takes hand sanitiser from the gatekeeper in front of a factory that reopened in the capital's Tejgaon industrial area with part of its workforce yesterday. Employees of the factory formed a queue maintaining safe distance among each other at the entrance.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Some RMG factories reopen on a limited scale

STAR REPORT

A section of owners yesterday reopened their garment factories with a part of their workforce amid continued protests in different districts demanding arrears. At least 1,427 out of 7,602 export-oriented factories have reopened, industrial police officials said. The move comes although there is no sign that the coronavirus outbreak has been contained. Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association had earlier issued a timetable for reopening the factories and guidelines on maintaining social distance inside the facilities. Some 227 factories were open on the outskirts of Dhaka, 438 in Gazipur, 412 in Chattogram, 193 in Narayanganj, 75 in Mymensingh and 82 in

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BANGLADESH UPDATE

418 New cases in 24hrs	5,416 Total cases	145 Deaths	122 Recoveries	GLOBAL UPDATE	204,014 Deaths	2,945,893 Total cases
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Social protection initiatives scanty in Bangladesh

UN report on Covid-19 response says

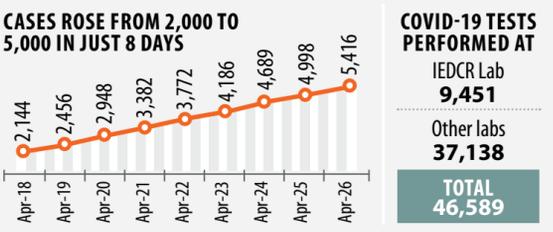
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is coming up with the fewest social protection initiatives in the Asia Pacific region, finds a United Nations position report prepared by the organisation's regional bureau. The report published on April 13 assessed measures adopted by governments in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in countries under the jurisdiction of the organisation's Regional Bureau of Asia Pacific (RBAP). The organisation broke down "social protection" into eight categories: measures to boost affordable healthcare; sickness benefits ensuring income security during sick leave; unemployment protection, preventing job losses and supporting those who lost their jobs; old age, survivor and disability benefits; providing income support (i.e. social assistance, cash transfers and other support); family leave and care policies; modifying the payment of social security contributions and tax payments for enterprises; and an unspecified category called "other measures". According to the report, Bangladesh is only providing income support, or social assistance.

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Another sad milestone passed

Number of infected crosses 5,000; Five more die



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Coronavirus cases in the country have passed the 5,000 mark, with health officials reporting 418 new cases yesterday. The total number of detected cases now stands at 5,416 as the death toll reaches 145. In the 24 hours till 2:30pm yesterday, five more patients died of the disease, Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general (admin) of the directorate general of health services (DGHS) said in a bulletin. All the deceased were from Dhaka district -- four inside the city and the other from Dohar upazila. Three of them were male and two female. Three were aged between 51 and 60 while one over 60 and the other was a 10-year-old child who had kidney disease, Nasima said. According to IEDCR website, Dhaka city has continued to be the worst affected area in the country. As of yesterday, around 52 percent of all positive cases were from the

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Govt targets 5,000 tests a day from May

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Directorate General of Health Services has started working to scale up its coronavirus testing capacity with a target of testing over 5,000 people daily by the first week of next month. Abul Kalam Azad, Director General of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), yesterday told The Daily Star that they had a plan to conduct 10,000 tests daily but they were initially eyeing for 5,000. Currently, the country has a capacity of testing around 3,500 samples a day with the help of 30 PCR machines in 20 labs. "We are preparing eight more labs for coronavirus tests and the number of tests will increase once it is done," Azad said, adding, "We are now thinking of scaling up the testing facilities at upazila-level." He also said they were listing labs of different ministries that could be used for coronavirus tests. As per insiders, if the existing PCR machines operate in two shifts then around 5,500 tests can be performed a day. Besides, although the number of testing labs increased, but the lack of planning and manpower still remains, experts said. People who collect samples on the ground are not well trained. Thus, many of the samples are not being collected properly, they added.

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CONSTRUCTION WORKERS As informal as ignored

Delayed response from ministry, lack of database leave them in trouble amid coronavirus shutdown

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Though the ongoing shutdown has put informal workers in the construction sector in a tight spot as they are largely dependent on daily wages, the ministry concerned has failed to act promptly to address their hardships. Only on April 12, the 18th day of the shutdown, the Ministry of Labour and Employment formed a crisis management committee to address food security for day labourers. It is now compiling a database of construction workers and rickshaw and van pullers so they receive the government's food and financial support. Till April 19, the committee prepared a list of 40,000 workers -- 15,000 of whom are from the construction sector, according to the committee's convener, Mohammad Aminul Haque, director of the Divisional Labour Office. There is no exact count of construction sector workers or indeed, of informal workers, in the country. Of these informal workers, around 24.51 lakh work in building construction; 5.75 lakh in specialised construction activities; 14,000 in plumbing, water and sewerage connection; 1.02 lakh in electricity connection and electrical equipment installation; and 7.7 lakh in furniture, according to the Labour Force Survey 2016-17. Not just the ministry, but labour associations, which are vocal about the rights of day labourers, have reportedly failed to support them in their time of need. "I don't know how long this shutdown will continue. All my savings

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Some RMG factories

FROM PAGE 1

Khulna, according to industrial police.

Of these factories, 480 are members of the BGMEA, 121 BKMEA, 58 Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, and 198 under Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority. There are 570 other factories that have reopened, officials said.

Meanwhile, at least 650 factories have not paid their employees as of yesterday leading to sporadic protests, police sources said.

In Ashulia, many workers, who travelled miles on foot a day ago to join work, complained that they were turned away from their factory gates because the management wanted to keep fewer people inside, said Khairul Mamun Mintu, organising secretary of Bangladesh Garments Workers Trade Union Centre.

The management should have asked only those who were needed at the factory to travel all the way from their villages, he told The Daily Star.

DEMONSTRATIONS

Over 300 sacked workers in Ashulia's Tajpur area demonstrated inside their factory.

The protesters told our correspondent that they found out that they have been laid off after they went to the factory.

Alam Khan, assistant superintendent at Dhaka Industrial Police-1, said police teams were deployed near the factory and officers were talking to the management.

Around 1,000 workers of four other factories in Savar and Ashulia demonstrated in front of their factories demanding last month's salary, labour leaders said.

Several hundred workers of eight factories demonstrated in Narayanganj, a hotspot of the coronavirus outbreak, denouncing layoffs and demanding arrears. A couple of hundred workers

also blocked Dhaka-Narayanganj highway.

Workers were fired from at least 72 factories in Narayanganj, officials said.

There were protests also in Tongi and Gazipur demanding arrears.

BGMEA STATEMENT

"The staggered approach has been adopted so that they [factory managements] cannot all rush at one go and so that the influx of workers can be avoided," said a message sent by the association.

"What we have given is a general outline of the reopening. There are factories who have opened and have written to us...These factories, few in numbers, have started operating in a limited scale," BGMEA said in a WhatsApp message yesterday.

Govt targets

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Asked, Prof Azad of DGHS also admitted that there was a lack of expertise among those who collect samples on the field.

Asked about the testing kits, Nasima Sultana, additional director general at DGHS, said, "We have sufficient number of kits and more kits are coming. Kits will not be a problem."

She said more doctors, nurses and technologists would be recruited soon to solve the manpower crisis.

Contacted, Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) of DGHS, said the more tests we can perform the more accurate picture we would get. That would help us to take more accurate programmes to contain the virus spread.

Although officials did not disclose the number of kits they have, IEDCR sources said the institution has around 30,000 kits stored.

Coronavirus infections in Bangladesh crossed the 5,000 mark yesterday after five more deaths and 418 new cases. The country tested 3,473 samples in the last 24 hours.

Social protection initiatives

FROM PAGE 1

The report iterates the necessity of preventing job losses and providing social protection to those rendered unemployed.

"In Cambodia, Bangladesh and Myanmar, smaller garment factories are closing down due to the pandemic and, as a consequence, shedding jobs that were mostly held by women. In Bangladesh, where 45 percent of the population is vulnerable to falling into poverty, garment factories are crucial for providing incomes, especially to the near-poor," said the report, prepared by RBAP Economist Network.

The report also iterates the necessity of cash transfers and floats the idea of a universal basic income to make sure that the unemployed do not go without any income.

"A temporary UBI payment can boost aggregate demand, help vulnerable people maintain their livelihoods and consumption levels, as various industries shed jobs owing to declining demand or payment difficulties. Importantly, owing to its universality, it reaches the most vulnerable in society that traditional social programmes often cannot," stated the report.

The report criticised "targeted social protection schemes", which are schemes where the recipient has to meet a large number of criterion to receive social protection as being prone to corruption.

"Targeted social protection schemes, despite lower overall costs, have higher administrative costs and may not be immune from considerable leakages [non-poor receiving support while poor being excluded from support]. Moreover, in the context of the current crisis, creating new targeted social protection schemes is unrealistic," said the report.

Another sad milestone

FROM PAGE 1

capital while 32.82 percent are from the other upazilas in Dhaka and the districts belong to Dhaka division.

Narayanganj remained the second-worst affected district with 625 cases followed by Gazipur with 308.

Among the other divisions, Chattogram and Mymensingh shared around four percent positive cases each.

Meanwhile, nine more have recovered from Covid-19, taking the total number of recovery cases to 122, Prof Nasima added.

A total of 1,164 people were put under isolation so far in the country.

Of the 97,132 people so far put under isolation, 79,899 people are still in quarantine.

GOVT SAYS NO SHORTAGE

OF TEST KITS

During this 24-hour, samples of 3,473 individuals were tested in 22 Covid-19 testing labs across the country.

A total of 46,589 samples were tested in the country since January 28 when the first test was conducted.

Prof Nasima also informed that Covid-19 testing has been expanded to three more laboratories, taking the total number of labs to 25.

In addition, it suggested that data be gathered on the informal sector.

"Mechanisms to register informal groups and consolidating their data to bring them under formal mechanisms will be necessary. Thailand, for instance, has asked both formal and informal companies affected by the lockdown to register with the government by a certain date to bring in informal workers and others outside the formal coverage of current social protection systems."

Furthermore, the report warned that stimulus packages have to be governed to ward off mismanagement like using the package to raise executive salaries.

"Stimulus packages can attach simple, development-oriented conditions to the support provided, such as requiring companies to preserve their employment levels and pay wages; or where feasible to use funds received to produce goods and services directly needed to strengthen the health system and its ability to contain, treat, and eventually, beat the virus," stated the report.

The report also warned the countries against depending on international development assistance, and asked them to contain fiscal deficits.

"It is key to review existing budgetary priorities -- notably tax exemptions and glaring instances of tax evasion and avoidance on the revenue side, and fossil fuel subsidies, discretionary payments, "white elephant" projects on the expenditure side," said the report.

As a final recommendation, the report asked governments to review existing policies and make this the norm and not see these measures as a temporary band-aid.

The new labs have been set up at Abdur Rahim Medical College in Dinajpur, Kusthia Medical College and Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Science University.

Despite the number of laboratories has been increased in the last few days, the number of tests has not gone up correspondingly; it is still near around 3,000 every day -- which is far too low provided the level of transmission and size of the population.

Although the authorities are yet to lay bare the reason behind the inadequate number of tests, media reports indicate that shortage of testing kits might have been the cause.

Prof Nasima Sultana, however, dismissed the claim that they have any shortage of kits and other testing equipment.

"We are regularly importing test kits and we have enough supply of the kits," she said without mentioning the number of kits they currently have at their disposal.

Experts blamed many cases have been remaining undetected due to the small number of tests.



SOCIAL NEARING ... Hundreds of workers, with inches of space between them, climb a foot bridge at Chattogram's EPZ intersection after, inset, crowding out of factories on the first day of resuming their work in the port city yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

As informal as ignored

FROM PAGE 1

are finished," said day labourer Mokhlesur Rahman, a father of three, who left Dhaka for his village in Baufal of Patuakhali immediately after the government order was declared.

Ayub Ali, an interior decoration contractor, was working on the decoration of a shop at Pir Yemeni Market. After the market was closed on March 21, he too left for his home in Dogachi village of Pabna. He is now looking for a microcredit loan to support his family.

"Back in the village, I worked as a labourer at a local brick kiln for around 10 days in order to support my family. But it was also then shut down," said Ayub, adding 10 workers under his supervision are also going through hard times.

Toju Mia, a plumber in the capital's Gendaria, said he last worked at an under-construction building in the Sutrapur area in mid-March. "I sought some time from my landlord to pay rent. But I still don't know how I will pay him," he said.

Habibur Rahman Shiraz, chairman of the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), said the prime minister has issued strict directions on providing support to day labourers during the shutdown enforced to slow down coronavirus transmission.

"But there might have been some problems in executing this direction at the field level."

The Directorate of Labour, a regulatory agency under the labour ministry, has no database of construction workers. In contrast, the fisheries and livestock departments,

for example, have their own lists of informal workers in their respective sectors.

Shiraz, also labour secretary of the ruling Awami League, said the Jatiya Sramik League has a list of workers who are being given support accordingly. Asked about non-partisan workers and those affiliated with other political parties, he said they are providing support to all day labourers, including construction workers.

However, he acknowledged, preparing a list of day labourers in the construction sector is slightly problematic as they do not stay in the same place for a long time.

AKM Mizanur Rahman, director general of the Directorate of Labour, said they do not have any separate relief programmes for informal workers, such as those working in the construction sector.

"The government is centrally giving aid, we're assisting them," he said, confirming the directorate does not have a database of informal workers.

When asked about the delayed response, Mizanur cited the unprecedented crisis as reason for the time needed in responding to the labourers' needs.

The Daily Star tried to reach the State Minister for Labour and Employment, Begum Monnujan Sufian, over phone but she did not respond to these correspondents' calls or text message.

ASSOCIATIONS, TOO, UNHELPFUL

"We are needed only for May Day programmes and political rallies. They use us. No leaders have called to know how we're passing our days," said

Sobhan Mia, a construction worker from Baufal of Patuakhali.

"We're drowning in debt, but no one is there to protect us."

According to construction workers' leaders, there are around 350 associations that supposedly look after the welfare of informal workers in the sector. But they too are not playing a noticeable role in addressing the workers' plight, so far.

Osman Ghani, president of Imarat Nirman Sramik Union Bangladesh, said around 1.8 lakh construction workers including masons, labourers, plumbers, electricians, and carpenters are registered to the organisation.

"On April 19, I submitted a list of 2,000 construction workers to the DC office for aid," he said. He added that his organisation does not have enough funding to address these labourers' situation.

Sheikh Mohammad Nurul Haque, general secretary of Bangladesh Nirman Sramik League, said the organisation has around 40 lakh members across the country.

"We are doing these services voluntarily as we have no financial capital centrally. We have to depend on government support and aid to support our members," he told The Daily Star.

As a part of arranging such support, Nurul said that they have asked their district committee members to apply to the local administration with the phone number and NID details of their members, so that these labourers can get the relief arranged by the government for all those in need.

Hidden cases now spreading virus

FROM PAGE 1

Since January 28, all the 22 labs -- 10 in the capital and 12 outside -- assigned for testing suspected Covid-19 cases have tested 46,589 samples for the virus.

Asked, IEDCR Director Meerjady Sabrina Flora claimed that the number of asymptomatic patients would not be huge.

"We found 23 percent of all the Covid-19 cases asymptomatic," she told this newspaper yesterday.

Recently, eight IEDCR staffers tested positive for the virus but none of them had any symptoms.

"The IEDCR staffers have regular checkups as we deal with patients. None of the eight staffers showed any Covid-19 symptoms before the tests," said a doctor at the IEDCR, seeking anonymity.

Of them, six have already recovered without showing any signs of the disease while the other two are receiving treatment at the Infectious Diseases Hospital in the capital.

The doctor also mentioned a recent study by the Indian Council of Medical Research, which said 80 percent of the Covid-19 patients in India are asymptomatic.

"The number of such asymptomatic patients in Bangladesh could also be high," added the physician.

Recently, 25 staffers of a private hospital in the capital's Panthapath tested positive for the virus and none of them had any symptoms. Besides,

28 devotees at the Iskcon temple in Swamibagh, who got infected with the virus, didn't show any symptoms.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Prof Ridwanur Rahman, a specialist in medicine and infectious diseases, termed the recent detection of asymptomatic cases "the tip of the iceberg".

"It is a proof of our assumption that there are many undetected cases. It is tougher to control virus transmission at this stage. The virus is being spread mostly by those carriers who are not approaching the authorities for tests.

"Since we are not carrying out enough tests, we don't have the real picture. What we are seeing is just the tip of the iceberg. It's not possible to reach any conclusion based on the existing data."

Contacted, former DGHS Director General Prof Shah Monir Hossain, assigned by the DGHS to advise on controlling and preventing Covid-19 in Dhaka region, said there are many asymptomatic cases across the country.

"We have now reached the fourth stage of virus transmission. This means community transmission is there. At this stage, it is essential to test the suspected cases and also those who came into contact with Covid-19 patients."

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), the fourth stage refers to the highest

level of transmission, and in this phase, community transmission happens in many areas of the country at the same time.

Prof Monir said, "A number of asymptomatic cases, who came into contact with Covid-19 patients, are being tested for the virus as part of the government's contact tracing activities across the country. Any asymptomatic carrier of the virus may develop symptoms a few days later. It is because of the incubation period."

"As per our epidemiological prediction, the number of positive cases will keep increasing in the next two weeks. Then it will begin to fall."

"But we are worried because our country is a densely populated one. If virus transmission happens among the low socio-economic groups [such as slum dwellers], the situation may worsen," he pointed out.

The Covid-19 is transmitted mainly through respiratory droplets expelled by someone who is coughing or has other symptoms such as fever or tiredness. Many of those infected with the virus don't show any symptoms.

This is particularly true at the early stages of the disease. It is possible to contract the virus from someone who has just a mild cough and does not feel ill.

Some reports have indicated that people with no symptoms can transmit the virus. It is still unknown how often it happens.

Validate our test kit

FROM PAGE 12

CROs are the companies that are contracted by the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) for medical research.

"We then requested the DGDA to write which CRO we would go through, but it did not," Dr Zafrullah said.

He said CROs are contracted by the DGDA and therefore it should send the kits to them for testing, instead of Gonoshasthaya having to "directly go to the CROs".

Dr Zafrullah demanded that the government immediately make arrangements to start the process of kit validation.

"We don't know why the DGDA is handling the issue bureaucratically, when this is an emergency and we need to save lives. A day's delay may mean thousands of lives [lost]," he said.

Businesses and educational institutions are closed and that has had serious economic and social implications. There is pressures to reopen factories, he said, adding that their low-cost kit, which can lead to large-scale testing, is a must if businesses, and specifically factories, are to reopen.

The kit -- Rapid Dot Blot -- that was developed by a team of researchers of Gonoshasthaya Kendra is capable of testing antibody and antigen. Trials by Gonoshasthaya Kendra found its accuracy to be more than 90 percent.

The kit was supposed to be handed over to the DGDA on April 11, but it was not possible due to technical glitches at the factory of Gonoshasthaya-RNA Biotech Limited, a sister concern of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, although the Directorate General of Health Services had provided samples to Gonoshasthaya to be tested.

On April 12, DGDA again applied to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGDA) for blood samples of Covid-19 patients. The DGDA eventually provided it on April 23.

"Our scientists worked day and night to test the blood samples and prepare the kits. Now, when we are urging the DGDA to do its part by approving after validation, we see sheer disinterest. I don't know why. Some quarters may be misleading the DGDA," Zafrullah said.

Gonoshasthaya organised a handover ceremony at its Nagar Hospital on April 25, when the DGDA representatives were scheduled to attend and receive the kits, but there were none from the DGDA.

It handed over kit samples to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and the US Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) for independent validation.

"As DGDA representatives did not come to the event, we contacted them and went there today, but we had no idea we had to face such bureaucracy," Zafrullah said.

"It is such a big emergency in Bangladesh, but some bureaucrats of the government are not realising it... they are more interested in private interest than that of public interest," he said.

Dr Firoz Ahmed, one of the researchers, said they want the prime minister's personal intervention to ensure that DGDA promptly arranges the validation process of the kit.

The team of researchers who developed the kit include Dr Bijon Kumar Sil, Nihad Adnan, Raed Jamiruddin, Firoz Ahmed and Mohib Ullah Khondokar.

Dr Bijon was among the researchers who had developed a kit to diagnose SARS coronavirus in 2003. Rapid Dot Blot is patented under his name.

CITIZENS CONCERNED

Fifty-five eminent personalities in a joint statement yesterday expressed concern over repressive measures against health workers and government's apathy to give approval to Gonoshasthaya Kendra's Covid-19 test kits.

"With deep concern, we are noticing the government's limitation to stem the spread of coronavirus is sending the people of the country to an uncertain future," said the statement.

The statement said that government limitations will be further exposed as it is taking repressive measure against doctors and health workers and government disinterest to give approval to Gonoshasthaya Kendra's and RNA Biotech limited Covid-19 test kits and its production, and publicly demeaning Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder and freedom fighter Zafrullah Chowdhury, the statement added.

Government is importing testing kits or taking grants but not providing necessary help to home-grown test kit initiatives.

None from the DGDA was present at the Gonoshasthaya Kendra's handover ceremony to collect kits, it said, adding: "This shows government's disinterest nakedly."

Moreover, a section of the media are harassing Zafrullah publicly and trying to start a campaign to make the Gonoshasthaya Kendra's test kit questionable, the statement added.

Among others Dhaka University professor emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury, Central Women's University Vice Chancellor Prof Perween Hasan, former DU professors Akmal Hossain and Ahmed Kamal, Jahangirnagar University professor Anu Muhammad, professor Naila Zaman Khan, photographer Shahidul Alam, professor Meghna Guhathakurta, professor Gitiara Nasreen, anthropologist and columnist Rahnuna Ahmed and journalist Golam Mortoza signed the statement.

AFP, Lima

Seventeen police officers in Peru have died after contracting novel coronavirus while enforcing the nation's pandemic lockdown, officials and state media said.

Authorities admitted earlier this week that at least 1,300 officers had been infected by Covid-19.

On Saturday new interior minister Gaston Rodriguez, who was sworn in a day earlier after the sudden

resignation of his predecessor when the infections tally emerged, said: "We have 17 deceased police officers nationwide, 11 of them in Lima."

The high number is linked to "the exposure that police officers have when intervening with people who violate the measures issued to contain the spread of the coronavirus," state news agency Andina said Saturday.

Peru has been on lockdown since

March 16.

Rodriguez said his department had allocated 50 million soles (\$15 million) "for the purchase of protection elements such as masks and gloves" for Peru's police.

He added that roughly 220,000 Covid-19 tests for the force were due to arrive by the first week of May.

"We have an obligation to take care of them," said Rodriguez. "The police must be well equipped."



Even in the bleakest of days, children can find joy in the mundane. These three were waiting for relief goods by the street at Chattogram city's CRB area last Friday, and they found a way to pass that time making goggles, rings and watches out of coconut tree leaves.

PHOTO:
RAJIB RATHAN

Rehab centres restrict admission of patients for Covid-19 outbreak

MAHBUJUR RAHMAN KHAN and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

It was about 2am on April 15 when a helpless mother phoned the owner of a narcotics rehabilitation centre in Dhaka's Gulshan.

Breaking down in tears, she pleaded the owner to admit her drug addict son to his rehabilitation centre, but the owner refused.

"She was crying and pleading me to admit her son, as she could not control him," said the owner, on condition of anonymity.

"I didn't want to put my staff and other patients in coronavirus [infection] risk with admission of new patients. Instead I suggested her [the mother] to seek help from the Gulshan Police Station," he said, adding that his stock of personal protection equipment (PPE) for his staff are limited.

To prevent spread of the novel coronavirus in the country, the government has enforced a shutdown and restricted public movement.

These measures have managed to reign in the illegal trade of narcotics to some extent.

"We are not allowing anyone to move, and have sealed all the narcotics spots. Even then, if anyone is found selling or using narcotics, we are taking lawful action against them," Mahmuda Afroz Lucky, additional deputy commissioner of

Mirpur division police, told The Daily Star recently.

On the flip side, this cessation in narcotics trading has taken a toll on families of drug users, who are now undergoing severe withdrawal symptoms, and often turning violent.

Two days after the countrywide shutdown was imposed on March 25, a 17-year-old boy stabbed his mother to death as she refused to give him money for drugs.

The mother, Suraiya, used to work as a domestic help at a Jatrabari neighbourhood. On the fateful day, the boy first locked into a heated argument over money. At one stage, he stabbed his mother in front of their home, police said quoting eyewitness.

Talking to the Daily Star, Mukti Das, who has been running Setu Drug Addicts Rehabilitation Center, said many drug users are becoming violent on their family members in want of drugs.

"Family members are the ultimate sufferers in the hand of drug abusers," Mukti said.

Besides the government drug addict treatment centres, there are about 324 private centres which have around 4,103 beds.

However, almost all of them have stopped admitting new patients since March 25.

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India sends second lot of medical supplies

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

India yesterday donated its second tranche of emergency medical supplies -- 1,00,000 Hydroxychloroquine tablets and 50,000 sterile surgical latex gloves -- to Bangladesh.

Indian High Commissioner Riva Ganguly Das handed over the supplies to the officials concerned of the Central Medical Stores Depot.

On March 25, India donated 30,000 surgical masks and 15,000 head-covers to Bangladesh.

The assistance is being given under the Saarc Covid-19 Emergency Fund, created following a video conference among the leaders of Saarc countries on March 15 initiated by Indian Prime Minister

Narendra Modi.

India has made an initial contribution of \$10 million, while Bangladesh announced a contribution of \$1.5 million; Afghanistan and Nepal pledged \$1 million each; Sri Lanka \$5 million; the Maldives and Bhutan pledged \$200,000 and \$100,000 respectively. After holding out for some time, Pakistan early this month pledged a contribution of \$3 million to the fund.

In a statement, Riva Ganguly said the assistance is part of India's "Neighborhood First" policy and with a view to taking a collaborative regional approach to containing the spread of Covid-19.

She said separate video conferences between health experts and trade

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Circular to keep 18 ministries, divisions open withdrawn

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The public administration ministry has withdrawn its earlier circular to keep 18 ministries and divisions, and their agencies open on a limited scale during the ongoing shutdown.

However, government offices, which are involved in emergency work and services, will remain open on a limited scale, the ministry said.

The development came at a time when several hundred garment factories in and around Dhaka and eight state-run jute mills in Khulna-Jashore industrial belt partially resumed activities yesterday, despite experts warning that doing so will increase the risk of virus transmission at a wider scale.

The ministry on April 23 extended the ongoing shutdown of most public and private offices till May 5 to slow the spread of novel coronavirus, according to a circular.

However, factories, including pharmaceuticals and export-oriented manufacturing units, can resume operation by ensuring health safety of workers, it said.

On the same day, the ministry issued a separate circular saying that 18 ministries and divisions, and their agencies will operate on a limited scale during the Covid-19 shutdown.

Those included the Prime Minister's Office, and the ministries of health and family welfare, agriculture, commerce, food, LGRD and co-operatives, and disaster management and relief.

Prime Minister Office, in a circular on April 23, said the office will reopen on April 26 and director generals, project directors, directors, deputy directors, assistant directors and all same rank officials were asked to attend office regularly.

The circular, which is available at PMO's website, however said presence of supporting staffers should not be more than 25 per cent.

Public Administration Secretary Shaikh Yusuf Harun yesterday said that they have already withdrawn the circular centring reopening 18 ministries and divisions, and it was

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

'Stand by Bangladesh'

TIB urges development partners to continue their support in tackling Covid-19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday called upon Bangladesh's development partners to ensure "unprecedented level of support" to the country in its efforts to the Covid-19 crisis and recovery.

At the same time, it urged the donor organisations to ensure the highest standards of anti-corruption, transparency and accountability at all levels.

In a statement issued to the media, TIB said no country was fully prepared nor had the perfect capacity to cope with the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Bangladesh could not be any exception, it said.

In spite of commendable economic performance in gross domestic product (GDP) growth and many other socio-economic indicators as well as globally acknowledged disaster management experience, the crisis has exposed Bangladesh to worst ever challenges of sustaining the progresses achieved in the health sector and beyond, the statement added.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "While full consequences of the crisis remain unpredictable to be assessed in concrete terms at this stage, it is clear that Bangladesh will certainly require substantial donor support."

"Hence, our call to development partners as trusted partners of shared interest, for deeper and wider support to Bangladesh than ever before," he said.

TIB said it considers the development partners as valued partners in Bangladesh's "compulsions to prevent and control corruption by promoting transparency and

accountability".

"We, therefore, urge upon them to ensure that anti-corruption principles and practices are specifically ensured in all initiatives or projects at all levels of decisions, designs and implementation," TIB said.

In management and recovery from mega crises like this, funding decisions and project implementation processes may often genuinely need to be fast-tracked, it said.

"However, nothing justifies any compromise of proactive and on-demand disclosure of information including unrestricted reporting by the media and civil society including freedom of opinion," the statement added.

"Public procurement, as rushed as it may often require to be in crisis situations, must be subjected to transparency and accountability. All kinds of procurement risks like collusion, political bias, conflict of interest and over-pricing must be prevented by ensuring compliance and accountability without favour or fear.

"Improved transparency and accountability will boost public trust and credibility of the government as well as donors. Lack of openness will create greater opportunities for abuse of power and discretion as well as collusive corruption and rent-seeking," said the TIB executive director.

The Covid-19 crisis has overwhelmed the world by unprecedented challenges. At the same time, it also calls attention of all stakeholders to be more vigilant to ensure integrity, in which strategically designed contributions of development partners can add great value, said TIB in the statement.



Indian High Commissioner Riva Ganguly Das handed over the emergency medical supplies yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

DHAKA-LONDON UK to operate 5 more flights

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

British High Commissioner Robert Chatterton Dickson yesterday announced five more charter flights from Dhaka to London for British tourists, short term visitors and their direct dependents to return to the UK.

In a video message, he said the flights are scheduled for April 29 and May 1, 3, 5 and 7.

"If you're currently in Sylhet, you will also have the option of booking a domestic transfer from Sylhet to Dhaka ahead of the flights on Wednesday 29 April, Friday 1 May, Tuesday 5 May and Thursday 7 May. There will be no domestic transfer option available ahead of the flight to the UK on Sunday 3 May," the high commissioner said.

"These flights cost £600 per person, whether you are departing from Sylhet or Dhaka," he said.

"To be eligible to take these flights, the UK nationals must be normally resident in the UK," he said, adding, "Their eligibility will be checked before your tickets are issued."

So far, the UK high commission has arranged four special flights to fly UK nationals from Bangladesh.

Chief justice to seek president's approval for 'virtual' hearing of urgent cases

Closure of all courts extended till May 5

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday decided to keep the court functions closed till May 5 to contain the spread of coronavirus.

He took the decision at a full court meeting with the judges of both the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court. The meeting was held through video conference.

The meeting decided to amend the rules for holding virtual hearing of very urgent cases through online and video conference.

The SC judges also decided that the chief justice will request President Abdul Hamid to issue an ordinance so that the subordinate courts can hold virtual hearing of the urgent cases, SC sources said.

The chief justice may constitute a committee for amending the rules with necessary provisions and guidelines. He also decided to suspend the limited court functions till May 3.

The judges and lawyers will be given training through the United Nations Development Programme for holding virtual hearing and disposing of the cases through digital services.

The magistrates concerned will hear the urgent cases as usual during the ongoing closure of courts, sources said.

The chief justice on April 23 decided to operate functions of courts on a limited scale following demands from some lawyers, in order to hear and dispose of very urgent cases. This decision then was suspended till April 27. Supreme Court Registrar General Md Ali Akbar issued two separate circulars to this effect, citing unavoidable reasons.

The CJ however convened a full court meeting with judges of Appellate and High Court Divisions yesterday and decided to keep the court functions closed till May 5.



Krishnachura trees are starting to show their vibrant hues to anyone who wishes to marvel at their beauty. But sadly, not many will get to stand under their branches and appreciate this year's bloom. This photo was taken recently from Chandrima Udyan in the capital.

PHOTO:
PRABIR DAS

Khandakar Asaduzzaman laid to rest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Former lawmaker Khandakar Asaduzzaman was laid to rest with state honour at his family graveyard in Naruchi village under Gopalpur upazila in Tangail yesterday morning.

Earlier, his namaz-e-janaza was held at Naruchi College premises.

Asaduzzaman, an organiser of the Liberation War, passed away at his Dhaka residence at 4:10pm on Saturday due to old age complications. He was 87.

He left behind his wife, son and two daughters to mourn his death.

He was the first finance secretary of Bangladesh government and took part in politics after retiring from his job.

He was elected lawmaker from Tangail-2 (Gopalpur-Bhuapur) constituency in 1996, 2008 and 2014 as an Awami League candidate.

His daughter Oprajita Haque is now a reserve-seat lawmaker in Tangail.

Rehab centres

FROM PAGE 3

Ayaz Uddin, Deputy Managing Director (DMD) of Holy Life said they are not admitting new patients and not even allowing any visitors to see patients.

"It's a time when people could not even trust their own hands. We don't want to take any risk," he said.

Larger rehabilitation centers -- like Mukti in Elephant Road and Prottoy in Baridhara -- have also stopped admitting new patients.

"Narcotics treatment is kind of group therapy and we have to provide the treatment in groups. For this reason, we are avoiding request for new admission as we don't have enough space in the rehab centres in Dhaka to ensure new admission during quarantine period," said the owner of a rehab centre in Mirpur, preferring not to be named.

"Thus, we do not want to take the risk of our admitted patients and staff getting infected with the coronavirus," added the owner.

Eminent psychologist Dr Akhtaruzzaman Selim, who had worked at Central Drug Addiction Rehabilitation Centre, said symptoms of withdrawal are more likely to occur among people who are addicted to heroine, morphine, sleeping pills and alcohol.

But yaba users are different. "Refrainment from taking yaba might cause someone to sleep for entire days at the start. After that, depression begins to grip them," he said, adding that symptoms can vary depending on a person's health and duration of addiction.

Dr Akhtaruzzaman further suggested parents and guardians to deal with addicted family members with time and patience.

Khorshid Alam, assistant director of Department of Narcotics Control, said there are around hundred rehab centres in Dhaka, and they are trying to take updates from the centres via video call regularly.

"The number of patients may have increased slightly, but we are actually discouraging rehab authorities from taking in new patients. If they admit anyone, then we are asking them to follow the health directives strictly, and maintaining the 14-day quarantine is must," he told The Daily Star.

Registration exam of non-govt teachers postponed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 17th teachers' registration examinations to qualify for appointment to the private educational institutions have been postponed due to the evolving coronavirus crisis.

The preliminary test was scheduled for May 15 and 16 and written tests for August 7 and 8. The exams were postponed due to unavoidable circumstances, an order of Non-Government Teachers' Registration and Attestation Authority (NTRCA) said yesterday. New exam schedule will be given later, the order uploaded on its website said.

The test is a pre-qualifying exam to

appoint teachers in private schools, colleges, madrasas, and technical institutions.

JAHAJI STARTS ONLINE MODEL TESTS Meanwhile, authorities of a mobile phone app "Jahaji" yesterday launched an online model test for examinees of Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exams.

The online model test for children of staff members working with inland vessels operations will be free of cost, said Jahaji co-founder and CEO Kajal Abdullah.

Others will need to pay Tk 1,000, for taking part in 40 MCQ model tests, he added. For more information, one can visit specialtrix.com.

India sends

FROM PAGE 3

representatives of the Saarc nations were held to discuss specific measures, trade facilitation and exchange of best practices. Health officials from Saarc nations are in constant touch to share best practices and to benefit from each other.

Further, Indian healthcare experts have designed e-ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation) training modules for Saarc nations in the form of short live webinars for health care professionals on Covid-19 management strategies, capacity building, knowledge sharing on best practices and related aspects.

The first such online course was conducted on April 17-21 by All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Raipur in which over 90 health professionals from Bangladesh participated.

A second online course is being organised by Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, India from April 26 to May 6 under ITEC initiative.

Circular

FROM PAGE 3

not available on the ministry's website.

"However, government offices involved in emergency work and services will operate on a limited scale," he told The Daily Star.

The government has been enforcing the shutdown from March 25. Most government and private offices remained closed, and operation of all types of public transport, except vehicles involved in transporting goods and emergency services, remained suspended.

M'singh mayor joins farmers in boro harvesting



PHOTO: STAR
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Mymensingh City Corporation Mayor Ekramul Haque Titu yesterday joined farmers in harvesting boro paddy in Char Kalibari area.

He took part in the move taken by the leaders and activists of city unit of Krishak League. They harvested paddy on 230 decimals of land owned by farmer Tofazzol Hossain in the area.

Such a programme will go on, especially in the newly included areas in the city, said the mayor.

Krishak League city unit president AB Siddique, secretary Abul Hashem Raihan, vice president Noor Ali Talukder, joint secretary Sohail Rana and Shamima Rahim, among others, participated in the harvesting.

Earlier on Thursday, the leaders and activists harvested paddy in Shalihar village under Gouripur upazila.

Krishak League district secretary Golam Mustafa Babul alias VP Babul led the inaugural programme. They harvested boro on 80 decimals of land of one Anisuzzaman Bhuiyan. They also carried the harvested paddy to the farmer's house.

Babul said they are helping farmers in boro harvest in the district considering the ongoing countrywide crisis of farm labourers due to coronavirus pandemic.

Build Shonar Bangla

FROM PAGE 12

The prime minister further says that Fazlul Huq was a true Bangalee in his words and deeds, through which he carved out a niche in the hearts of the peasants of Bengal. "In the history of Bangladesh, Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq was the pioneer among those who fought for the cause of the oppressed people in rural Bengal," he adds.

"While we observe his death anniversary for the first time in the sovereign and independent Bangladesh, we can say that he believed in our principles of democracy, secularism, socialism and nationalism. On this auspicious day let us pledge to build the Shonar Bangla on the principle of socialism," reads the message of Bangabandhu.

BANGABANDHU'S STERN WARNING TO EXPLOITERS

Bangabandhu reaffirms today that socialism must be established in the country to provide the teeming millions with food, clothing and shelter. Addressing a seminar organised by the Awami League on the 10th death anniversary of Sher-e-Bangla, the prime minister makes it clear that if any obstruction is put in the way

of the establishment of socialism, it will be removed. He warns those elements who are conspiring against the policy of nationalisation that if they do not desist soon from their evil-mongering, they might be put behind bars.

The prime minister wonders how some people can forget the blood which still stains the country. How can people still indulge in profiteering, bribery and corruption? He calls upon all to change their mentality.

He further says that a section of workers is forcing the administrators of nationalised industries to pay them money. The workers, he says, forget that these industries belong to seven-and-a-half crore people of the country, not only to them. Turning to those who are amassing fortunes, Bangabandhu asks them to take a lesson from the fate of the Muslim Leaguers. People will not tolerate them, he warns. "I shall remain with the people," he declares. "I have received the love and affection of the people and I don't want anything more."

SOURCES: April 28, 1972 issues of *Bangladesh Observer*, *Dainik Bangla* and *Ittefaq*

German

FROM PAGE 12

When the officers arrived at the salons, carefully installed in the cellars of two private houses, "people were having their hair done", local police said in a statement.

Two people were waiting for a cut in Elsenfeld and another in a cellar in Mornlingen, according to the German agency DPA, which claims that "the salons were professionally equipped".

Police have opened investigations for non-compliance with lockdown measures which, in Bavaria, are among the strictest in Germany.

Under the rules set down at the end of March when confinement started, leaving home without "valid reason" is punishable by a fine of 150 euros.

Hair salons, closed like other businesses considered non-essential, however, will begin to reopen from May 4 in the country as part of a gradual de-confinement.

Locals loot

FROM PAGE 12

Kaskanakpur and Barthakuri unions of the upazila at a special price of Tk 10 per kg and 30 kgs per family.

Mahtab Hossain Chowdhury, chairman of Manikpur union of the upazila, said, "The truck, loaded with 570 sacks of rice for 684 families of three unions, reached Kaliganj bazar last night and rice for 228 families of Manikpur union was supposed to be unloaded to the dealer's point in the bazaar."

"The remaining rice was supposed to be sent to the respective unions but the dealer of a nearby Kaskanakpur union owns a rice store in this bazar and allegedly unloaded rice here. Locals first started protesting and then they looted the whole truck," he said.

Bijon Kumar Singha, upazila nirbahi officer of Zakiganj, said, "We were not informed until last night [Saturday night] about the rice to be brought to Zakiganj. When informed this morning, I rushed to the spot and found 14 sacks of rice in the union's dealer's store while we found another 26 or 27 sacks at the store of the dealer of a nearby union."

"The dealer claimed that locals dropped these rice sacks in his store to frame him. Meanwhile, most sacks of rice was looted from the truck by the locals and police recovered some," he said.

Lutfur Rahman, additional superintendent of Sylhet District Police, said, "We are investigating the matter of embezzlement of the rice and looting of the truck. A case will be filed in this regard soon."

"We detained two dealers, the truck driver and his helper, and two other locals. So far 346 sacks of rice have been recovered and police are looking for the rest," he said.

Nations prepare to ease lockdowns

FROM PAGE 12

Governments are planning to slowly peel back lockdown measures in order to avoid a sudden rush back to normal life -- and the risk of a resurgence amid warnings from the World Health Organization that recovered people might not be immune to re-infection.

Spanish families embraced new rules allowing children outside for the first time since March 14, with kids hopping on bicycles and scooters on the streets of Madrid -- some wearing small masks and gloves.

"They are super excited, very, very impatient. They were up at 6:30 am, saying 'We are going out. We are going out!'," Inmaculada Paredes told AFP, ready to take her seven- and four-year-old kids outdoors.

Under the revised rules, children are allowed out once per day between 9:00 am and 9:00 pm, but cannot venture more than one kilometre (0.6 miles) from their homes.

The new rules were rolled out as the death toll in the hard-hit country dropped to 288 people yesterday, the lowest since March 30.

With more than 23,000 fatalities, Spain has the third highest death toll in the world after Italy's 26,000 and more than 53,000 in the United States.

Other hard-hit countries across Europe are also starting to look toward a slow crawl back to normality.

Italy yesterday said schools would reopen in September, while many business could resume work next

week, and France was expected to unveil details of its de-confinement plan on Tuesday.

Belgium said schools and businesses will reopen from mid-May, while Germany started to reopen some shops earlier this week.

RAMADAN AT HOME

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia yesterday said it would partially lift its 24-hour curfew, allowing malls and retailers to open their doors during certain hours.

But the kingdom said it would maintain a round-the-clock lockdown in the Muslim holy city of Makkah.

Worshippers in the country joined hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world who marked the second day of Ramadan at home, avoiding traditional, large family meals to break their day-time fasts under social distancing rules.

Rejecting the advice of top disease experts, the US state of Georgia allowed thousands of businesses to resume operations, from hairdressers to bowling alleys.

"How long are we supposed to imprison ourselves?" said 30-year-old Mackenzie Scharf, one of many in Georgia embracing the return to something resembling normalcy.

"This is much safer than going grocery shopping," she told AFP on the beach at Tybee Island, where her five-year-old son flew a kite under a cloudless sky.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly said he wants to resume business in the world's biggest

economy, even as medical advisors have cautioned against easing lockdown too soon or too fast.

The US leader faced a fresh volley of criticism after suggesting that coronavirus could be treated by shining ultraviolet light inside patients' bodies, or with injections of household disinfectant.

He lashed out at the media on Twitter, accusing journalists of posing hostile questions, and suggested his daily coronavirus briefings were not worth his time.

"They get record ratings, & the American people get nothing but Fake News. Not worth the time & effort!," Trump wrote.

IMMUNITY WARNING

While new reported cases appear to have plateaued at about 80,000 a day, the world remains in wait as companies and governments race to develop treatments and, eventually, a vaccine for the virus.

Some governments are studying measures such as "immunity passports" as one way to get people back to work after weeks of shutdowns that have roiled the global economy.

"If I've already had corona then I'm not infectious," said Berlin resident Lothar Kopp, hoping to test positive for antibodies as it could allow him to visit his elderly mother.

But the WHO warned that people who survive infection cannot be certain they will not be hit again by the respiratory disease, which first emerged in China late last year.

BPC plans to rent private tanks

FROM PAGE 12

Saudi Arabian Oil Company and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

On April 23, the price of one barrel of Arab Light oil was \$16.01 and that of Murban oil was \$19.04. The price per barrel of crude oil of each has fallen 45 and 50 percent, respectively, in just one month.

As of April 22, BPC currently has reserves of around 9.41 lakh metric tonnes of fuel oil. Its storage capacity is 9.5 lakh metric tonnes.

Due to the limited storage capacity, around 1.2 lakh metric tonnes of diesel and 20,000 metric tonnes of crude oil are now stuck in five vessels at the outer anchorage of Chattogram port. Another import of 4.5 lakh tonnes of fuel oil is awaited next month.

According to BPC data, the ongoing shutdown due to the coronavirus outbreak has reduced fuel consumption by 60 percent in the country's industry, agriculture, and transport sectors.

In April last year, an average of 13,000 tonnes of diesel were used per day; this figure has come down to 6,000 tonnes this month. The daily demand for jet fuel has come down to only 81 metric tonnes from 1,239 metric tonnes in April last year. The demand for other fuel -- including petrol, octane, and kerosene -- has also declined significantly, the data showed.

BPC buys 50 percent of oil through government-to-government agreements and the remaining 50 percent through open tenders. To meet the demand in the country, an average of five to six lakh metric tonnes of fuel oil is imported every month.

"Stocks have increased every day due to the declining demand for fuel oil. Dealing with the situation, an initiative has been taken to conserve these fuels at various

privately-owned petroleum companies and power plants," said Syed Mehdi Hasan, BPC's director (management).

"The amount of oil that can be stored in these places is being checked. We have already held discussions with several petroleum companies. We hope this issue will be resolved soon," he further told The Daily Star.

Mehdi added that around 65 to 70 percent of the country's fuel oil demand is for diesel. At present, stored diesel amounts to around 5.32 lakh tonnes, against a capacity of 6.28 lakh tonnes. The four oil tankers, currently at the outer anchorage of Chattogram port, containing a further 1.2 lakh tonnes of diesel, would exceed capacity.

Around 45,000 tonnes of oil have also been stored for now in BPC's oil tankers, normally used for transporting the fuel.

BPC officials said they have already sent a letter to eight major private companies requesting information on the number of tanks and their capacity, the receiving points and rent of the tanks, and rates of other associated costs. A BPC committee will make a report on their decision on the rates quoted by the companies and BPC will then sign mutual agreements with interested companies for storage till December this year.

While the oil remains unloaded from the five ships carrying diesel and crude oil stranded outside the port for more than a week now, BPC will have to pay an additional fine of around \$10,000 per day.

According to Chattogram Customs House data, 6.79 lakh tonnes of diesel and 3.3 lakh tonnes of crude oil were imported by BPC between January and April 23 this year. During the same period last year, 10.71 lakh tonnes and 3.69 lakh tonnes were imported respectively.

PM lauded in Forbes

FROM PAGE 12

She was quick off her feet standing up to this one, with a response the World Economic Forum called "admirable".

Hasina, the country's longest-serving prime minister, started evacuating Bangladeshi citizens from China in early February.

After the first case was diagnosed in early March, she closed educational institutions and nudged all non-essential businesses to go online.

Then she harnessed tech, installing screening devices across international airports which screened some 650,000 people (of which 37,000 were immediately quarantined), something the UK still is not doing, the article reads.

Both Singapore under President Halima Yacob and Hong Kong, China, under Chief

Executive Carrie Lam, have been globally admired for their early and highly effective lead in getting ahead of the crisis, it said.

Now Singapore is scrambling with a second-wave whiplash, while Lam has done better at nipping resurgence in the bud.

Different cultures and issues in every country mean responses will never be a one-size fits all.

Women now govern 18 countries and 545 million people globally. That is 7 percent of the world's population (Exactly the same percentage, by the way, of women CEOs on the Fortune 500.)

From Bangladesh and Ethiopia, to Georgia and Singapore, women are emerging into political leadership across the globe. And this revelatory crisis is showing their talents.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD
Magura Road Division, Magura
Fax : 0488-62518
e-mail: eemag@rhd.gov.bd

Memo No. _____ Date: 26.04.2020

e-Tender Notice

e-Tenders are invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Magura for the procurement of:

Sl. No.	Tender ID No.	Name of work	Last selling date & time	Closing date & time	Opening date & time
1	455780 e-GP/MRD/17/ 2019-2020	Supply of 20mm Stone Chippings 1st Class Bricks Pea-Gravels Local Sand and Fire Wood at RHD Stackyard under Road Division Magura during the year 2019-2020.	10-05-2020 at 17:00	11-05-2020 at 11:00	11-05-2020 at 11:00
2	455855 e-GP/MRD/18/ 2019-2020	Supplying 8mm MS Plate & Repair of Triple Single Baily Bridge Decking Plate Shemakhali at 23rd km p of Jashore-Magura N-702 Road under Road Division Magura during the year 2019-2020.	10-05-2020 at 17:00	11-05-2020 at 11:00	11-05-2020 at 11:00

- This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in e-GP Portal.
- To submit e-Tender, registration in the e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.
- For further information, please contact e-GP helpdesk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Md. Badsha Miya
Sub-Assistant Engineer (RHD)
Road Division, Magura
GD-760

Md. Nazrul Islam
Executive Engineer (A/C) RHD
Road Division, Magura

Not worth the time & effort!

Says Trump about daily virus briefing after disinfectant gaffe

President Donald Trump tweeted Saturday that his daily coronavirus briefings were not worth his time, two days after sparking a furor by suggesting patients might be injected with disinfectant to kill an infection.

He appeared to confirm media reports that he was considering halting the briefings, which dominate early-evening cable television news for sometimes more than two hours, out of frustration with questions about his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"What is the purpose of having White House News Conferences when the Lamestream Media asks nothing but hostile questions, & then refuses to report the truth or facts accurately," Trump wrote.

"They get record ratings, & the American people get nothing but Fake News. Not worth the time & effort!"

On Thursday the US leader stunned viewers by saying doctors might treat people infected with the coronavirus by shining ultraviolet light inside their bodies, or with injections of household disinfectant.

After a strong rebuff of his suggestion by top medical experts and disinfectant manufacturers, Trump on Friday claimed he had been speaking "sarcastically."

But he limited that day's briefing to just 19 minutes, and did not take any questions from reporters.

And on Saturday, after 50 briefings over two months, the White House did not hold one at all.



People applaud to show their support for healthcare workers in front of Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, DC, on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

LATEST UPDATES

INFECTIONS NEAR 3 MILLION
The new coronavirus has claimed at least 202,994 lives since its outbreak in China in December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT yesterday. More than 2,902,450 cases were registered in 193 countries and territories. Of these cases, at least 791,700 are now considered recovered. The United States has the highest number of deaths with 53,934 out of 939,249 cases. Italy has the second highest toll with 26,384 deaths out of 195,351 cases, followed by Spain (23,190 deaths and 226,629 cases), France (22,614 deaths and 161,488 cases) and the United Kingdom (20,319 fatalities and 148,377 cases).

US RECORDS 2,494 MORE DEATHS
The United States recorded 2,494 more coronavirus deaths in the past 24 hours, according to figures reported Saturday night by Johns Hopkins University.

SAUDI RELAXES LOCKDOWN EXCEPT IN MAKKAH
Saudi Arabia yesterday partially eased a 24-hour curfew in place to combat the coronavirus pandemic, except for in hotspots including the Muslim holy city of Makkah. The curfew will be relaxed between 9am and 5pm and malls and retailers will be allowed to reopen in all regions of the kingdom until May 13.

UK PM TO RETURN TO WORK
Boris Johnson will return to work at the start of the week as pressure increases on the UK government over its handling of the coronavirus crisis which has claimed more than 20,000 lives. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab told Sky News that Johnson would be back in his Downing Street office today after recovering from the virus and was in "good spirits" and "raring to go".

CHINA SEIZES OVER 89M SHODDY FACE MASKS
China has confiscated over 89 million poor quality face masks, a government official said, as Beijing faces a slew of complaints about faulty protective gear exported worldwide. Demand for protective equipment has soared as nations across the globe battle the deadly coronavirus, which has infected around 2.9 million people.

SRI LANKA EXTENDS LOCKDOWN
Sri Lanka has reversed plans to end its virus lockdown today, extending it for another week after a spike in coronavirus infections including at a naval base. Within hours of announcing that the nationwide restrictions imposed on March 20 would be lifted, the government revoked the order and extended them until May 4.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Strictly follow lockdown

Indian PM urges citizens as 1,990 cases recorded in last 24 hours

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday appealed to citizens to strictly comply with a nationwide lockdown and maintain social distancing norms, as cases of coronavirus mounted steadily despite over a month-long curfew.

In a radio address, Modi said the country was in the midst of a "war" and urged hundreds of millions of citizens to sustain the "people driven" fight and not be misled into believing the spread of the virus has been brought fully under control.

"I will urge you that we should not be trapped into over-confidence and nurse the belief that in our city, in our village, in our streets, in our office, coronavirus has not reached and that is why it will



not reach" Modi said.

India's high population density, poor sanitation infrastructure, and high rates of internal migration has hastened the spread of the virus.

India recorded 1,990 coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours - its biggest single-day spike so far - taking the total to 26,496, including 824 deaths.

Forty-nine deaths linked to the highly contagious illness were reported from different parts of the country in the last 24 hours.

Modi imposed a lockdown of India's 1.3 billion people on March 25 but experts fear that the world's biggest lockdown has not been able to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

"We need to be careful that physical distancing, covering the face with a cover or a mask and washing our hands again and again will be the biggest medicine to fight this disease in the days to come," Modi said.

On Saturday, India allowed small shops in residential areas to reopen although with staff members reduced by half and there were expected to wear masks and gloves during work hours.

All coronavirus patients in Wuhan now discharged

REUTERS, Shanghai

The Chinese city of Wuhan, where the global coronavirus pandemic began, now has no remaining cases in its hospitals, a health official told reporters yesterday.

The novel coronavirus is believed to have originated in a wet market in Wuhan and first emerged in December before spreading quickly worldwide. Some 2.83 million people have been reported to be infected globally and 197,872 have died, according to a Reuters tally.

"The latest news is that by April 26, the number of new coronavirus patients in Wuhan was at zero, thanks to the joint efforts of Wuhan and medical staff from around the country," National Health Commission spokesman Mi Feng said at a briefing.

The city had reported 46,452 cases, 56% of the national total. It saw 3,869 fatalities, or 84% of China's total.

Wuhan and the province of Hubei were put in lockdown near the end of January for more than two months. The city is still testing residents regularly despite relaxing the restrictions.

China's health authority had earlier reported 11 new coronavirus cases on the mainland on April 25, down from 12 the previous day, with no fatalities.

VIRUS EQUIPMENT

China eases restrictions on exports

REUTERS, Beijing

China is dropping a requirement that a number of key virus care products get domestic regulatory approval before export, as long as they are approved in the importing countries.

China had been mulling such extra approval at home since the end of March after several countries complained that Chinese-made test kits were inaccurate. The new ruling applies to products such as tests, medical masks, protective suits, infrared thermometers and ventilators.

Many countries around the world have been scrambling to buy or make enough personal protective equipment for medical staff and care workers at risk of infection, and also tests to trace contagion and identify people who can leave quarantine.



A woman wearing a protective mask lights a candle at a memorial, dedicated to firefighters and workers who died after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, during a night service amid the coronavirus outbreak, in Slavutych, Ukraine yesterday. Ukraine yesterday marked the 34th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster which was the world's worst nuclear accident.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Train likely belonging to Kim seen at resort town

AFP, Seoul

A train likely belonging to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been spotted at a resort town in the country's east, satellite photos reviewed by a US-based think tank showed, as speculation persists over his health.

The train was parked at a station reserved for the Kim family in Wonsan on April 21 and April 23, the respected 38North website said in a report published Saturday.

38North cautioned that the train's presence "does not prove the whereabouts of the North Korean leader or indicate anything about his health."

"But it does lend weight to reports that Kim is staying at an elite area on the country's eastern coast," it said.

There has been growing conjecture about Kim's health since his conspicuous absence from the April 15 celebrations for the birthday of his grandfather Kim Il Sung, the regime's founder -- the most important day on the North Korean political calendar.

Kim has not made a public appearance since presiding over a meeting of the Workers' Party politburo on April 11 and inspecting drills by fighter jets at an air defence unit, which was reported by state media on April 12.

Daily NK, an online media outlet run mostly by North Korean defectors, has reported Kim underwent a cardiovascular procedure earlier this month and was

recovering at a villa in North Pyongan province.

Citing an unidentified source inside the country, it said Kim, who is in his mid-30s, had needed urgent treatment due to heavy smoking, obesity and fatigue.

South Korea, which is still technically at war with the North, has played down the report.



On Thursday, US President Donald Trump rejected reports that Kim was ailing.

On Thursday, citing an unidentified government official, South Korean broadcaster SBS reported that Kim appeared to have been in Wonsan for at least the past four days and would soon return to the public eye.

The report added that the military was monitoring Kim's train, which had been seen in Wonsan, while his personal jet -- frequently used by Kim on his trips to Wonsan -- remained in Pyongyang.

WAR IN YEMEN

Separatists declare self-rule in south

REUTERS, Aden

Yemen's main southern separatist group announced early yesterday it would establish self-rule in areas under its control, which the Saudi-backed government warned would have "catastrophic consequences".

The move threatens to renew conflict between the UAE-backed separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the Saudi-backed government, nominal allies in Yemen's war, even as the United Nations is trying to secure a nationwide truce to confront the novel coronavirus.

The STC yesterday deployed its forces in Aden, the southern port which is the interim seat of the government ousted from the capital, Sanaa, by the Iran-aligned Houthi movement. Reuters journalists saw STC fighters in a column of pickup trucks and military vehicles riding down a main street in Aden.

The STC is one of the main groups fighting against the Houthis as part of a coalition led by Saudi Arabia. But the separatists, long backed by Saudi coalition partner the UAE, have clashed with government forces in the past.

In a statement, the STC announced emergency rule in Aden and all southern governorates, saying it would take control of Aden's port and airport and other state institutions such as the central bank.

The Saudi-backed government and southern regions of Shabwa, Hadhramout and Socatra, among the few areas under coalition control, issued separate statements rejecting the declaration.

Yemen's FM Mohammed Al-Hadhrami said the STC announcement constituted "a resumption of its armed insurgency" and a "rejection and complete withdrawal from the Riyadh agreement", a deal which ended a previous stand-off between the separatists and the government last year.

Rajshahi City Corporation
Engineering Department
Nagar Bhaban, Rajshahi

Memo No. 46.12.5081.006.07.155.2020.674
Date: 23.04.2020

Invitation for Tenders (IFT)

20/2019-20

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following goods & works:

Sl. No.	ID No.	Reference No.	Name of works	Tender/proposal document last selling time and date
1	455209	46.12.5081.006.07.156.2020.671	Recovery & re-installation of 11KV/440V electrical distribution line, pole & related works of Anurag Community Center to Ranibazar Mour through Malopara.	12.30pm on 14-May-2020
2	455196	46.12.5081.006.07.154.2020.372	Supply, Fitting, Fixing & Installation of Street Lighting System at Upashohor Mour to Ranibazar Mour Through Malopara.	12.30pm on 19-May-2020
3	455175	46.12.5081.006.07.155.2020.673	Supply, Fitting, Fixing & Installation of Street Lighting System at Bilshimia Rail Crossing to Kashiadanga Mour of Rajshahi City.	12.30pm on 01-Jun-2020

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helodesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Md. Rezaul Hossain
Executive Engineer (Elec.)
Rajshahi City Corporation
Tel. 0721-772215
E-mail: reazulrtd@gmail.com

ৱেবসাইট/ফোন-১০৬ (২০১৯-২০)
২৩.০৪.২০২০
GD-759

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Second Rural Transport Improvement Project
Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar
Dhaka-1207
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.0000.726.07.032.2020.2818
Date: 23/04/2020

Corrigendum of e-GP: Tender Notice (3rd)

Due to some unavoidable circumstances, following amendment has been made to the Tender ID No. 437197.

Sl. No.	ID No.	Name of supply	Field name	Old value	New value
1.	Tender ID 437197	Supply of Computer, Laptop, Printer, Multimedia Projector, UPS and other accessories (Package No. AF-G1)	Tender document last selling date & time	27 April 2020 17:00	18 May 2020 17:00
			Last date and time for tender security submission	28 April 2020 12:00	19 May 2020 12:00
			Tender closing date & time	28 April 2020 13:00	19 May 2020 13:00

All other terms and conditions will remain unchanged.

Sd/-
Md. Sohrab Ali
Project Director
Tel: 9120218
E-mail: pdrtip2.lged@yahoo.com

GD-758

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
Closed	Closed	\$1,714.50 (per ounce)	\$21.44 (per barrel)	1.68%	0.86%	0.95%	1.06%	BUY TK 83.95	89.80	102.95	11.70
				31,327.22	19,262.00	2,518.16	2,808.53	SELL TK 84.95	93.60	106.75	12.30



Star BUSINESS

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TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Nation reels towards poultry shortage

SOHEL PARVEZ, EAM ASADUZZAMAN and AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

There has been a stunning slump in demand for meat and eggs since coronavirus arrived on these shores. And the dizzying speed at which the lethal pathogen went about upending life in the country prompted many farms, slapped by unprecedented losses, to cut back on production by more than half.

But the development now means the nation is heading towards a poultry shortage and a price increase.

"There would be an impact in the middle of next month and the supply-demand mismatch for poultry would continue for a minimum of six months," said Fazle Rahim Khan Shahriar, managing director of Aftab Bahumukhi Farms.

Breeders used to hatch 1.40 crore day-old chicks every week before coronavirus. Now, it has come down to 70-75 lakh, according to industry people.

In general, it takes a month for a batch of birds to become mature for sales and three weeks to get a bird from an egg.

As the nationwide movement control order took effect on March 26 to flatten the curve on coronavirus, hotels, restaurants, bakeries and fast food joints shuttered on a slump in customer footfall and the need for social distancing meant there were no mass gatherings like weddings.

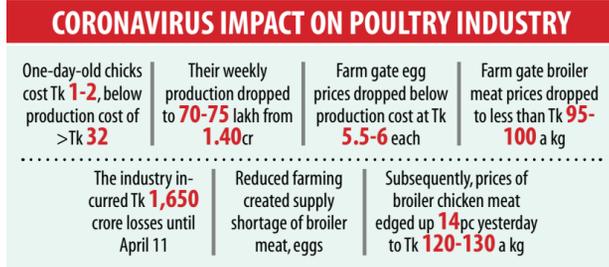
In short, the demand for chicken and eggs hit the pits, forcing hatcheries either to sell hatched eggs at throwaway prices or dump chicks.

Besides, the ongoing shutdown has wiped out the income of the poor and low-income people, one of the main consumers of poultry products, said Mahamudul Hasan, joint secretary of the Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association (BPIA) for Rangpur division.

The sector has been suffering for low prices for the last eight months and the coronavirus has dealt a fresh blow.

"Some of the breeders even offered day-old chicks to farmers for free, but no farmers wanted to take them," said Sayed Sultan Ahmed, general manager of Kazi Farms, one of the biggest poultry breeders in Bangladesh.

This compelled breeders to sell day-old chicks at Tk 1-2 each against the production cost of Tk 32-32.35, according to the Bangladesh Poultry Industries Central Council (BPICC), which represents the Tk 35,000 crore-



poultry industry in the country.

The prices of broiler chicken and eggs dropped and farmers had to sell the protein at as much as 50 per cent below the production cost of Tk 95-Tk 100 for each kilogram of broiler chicken and Tk 5.5-Tk 6 for an egg, BPICC data showed.

Prices rebounded in the last two days, said Shariful Alam Biddut, owner of Mahin Poultry Farm in the northwestern district of Nilphamari, on April 21.

The farm has 13,500 layer chickens. It incurred losses for selling an egg at Tk 5.20 until early this week against

the cost of production of more than Tk 6.

"Even the prices of layer chickens have fallen below the level of the prices we got in the days before the coronavirus outbreak," said Biddut, one of the 88,000 poultry farmers in Bangladesh.

But it is good to see the prices of eggs have started to recover.

"If the trend continues, we would be able to recover the losses," he added.

The rebound in prices, however, might be temporary, said Md Golam Kabir Shishir, a broiler poultry farm owner in Pabna.

The price of broiler chickens has begun to go up as farming dropped, said Ahmed of Kazi Farms. Also, the prices of day-old chicks rose amid farmers' renewed interest in posting higher sales during Eid, scheduled for next month.

"Prices will go up sharply if the shutdown ends and normalcy returns," he added.

The resurgence in demand would be short-lived and the industry situation would turn bad after the Eid-ul-Fitr festival, said BPICC President Moshir Rahman.

"Overall, the poultry industry situation is not good. This is the worst ever crisis for us."

The BPICC estimates that the sector incurred a loss of Tk 1,650 crore until April 11. This included the losses faced by feed millers and animal health companies.

The loss is forecast to cross Tk 3,000 crore by the end of April. "It is a huge loss," Rahman said.

Large business groups show up at customers' doorsteps

AHSAN HABIB

Big business groups have turned to e-commerce and home delivery to head off a collapse in sales amid the countrywide movement control order.

Square Toiletries, ACI Foods, Pran-RFL, Aarong Dairy, Transcom Digital, Rangs Electronics, Singer Bangladesh, Hurrier Baby Diaper, Dan Cake, Fresh and Golden Harvest are among the companies that are taking their products to the doorsteps of consumers.

"We have started home delivery as we want to ensure our consumers that we are with them in this crisis," said Ahmed Rajeeb Samdani, chairman of Golden Harvest Group, a frozen food giant.

Consumers' response has been good and it is convenient to supply the products due to low traffic on the roads.

This, however, is not a money-spinning exercise. "We are just keeping the ball rolling," Samdani added.

"We have no resources to reach consumers directly, so we are depending on e-commerce service providers," said Jesmin Zaman, head of marketing of Square Toiletries, which is currently delivering essential products such as hand sanitisers and sanitary napkins.

The home delivery system is getting significant response as the consumers benefit from the service, said Kamruzzaman Kamal, Pran-RFL's marketing director.

"Our outlets are doing the work of distribution with the help of e-commerce providers," he added.

Sadeeq Agro, which sells dairy and meat products, has taken the direct-to-consumer route amid the shutdown, said Mohammed Imran Hossain, its proprietor.

"Customer response has been so high that we can't fulfil their demand. It is clear that the marketing side needs more investment to ensure a good price for producers," he said.

The shift is not without challenges for the companies though.

Because of the small order bill and travel restrictions, Pran-RFL can't afford to supply products across the country, Kamal said.

"We are taking the risks because our products are being sold and people who are staying at home are also getting the supply," said Hossain, also the secretary general of the Bangladesh Dairy Farmers Association.

Frozen food having its day in the sun amid pandemic

SOHEL PARVEZ

In a moment of crisis, many reach out for comfort foods.

And that is exactly how urban residents are behaving as uncertainty about the future and morbid fear reign supreme, propping up the demand for frozen foods up at a time when a vast range of consumer goods and services have fallen prey to the global coronavirus pandemic.

As the coronavirus situation is only getting worse, restaurants and fast food joints, which could have satisfied their craving for comfort food, have kept their doors shut, shoppers are to the supermarket aisles to pick up ready-to-eat chicken and beef products, the closest substitute.

Sales of chicken-based food products are bested only by those of frozen parathas these days, according to industry people.

And yet, overall sales have remained well below the pre-coronavirus days.

"Two of our sales channels are contributing less now than in the pre-COVID period. But we see good sales through supermarkets," said Tanvir Haider Chaudhury, chief executive officer of Kazi Food Industries, one of the leading frozen foods and chicken products processors in Bangladesh.

Active for the last one and a half

decades, the company has found a niche among the convenience-seeking middle-class and working families.

Apart from marketing its frozen foods through supermarkets and neighbourhood shops, Kazi Food Industries has 150 quick-service restaurants. Most of the kiosks are shut. Besides, limited opening hours for convenience and superstores are hampering sales.

The company is also facing difficulty in delivering products in many areas because of the countrywide movement control order, with its business now limited to only Dhaka and Chattogram metropolitan areas.

"We see demand in these areas. From that perspective, frozen foods are still keeping us afloat. But things could have been much better," Chaudhury added.

The market for ready-made foods and snacks has been growing fast and the pace of growth accelerated in recent years to stand from as low as Tk 300 crore to Tk 1,000 crore.

It is growing at 15 per cent year-on-year, said Ahmed Rajeeb Samdani, managing director of Golden Harvest Agro Industries, a frozen food giant.

"Our frozen food market has not fallen to that extent. Frozen foods are moving from the shelves compared with other products that are not



ZINA TASREEN

moving at all," he said.

As the shutdown affected demand and distribution in many parts of the country, Golden Harvest has begun home delivery to make use of its trucks that have become idle after the requirement for delivery out of Dhaka dropped.

Most of the companies in the trade have started home delivery, Samdani said. Paragon Group, one

of the leading poultry breeders and processors, has found home delivery as one of the main windows to retain sales to some extent amidst a dip in demand for chickens and eggs.

The company used to supply its processed chicken to some global chain restaurants and hotels in Bangladesh but the shutdown has hit its sales hard.

The introduction of home delivery

could arrest the bleeding to some extent.

"Demand for home delivery has soared but we can't meet the increased demand as we don't have enough delivery vans to respond to all calls," said Moshir Rahman, managing director of Paragon Group.

For AG Agro Industries, daily sales of processed chicken, processed chicken items and flour-based frozen foods fell 40 per cent to Tk 6 lakh after the shutdown began, said Md Lutfor Rahman, chief executive of the poultry breeder and processor.

"Shops are not open everywhere. We see an increased demand in the areas where we can access shops. In general, sales have been below the level of the pre-COVID-19 period," said Kamruzzaman Kamal, director marketing of Pran-RFL Group.

Processors are sanguine about the future. There would be a jump in the frozen food market once the lockdown ends, Samdani said.

"It is because of convenience."

Many residents in urban areas will be shaky in hiring domestic workers to make food such as traditional paratha for fear of coronavirus infection.

"We are experimenting with new products and planning to expand capacity. I think the frozen and ready-to-eat food industry is going to grow."

BB orders banks for quick release of import documents

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bank yesterday asked banks to speedily release import-related documents such that the goods can be released from the port without further delay as the government scrambles to prevent any supply disruption during Ramadan.

Banks were also asked to settle the import liabilities swiftly such that essential goods can be supplied to the market smoothly amid the ongoing lockdown.

The goods that must get priority include rice, lentil, onion, salt, sugar, ginger, garlic, water, baby food, food items and all types of medical and electronic equipment.

The instructions were given following a commerce ministry letter.

As per the ministry instruction, the imported goods will be transported to the required zones of the country by maintaining the health code.

The country's supply chain has been disrupted on a massive scale due to the ongoing shutdown to snuff out the coronavirus pandemic.

Many authorised dealer branches that settle foreign exchange transactions have remained shut for the shutdown. This slowed the release of products from the Chattogram port.

CPA pleads with importers to ease port congestion

DWAIPAYAN BARUIA, Ctg

In a last-ditch move, the Chattogram Port Authority (CPA) has started writing to importers directly asking them to take delivery of imported cargoes that have piled up at the country's premier port and causing congestion.

Yesterday, it sent letters to 13 importing firms that brought in about 2,800 tonnes of garlic, ginger and onion and asked them to take the deliveries.

The items were imported to meet the heightened demand during Ramadan, but they have been stranded at the port for the last few weeks.

According to the port, 208 TEUs containers loaded with 850 tonnes garlic, 475 tonnes ginger and 1,473 tonnes onion were lying at the port yards.

"We did this to reduce the congestion and accelerate the supply of commodities in the market," said CPA Member Md Zafar Alam.

About 44,000 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of fully loaded containers were lying at the port yards against the capacity of 34,868 TEUs, it said in the letter.

"As the delivery of the containers has been very slow for the last one month, the port has been facing operational disruption," the letter added.

More containers carrying the three items have remained on board of several vessels waiting at the outer anchorage

to get a berth, said CPA officials.

Importers earlier blamed limited services provided by various government and other offices involved in releasing goods for the slow delivery from the port.

Because of repeated pressure from the CPA and the shipping ministry to resolve the congestion, the National Board of Revenue and the Bangladesh Bank last week even took several initiatives, like the full-scale reopening of the



RAJIB RAIHAN

Chattogram Customs House and some branches of banks as well as allowing all types of imports to be shifted to the private inland container depots.

The situation would not improve much if the importers don't take their cargoes, according to berth operators, shipping agents and off-dock owners.

The CPA also sent letters to the Chattogram Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chattogram C&F Agents Association to take initiative in this regard.

The importers failed to get the delivery on time as the related offices like customs house, banks, the plant quarantine department and the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission have been working on a limited scale since the shutdown started, said Liakat Ali Hawlader, secretary (port) of the Chattogram C&F Agents Association.

Though most offices have gradually reopened, all the banks are yet to begin their operation fully, causing problems for the importers to process import-related documents, said Hawlader, adding that the situation would improve gradually.

Meanwhile, the price of imported ginger has continued to soar for the last four weeks because of a supply shortage. It shot up by Tk 100 to Tk 150 per kg to Tk 280 last week. Retailers are selling it at Tk 300 a kg.

Prices of the food items went up at the wholesale hub of Khatunganj, too.

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Technology is a useful servant. Let's harness it for social protection, social distancing and community testing.



ZAHID HUSSAIN

The government is hard-pressed in responding to the raging coronavirus pandemic with every resource, instrument, policy and strategy it can get its hands on.

A key lesson from COVID-19 we cannot afford to forget, at least for a while, is that social protection is as important an instrument as social distancing that countries must deploy to fight the virus.

The virus is destined to stay with us, alive and spreading, until vaccines and treatments are found.

Until then, if not even later, social protection is a two-in-one instrument -- it protects both lives and livelihoods.

It protects lives by obviating the need for seeking work outside the home when harsh measures to contain the virus spread are in place.

It protects livelihoods by supporting millions of hardworking people who have lost self and wage employment with little or no savings to draw from. It helps fight hunger, a non-contagious but no less deadly human deprivation.

The government has decided to expand the existing Old Age and Widow allowance programmes, implemented by social welfare ministry, by Tk 815 crore.

It has also announced an emergency cash transfer programme for households impoverished by coronavirus with a provision of Tk 760 crore. Who in government will implement this programme is yet to be decided.

It is also providing free food to the poor and selling rice under the Open Market Sale (OMS) programme at a highly subsidised price of Tk 10 per kg. The government has further promised housing assistance for homeless people.

How to deliver social protection quickly and efficiently are old questions -- and coronavirus has added a new dimension.

How do you deliver social protection safely when the country is in lockdown and there is a need to protect the poor and the vulnerable population from contracting COVID-19?

Richard Chirchir, director and senior management information specialist for development pathways, in a recent blog titled "7 ways technology can help the social

protection response" provides some useful ideas.

Quick, efficient and safe delivery of social protection is possible by leveraging existing technology solutions without having to build these systems from scratch.

What is critical at this difficult time is to ensure that assistance is delivered to intended beneficiaries on a timely basis.

Technology can play a crucial role in augmenting delivery in several ways, depending on the contextual constraints and opportunities.

A key consideration in the design is the parameters on which information need to

Most Bangladeshis have national identification (NID), access of adults to mobile phone devices is close to 90 per cent, and the MFS system has an established capacity in the use of technology.

People who have access to smartphones can open their accounts instantly as long as they have the NID.

Those who don't have smartphones can go to one of the 60,000 digital KYC centres of the MFS operators across the country with their NIDs, where they would be able to instantly open the MFS accounts.

If the appropriate authority instructs to open accounts, the needy people would be

Without their full engagement, MFS providers are facing severe challenges in cash management and in keeping the agents active.

MFS agents' activities have declined 20 to 30 per cent due to these disruptions, which will go away as and when the banking hours return to normalcy.

Meanwhile, some regulatory tweaking can generate additional ease in the MFS system.

For example, extending the daily and monthly fund transfer limits from bank accounts and cards to MFS accounts could ease the liquidity constraint to some extent. Currently, these limits are Tk 30,000 daily and Tk 2,00,000 monthly.

I have no doubt our IT, MFS and e-commerce professionals can quickly come up with interoperable systems allowing information exchange and real-time monitoring of last-mile delivery if given a chance.



ANISUR RAHMAN

Hungry poor wait for food in a neighbourhood of Kamalapur, Dhaka. The photo was taken on April 20. The poor and the vulnerable non-poor were trying to cope with the countywide shutdown since March 26 that has dried up their sources of income by using savings, borrowing and reducing food consumption. By now, many have exhausted those options too and are now reduced to depending on handouts.

be collected to register the beneficiaries and deliver the assistance.

This is not the time to design restrictive poverty-targeted schemes.

Essential information parameters such as ID numbers, names, addresses, mobile numbers and transaction profile can be collected instead of additional monitoring information such as assets, household composition and socio-economic details.

The accumulated historical transactional database of the mobile financial service (MFS) contains a wealth of information, which, if used smartly, can identify the needy from transaction records.

This database is already linked to the payment service provider systems that are regulated by the Bangladesh Bank (BB). Therefore, financial regulatory supervision can be assured.

This will facilitate direct cash transfers from the government accounts, via the banks, to the accounts of the beneficiaries.

Cashless payment delivery through mobile money accounts should be encouraged to avoid risks of crowding and the spreading of the virus through the handling of cash.

Bangladesh has the capacity to device multiple bank delivery mechanisms under which benefits can be withdrawn from different commercial banks through the MFS system. These banks will receive the appropriate amount of money through BB's Bangladesh Electronic Funds Transfer Network (BFTN).

able to do so without much hassle.

Following a BB notice on April 6 making it a requirement for workers in export-oriented industries to have MFS or bank account, MFS account openings surged from 20,000 per day to 90,000. bKash, Rocket and Nagad have together added 2.6 million new accounts in April.

Liquidity constraints at the agent level pose a challenge that can be handled. Before

Increasing the limits will increase digital liquidity in the MFS system, thus reducing dependency on the physical agent point.

This kind of adjustments can allow customers who have bank accounts to bring more money from their banks to MFS accounts to pay for their groceries, utility bills, domestic helps' monthly salaries and so on.

These are verified customers who do not pose any additional risk. This reform will,

Let us remake the Bangladesh surprise through a strong and coordinated effort in social protection, health and digital platforms for delivering social assistance, facilitating physical distancing and conducting community testing in urban and rural areas.

coronavirus, there was no evidence of liquidity constraint at the MFS agent point.

MFS agents are independent entrepreneurs who offer MFS services in exchange for commissions. However, under coronavirus restrictions, banks are understandably open for very limited hours.

The electronic fund flow channels such as BFTN are also operating for limited hours.

therefore, help make the nation's payment systems adapt to physical distancing.

Digital solutions can also be used to manage food-based social assistance.

Monitoring the delivery of food at the last-mile has always been a challenge.

Reach of mobile connectivity and innovation in ICT have enabled real-time data interchange until the last level of service

delivery using low data usage applications in mobile devices.

Low-cost mobile technologies can be developed to enable the delivery of food entitlements at the doorstep of the beneficiary. These require using business models analogous to ones that e-commerce entrepreneurs use to deliver their orders.

Why do people have to line up densely in public places to get the food rations in digital Bangladesh?

There is no time to re-invent when the existing wheels are good to drive. Typically, new information systems would take months if not years to develop and implement.

However, if requirements are simple, then functional information systems can be developed from existing data in a matter of weeks.

I have no doubt our IT, MFS and e-commerce professionals can quickly come up with interoperable systems allowing information exchange and real-time monitoring of last-mile delivery if given a chance.

This would depend on collaborations with technology providers and the responsible public agencies such as the ministries of social welfare, disaster management and relief, and finance and the BB.

Different countries are pursuing very different strategies in testing for COVID-19.

The World Health Organisation supports a policy of widespread testing. When the healthcare system is overloaded, you don't want a lot of non-sick people coming to health facilities and risking contagion.

The digital health community is trying a slew of new tools aiming to monitor the spread of the disease and facilitate better treatment.

The database used for the social protection programmes can be used to draw random samples of workers to do aggressive testing, once reliable tests and kits are available.

Notwithstanding the limits of scientific understanding of COVID-19 immunity, tests at the community level will be critical in the weeks and months ahead for disease surveillance, therapeutics and return-to-work screenings.

COVID-19 has brought to the forefront the synergy between social protection and public health.

Lockdown and social protection buy time for building the health system readiness to unlock the process of reopening the economy.

Let us remake the Bangladesh surprise through a strong and coordinated effort in social protection, health and digital platforms for delivering social assistance, facilitating physical distancing and conducting community testing in urban and rural areas.

The success of COVID-19 digital initiatives can be significantly enhanced by establishing feedback systems in coordination with the existing governance systems in the institutions within and outside the government.

The writer is an economist

Why do people have to line up densely in public places to get the food rations in digital Bangladesh?

Beza plans generous incentives to tempt foreign investors

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (Beza) plans to put in place a generous incentive package to perk up the country's investment climate and attract more foreign investors to economic zones in the post-coronavirus era when companies will scope out new destinations to reduce costs.

"We have submitted proposals to the Prime Minister's Office on how we can offer policy support and incentives to the foreign investors," said Paban Chowdhury, executive chairman of Beza.

As the pandemic is wreaking havoc on the global investment scenario and Bangladesh will not remain immune to the fallout, the country should use some innovative tactics to rope in investors, he said.

As per the Beza proposal, foreign companies that will relocate their production to Bangladesh can be allowed to import used machinery to set up their factories in the country.

Industrial units that will be set up in the government economic zones

within 2023 can be offered 100 per cent corporate tax exemption for 10 years.

Like the export-oriented industrial units, local factories should also be entitled to bonded warehouse facility, which allows exporters to import and store their raw materials without payment of customs duties for a certain period until these are used in manufacturing export products.

Beza also called for waiving value-added tax on leasing land by foreign companies for setting up factories as the provision of VAT erodes the competitiveness of the country as a lucrative investment destination.

Like India, the Bangladesh government should also provide 50 per cent of the cost for establishing central effluent treatment plants in the economic zones, Beza said.

Agro-processing industries operating outside the economic zones receive 20 per cent cash incentive irrespective of their ownership structure, but in the economic zones, only C-type industrial units that have

100 per cent local ownership enjoy 4 per cent cash incentive. "This stands in the way of attracting foreign direct investment in agro-processing industries in the economic zones. This disparity should no longer exist," Beza said, adding that a flat 20 per cent cash incentive should be given to all investors in economic zones irrespective of their types.

INCENTIVES PLANNED

- Foreign investors may be allowed to import used machinery to set up factories
- They can be offered 100% corporate tax waiver for 10 years
- VAT waiver on land leasing for foreign companies
- Local industries can be given bonded warehouse facility
- Govt can offer subsidy for setting up CETP

BY THE NUMBERS

- Beza so far received investment proposals worth \$20.50b
- About \$3b has already been invested
- Some \$5.78b will come as FDI
- The rest \$12.13b to be invested by 60 local firms
- 151 local and foreign firms expressed interest

As of February, Beza received investment proposals worth \$20.50 billion from 151 local and foreign business entities, and of the amount, about \$3 billion has already been invested in different special economic zones.

About \$5.78 billion will come as foreign direct investment from companies in China, South Korea,

Japan, India, Singapore, the UK, Australia, Malaysia and the US.

The rest \$12.13 billion will be invested by 60 local companies, including TK Group, Karmo Foam Industry, Mango Teleservices, BDCOM Online, Bashundhara Group, Siraj Cycle Industries, Abdul Monem, Star Consortium and Ayesha Clothing Co.

The domestic companies want to pour funds in pharmaceuticals, steel, textiles, garment, bicycle, automobile, tyre and tube, electronics and ceramic industries, according to Beza.

WHY BEZA WANTS TO OFFER THE INCENTIVE?

In the existing global economic order, China is considered as the factory of the world as it hosts the skeleton of the global value chain, Beza said in the proposal.

But the post-COVID-19 economic order will not be equally interested to rely on the China-centric supply chain.

"Presumably the Japanese plan to relocate its manufacturing facilities from China presages an upcoming manufacturing exodus from the world's

second-largest economy," it said.

If manufacturers decide to get rid of the Chinese dominance from their supply chain, their investments will be more equitably distributed to other countries that could hardly compete with China previously.

Whenever any incentive package is offered to attract investments, a short time compromise with revenue collection is made for a bigger return in future, according to Beza.

"A thorough cost and benefit analysis can justify the proposition of being generous with the investors at the cost of a short-term decline in revenue collection."

Joblessness will be the most serious concern in the coming days and it will not let the country increase the aggregate demand.

Against this backdrop, a prudent macroeconomic response is to be concerned with employment and aggregate demand, as boosting investment has always been a useful instrument in achieving these goals, Beza said in its proposal.



Homegrown Covid-19 test kit

Approve its production and use without delay

AMONG the depressing news about the galloping rate of the coronavirus infection in Bangladesh, it is very heartening to learn that our doctors have produced a test kit that can diagnose the virus in five minutes. On Saturday, samples of the kit were handed over by Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK)—whose doctors devised the kit—to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and the US Centre for Disease Control for validation checks and testing its efficacy. The GK deserves our congratulations for devising the contraption locally that has the potential to save lives and hard foreign exchange.

The administration should seize this opportunity to produce a locally devised testing kit. It is certainly a positive development, given the need to conduct widespread testing to identify and isolate the positive cases (in order to thwart the spread of the virus) and the likelihood of the existing kits running out (considering its high demand worldwide). Producing it in large scale will meet our requirement for testing kits, which are already in short supply, and reduce our dependence on outside sources. Testing kits will also be required to identify those who carry the virus but are asymptomatic. This needs to be done before we can expect normality in our lives.

Now that we have a kit of our own, one produced by our own doctors, all that remains to be done immediately is to pass it through the rigorous tests that such a kit should go through to meet the medical standards, and approve its use. We believe that the emergency situation calls for dispensing with the bureaucratic red-tapism, and all the necessary tests should be done expeditiously without being hampered by protocols to complete the necessary process. We feel that, if found fit for use, the GK kit should be tried out on a limited scale to test its effectiveness and thereafter be produced on a mass scale.

Fighting social stigma associated with coronavirus infection

Patients should be treated with care and compassion

THAT many people infected with coronavirus are hiding information about the disease is a cause for concern because such behaviour is putting others who are coming in contact with the patients, especially doctors, nurses and medical staff, at great risk. It has been reported in the media that Covid-19 patients often do not disclose their symptoms to doctors when they go to a hospital for treatment because of the fear that telling the truth may deprive them of any treatment. We have come to know about a lot of incidents where patients with fever and breathing difficulties were driven away by the hospital authorities, and the family members of the Covid-19 patients faced harassment by people in their neighbourhood as they were either not allowed to enter the area where they live or were told to leave the place. It was even difficult for the family members of the patients to find transports to take their loved ones to a specialised hospital for treatment.

The social stigma associated with coronavirus infection has forced many to hide their disease from others, leading to further spread of the disease. A large number of doctors, nurses and medical staff across the country have been infected with the virus because, among other reasons, the patients did not disclose their real symptoms when they sought treatment.

In fact, the stigmatisation of Covid-19 patients has resulted from people's lack of trust in a health system which is still not prepared to deal with the current health crisis. The inefficiency and mismanagement with which the health ministry and the Directorate General of Health Services had dealt with the outbreak at the beginning made people lose their faith in the system. Therefore, in an attempt to save themselves from the infection, people have been doing absolutely hateful things towards the Covid-19 patients.

We need to stop stigmatising the coronavirus patients and approach them with empathy. If people are not stigmatised, there will be no reason for them to hide the disease from others. But for that, they need to have access to the right information and proper knowledge about the disease. The government needs to conduct awareness campaigns about Covid-19 as well as the need for isolation and quarantine measures so that the thought of isolation or quarantine does not scare the patients. But most importantly, the government needs to restore people's trust in our health system by making it efficient and people-friendly where all Covid-19 patients will be treated with care and compassion.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Prevent price hikes

It has almost become customary that prior to any grand festivity, prices of goods and essentials escalate for some odd reason. As it is, we are in the midst of a pandemic, struggling to cope with the unprecedented situation. Sources of income for many households across the nation are ceasing to exist. To make matters worse, the prices of garlic, ginger, onion, dry chili, sugar, chickpeas, lentil, palm and soybean oils have increased over the last few days.

Citing lack of transport to justify the rise in prices of various essentials, multiple unscrupulous traders, wholesalers and retailers are to blame for this. And now with the holy month of Ramadan in progress, the price hike was inevitable and is taking a toll on the general public. At any other time, I would be able to understand the impulse. But during this holy month, and especially with a pandemic underway, such price hikes are absolutely absurd. The government must take necessary steps immediately to stop this. I think setting up mobile courts to monitor the markets and punish the culprits can play an important role in this regard.

Akash Hossen, Meherpur

How hard will the poor be hit?

Researchers from South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM) discuss the poverty impacts of Covid-19 in Bangladesh

COVID-19 has spread all over the world in a manner that is very unprecedented. Like most of the affected countries, Bangladesh has been compelled to impose a lockdown, resulting in people staying at home and restraining economic activities. This is likely to lead to a huge distressing impact on the economy. Furthermore, as the advanced economies are projected to fall into prolonged recession, and the middle-eastern countries are already suffering from plummeted oil prices, all these will have serious negative implications for our export and remittance earnings.

There are debates over the economic impact of Covid-19 in Bangladesh. While both the World Bank and the IMF have projected a drastic fall in GDP growth rate, Bangladesh government's projection seems to be rather optimistic. However, the exact magnitude of the impact of Covid-19 on Bangladesh economy will depend on the length and spread of the crisis along with the mitigation measures taken by the government. There is no denying that the worst victims of the slowing down of economic activities are the poor people, many of whom are dependent on daily earnings and live hand to mouth. Also, this crisis is feared to have a disastrous impact on the low-income people who are otherwise considered "non-poor" but are very vulnerable to fall into poverty due to any negative income shock. A large segment of these low-income people is engaged in informal activities with high volatility in

earnings. Any assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on the country's poverty scenario, therefore, needs to take into account both the poor and "non-poor" vulnerable population.

According to the recent estimates of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 20.5 percent of the population, or around 34 million people, are poor. However, according to SANEM's estimate

income can vary if the economic crisis is prolonged). This suggests that the success in poverty reduction in Bangladesh over the past one and a half decades since 2005 may go in vain due to this crisis. In 2005, the poverty rate was 40 percent, which was even lower than our estimate of 40.9 percent poverty resulting from the ongoing crisis.

It can also be mentioned that the



The nationwide shutdown since March 26 has left the poor and vulnerable people battling hunger. The photo was taken on April 20, 2020 at the capital's Kamalapur area.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

The magnitude of the impact of Covid-19 will depend on the length and spread of the crisis along with the mitigation measures taken by the government. But there is no denying that the worst victims of the slowing down of economic activities are the poor people.

(uplifting the poverty line income by 1.25 times), there are another 36 million people who are "non-poor" but can be categorised as a vulnerable population. With any income shock, there is a high probability that a significant proportion of this vulnerable population will fall into poverty. Preliminary findings from ongoing research of SANEM on Covid-19's economic impact in Bangladesh—i.e. simulations using the latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) data of BBS—reveal that with a negative income shock of 25 percent, the overall poverty rate will be 40.9 percent, which means that another 20.4 percent of the population will fall into poverty.

Here we have assumed that a three-month lockdown (which is most likely) can lead to a fall in at least one-fourth of the incomes of households (note that the magnitude of the reduction in

poverty impact of any income shock may differ depending on the people engaged in various economic activities. Our simulation results suggest that most of the newly poor in Bangladesh will be concentrated in economic activities like crop, animal and fishing production (43 percent), different manufacturing activities including RMG (16 percent), retail trade (11 percent), transport activities (10 percent), and construction activities (7 percent). Given that the majority of these people are employed in informal activities (85 percent of the employed), any employment shock is feared to have severe implications for the overall level of poverty of the country, as mentioned above.

It should also be noted that given the geographical dynamics of poverty in Bangladesh, such a negative income shock on poverty rates will vary across

the regions. Our simulation results suggest that though at the national level an additional 20.4 percent of people will fall into poverty, 40 districts will experience the rise in the percentage of poverty more than the national average. For example, in Rangamati, there will be an additional 30.9 percent people falling into poverty. In the same fashion, other major affected districts with higher percentages (than the national average of 20.4 percent) of additional people falling into poverty will be Mymensing (30.2 percent), Sunamganj (28.7 percent), Cox's Bazar (27.5 percent), Nilphamari (27.2 percent), Narail (27.1 percent), Chattogram (26.9 percent), Netrokona (25.9 percent), Chuadanga (25.8 percent), Sherpur (25.6 percent), Barguna (25.5 percent), Shariatpur (25.3 percent), etc.

Contrary to the aforementioned regions, the estimated impact is found to be lower for Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Munshiganj, Brahmanbaria and Narshindi. However, since the initial hotspots of infection are concentrated in many of these areas with a high density of population, the fall in income of households in these regions can be much higher than our assumption of 25 percent income shock. Also, the higher concentration of small-scale trading activities, which can be heavily hit by the lockdown, may result in much more depressing impacts than the aforementioned estimations.

In combating the Covid-19 crisis, the government of Bangladesh has already announced several stimulus packages and social protection programmes which certainly indicate its positive intention to reduce the negative economic impacts of Covid-19 as well as minimising the burden on the poor and vulnerable population. However, the success of these initiatives will depend on three factors: 1) effectively identifying the vulnerable people and thereby determining the nature and duration of support; 2) ensuring that the genuinely affected industries and poor and vulnerable people receive support; and 3) introducing a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) mechanism to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability in the distribution mechanism.

SANEM researchers Dr. Selim Raihan, Dr. Sayema H. Bishwa and Mahtab Uddin of Dhaka University, Md. Tuhin Ahmed and Md. Jonaed have contributed to this piece.

When contracts have no meaning



RMG NOTES

WHAT does a

"contract" actually mean? I am sure many garment factory owners have been pondering over this issue these past few weeks. Here's a simple definition of a

contract: "A written or spoken agreement, especially one concerning employment, sales, or tenancy, that is intended to be enforceable by law."

A great many of my fellow compatriots have contracts with many of the world's leading apparel brands. Some are for major apparel orders, some are just for small orders, but all fulfil the basic definition of a contract.

But how many garment factories do you seriously think are going to sue their brand partners in the West for cancelling and refusing to pay for orders? How many would have the courage to go down this route, in the knowledge that their reputation would forever be tarnished among potential clients? How many would even have the money to go down this route?

I say all of this not to, once again, reopen the arguments around brands cancelling contracts. Brands will always look after their own interests first and it would be naive to expect otherwise. The whole world is going through a process of upheaval, the likes of which we have not seen since the Second World War.

My point is, after all of this is done, after business has returned to normal—a new normal, one might guess—Bangladesh's RMG sector needs to seriously consider the

in the 21st century. Bangladesh's economy is almost 90 percent dependent on garment exports for its income. And yet, as we are seeing right now, this industry is built on sand and made of straw.

Also consider this: a few brands, including the world's two largest retailers, H&M and Inditex, have announced they will now pay for wholly or partially completed (cancelled) garment orders on agreed terms. We are grateful for that, and we must hope that other brands follow their lead. But the respective decisions taken by Inditex and H&M were something that garment factory owners had very little control over—and that is my worry.

The point is that the garment industry cannot continue on a "wing and a prayer" like this. We surely need to have some say in our own destiny; our survival cannot be in the lap of the gods.

What is the point of our industry having so many millions of dollars' worth of purchase orders with brands if, when push comes to shove, these contracts, these purchase orders, count for absolutely nothing? They are not worth the paper they are written on.



A worker at a garment factory in Ashulia checks whether her name is on the list of employees terminated by the management, on April 25, 2020. The garment sector recently saw many contracts with western buyers rendered meaningless after the latter cancelled or refused to pay for orders amidst the coronavirus.

PHOTO: AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

But here's the thing: many of these contracts have been rendered utterly meaningless these past few weeks. It turns out that such contracts might as well not have existed in some cases, so little intention does one party have of fulfilling their side of the contract.

This is not to say that these contracts would not be upheld in a court of law; in many cases, it is highly likely they would

issue of contracts and purchasing practices generally. We simply cannot go on like this. What is the point of our industry having so many millions of dollars' worth of purchase orders with brands if, when push comes to shove, these contracts, these purchase orders, count for absolutely nothing? They are not worth the paper they are written on.

This is no way for an industry to operate

This means getting a grip in the issue of purchasing practices once and for all. It means working together, collaboratively, as an industry to ensure we are singing from the same hymn sheet as regards pricing and contract negotiations. It means all of us, collectively, standing our ground with regard to our buyers, saying "these are our terms of business, take them or leave them." This might mean 50 percent

payment for orders upfront, 50 percent on completion. This is commonplace in other industries, so why should garment production be so different?

There are those who will say that these are unprecedented times and that it was inevitable that some factories would suffer as brands pulled orders. Yes, there is truth in that. But it is the scale of what has taken place in terms of brands simply turning their backs on orders which has shocked our industry to its core. The fact that brands are willing to treat RMG suppliers in this way, and on such a scale, tells me something. It tells me the power imbalance between brand and supplier has gone too far. It tells me that, for some brands, these contracts mean very little; they are just pieces of paper to be followed or ignored as they see fit.

Yes, these are unprecedented times, but this power imbalance has been around long before now. Where contracts are concerned, the cards are always stacked massively in favour of the buyers, and always have been.

With what we have seen these past few weeks, where brands have cancelled and walked away from orders, it is time for all of us to draw a line in the sand and say: enough! We can't keep doing business in this way. What happened to being partners to brands? Brands want business security, they want to plan for the future. But so do we as suppliers. We all want to play our part in building modern, robust supply chain. But we cannot do that if the basic currency which underpins all of our industry—contracts—is proved to be without meaning when push comes to shove.

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'We shall meet again': A daughter's tribute

NUSRAT HOMAIRA

"**A**BBU, you must go to the hospital right now and please text me when you reach there!" I have been waiting 12 months for that text from my father—I keep scrolling my phone's message box up and down but there are no texts and there will never be another. These were my last words to my father, Mahfuz Ullah, eminent journalist, environmentalist and political analyst, who died on April 27, 2019.

On April 2, 2019, when I last spoke to my father, he had suddenly become quite unwell overnight and was rushed to the emergency department of Square Hospital in Dhaka with severe breathlessness. From there he was quickly shifted to the ICU and put on ventilator. Till his death, 25 days later, he lay lifeless in the hospital, first in Square hospital and then in Bumrungrad hospital of Bangkok. A man who was always full of words died without saying anything to anyone. Even the night before he fell terminally ill, on April 1, he was on a live talk show in one of the TV channels of Bangladesh where he spoke about the current political crisis of the country. His death came as unexpectedly to him as it did to us. We did not have the time to prepare nor did we have the time to say goodbye. That is why it took me 12 months to write this tribute. This tribute is like a closure, a goodbye, even though I do

not think I'm ready to say "goodbye"!

My two siblings are also looking for some closure but are failing every day. The loss of a loved one kicks you off all your complacencies and makes you realise everything in life is transient. The death of a dear one drowns you in an unknown sadness and makes you drift from everyone around you. It is almost like being in exile. My mother is probably the one affected most by our father's death. In the last 12 months, it feels like she has aged at least 5 years. She has always been a strong independent woman but now when I look at her, I see a woman lost and puzzled in her grief. I have a feeling that all she wants is to be with him again.

My parents were married at age 22. My mother knew from very early on that my father's work would always be the first priority in his life. Nevertheless, he loved her dearly, cared for her deeply, laughed with her and shared her grief. He would always say that he would die before our mother, maybe because he could never wish for a life without her.

He was 69 when he died but was young for his age. He worked like a young man and lived like a young man surrounded by friends and well-wishers. He nurtured friendship and loved to laugh with friends, often teasing them but never in malice. He could relate to people from all walks of life and looked for the good in



Mahfuz Ullah (1950-2019)

each person. Almost 20 years back, our father survived a massive heart attack and suffered several subsequent complications. I think those early brushes of near-death experiences made him appreciate life and live it to the fullest. Often our father would tell us that he wanted to live 10 more years so that he could finish writing other books, one being his own biography. I do not think he was scared of death, rather immortality through his work was a consolation for death to him.

In family life also, he completed the full circle. He left behind four grandchildren. He would always tell us that "love flows downwards—first you love your partner, then your children

fill your heart with love, and finally comes your grandchildren who occupy the whole of your heart." He was their friend. They loved him dearly and he loved them more.

We, three siblings, grew up knowing that our father's work formed a core element in his life; but we never felt any less loved. He was always busy but never too busy for us. Our weekends would be spent with him instilling in us the love for books, classic movies and Rabindra Sangeet. He taught us about life and politics and stressed the importance of education. From very early on, he taught me and my sister to believe that anything is possible, and that we should never accept anything just because we are women. He was our best friend, our rock, our therapist, and our mentor and now that he is gone, I am not sure which I miss more, the father or the friend?

Our father would often tell our mother that in the event of his death, his body should only be buried after his children came back to the country to say goodbye to him. In the end, it never came to that point. Throughout the 25 days before his death that he was in the ICU, we were able to be with him all day, every day, holding his hand and telling him we loved him. Everyday many journalists, several well-wishers, and a great many of his acquaintances would call to check on his condition. Often their voices would be heavy with grief and desperation, longing to hear some

good news.

The night before he died, his condition deteriorated drastically. I was up all night sitting beside him, constantly observing his vital signs in the monitor and trying to tame the transition between presence and the void. The beeping sound of the machine felt like a thumping noise in my heart. Next morning at around 10:15 am, the machine went quiet and there was an eerie stillness in the hospital. While he never really regained consciousness in those 25 days, I believe in my heart that he could feel my mother's hand holding his when he took his last breath. Our father was not alone in his death. His two janazas were attended by many people who loved him and mourned his death. He was a people's person and the people of Bangladesh bid him goodbye with due respect. We are ever thankful for that.

My father lost his father at a relatively young age and then subsequently lost his mother who was with him till her last breath. He often expressed his longing to see them again. While saying goodbye to my father was the hardest thing I had to do in this life, I find some solace in knowing that he is up there somewhere, happy, holding the hands of his parents.

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The Future of Education, Accelerated

TIBRA ALI

THE Covid-19 infection has taken the world by surprise. Human culture is not accustomed to the idea of exponential growth. As a physicist looking for an example to illustrate the power of exponential growth, my mind turns to the chain reaction (which is another name for exponential growth) in nuclear physics. The awesome destructive power released in the explosion of a nuclear warhead is also the result of exponential growth. Just as the nuclear explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki ushered in a new world order, the explosion of Covid-19 in the virosphere is also threatening to usher in a new world order. As a nation, we must be equal to the challenge of facing this new order whatever it may turn out to be.

As an educator, it has been my view for a long time that the future of education lies in harnessing the power of the internet. Many world-class educational institutions, such as MIT, have already invested heavily in online education. With the Covid-19 crisis amongst us, we can see that this is no longer just speculation about the future but a necessary condition for survival in this age of social distancing.

After the initial closure of all educational institutions in Bangladesh in mid-March, the University Grants Commission (UGC) on March 24 instructed all the universities to move onto online education. That directive, when it was issued, was seen as a bold and visionary move.

That different universities adopted different strategies to tackle the unprecedented problem of bringing the Spring semester to a satisfactory closure is completely understandable as different universities have different needs. At Brac University, when it became clear that the sudden move to online classes was causing widespread anxiety amongst the students, it was decided, after up to four online classes per course, that we would award grades to students based on the work that has already been assigned and turned in. It must be noted that by then, up to 60-65 percent of the final grade had been accounted for in most courses across the university. So, stopping the online courses did not hugely diminish the term's learning. The fact that the student body didn't have the same

uniform level of access to the internet also factored into the decision of not holding finals.

At Brac University, we were told to be considerate to the situation while grading students, and as such, we were in the middle of devising a clever system by which the grading would reward the students who have been working hard during the semester as well as give the benefit of the doubt to those students who were hoping to catch up in the final exams. The VC had appointed a steering committee that would collate ideas from around the university and finalise a fair and uniform grading system through a consultative process. (Disclosure: I am a member of this committee.)



Bangladesh's education authorities should be open-minded when dealing with private universities during the Covid-19 crisis.

Similar lines of reasoning were used at IUB to reach the decision to assign grades based on work that has already been turned in.

The decision to award grades based on work already turned in was not taken in a vacuum. We, teachers, don't take decisions about grading students lightly. We are fully aware that the grades we assign shape the future of our students as well as the reputations of our institutions. Thus many of us looked at how the best educational institutions around the world were dealing with this issue. Harvard University, for example, decided to go for satisfactory/unsatisfactory grades. Cambridge University, on the other hand, decided to assign numerical

grades but decided not to assign classes.

Reading through the Harvard Crimson or other online student magazines of these world-famous institutions, it becomes clear that no single grading system is going to be satisfactory to every student for the simple reason that when the semester started, each student had signed up for a system of grades which assumed that the world was in a certain state and, midway through the semester, we suddenly found ourselves in the throes of the birth of a new world order. The best we can do, under these uncertain times, is to minimise the damage to our student body as a whole. But one thing is clear from talking to every student and also reading the press reports of

Also, faced with a completely uncertain future, many of the private universities decided to adopt a policy of foregoing admission tests for student intake for the Summer semester. The UGC has also taken issue with this decision. But like the decision of assigning grades, not only was this decision taken within the legal framework of the Private Universities Act, it was also taken with the wellbeing of the students in mind. With the coronavirus threatening to spread far and wide in the country, it would be completely irresponsible (not to say unethical) for any university to hold traditional admission tests.

We have already witnessed several fiascos over the last month involving the closure and reopening of businesses that led to mass exoduses of people, raising the fear of a massive spread of the infection. If the UGC were worried that the intake of fresh undergrads might lead to analogous debacles in the educational sector, then it should have worked closely with the private universities to come up with guidelines to ensure that that doesn't happen. Instead, when asked why the UGC didn't take these decisions in consultation with the VCs of the private universities, the UGC made the astonishing statement that it is not mandatory for them to speak to stakeholders before taking a decision. But shutting down the possibilities of new intake raises the spectre of session jams and financial ruin.

As someone who entered the public university system at the fag end of the Ershad dictatorship, I know and have suffered first-hand the irreparable damage that session jams unleash onto the academic lives of students. Furthermore, private universities operate as providers of higher education premised on a revenue model which is generated through student fees, and not on government grants and endowments. So without the possibility of continuing their educational activities online or in some other shape and form, many of these universities will find it difficult to survive. If that were to happen, what will happen to the thousands upon thousands of students who are already enrolled in these schools? What will happen to the thousands of academics who have dedicated their lives to educating the future generations of Bangladesh? Unlike the

case of the RMG sector, the government of Bangladesh has not announced a generous package for the private universities to weather through any tough times, nor is it likely this will happen. From a purely financial point of view, public universities can afford to go into session jams as their staff salaries are underwritten by the government. But that is not the case for private universities. This confusing and short-sighted directive by the UGC threatens to shut down an entire thriving sector of our economy and jeopardise the continued learning of many.

The argument that has been given by the UGC is that the challenge right now is to survive (*tike thaka*) and that we can deal with all these challenges once normalcy returns. But again, this is a fallacious and invalid argument.

First of all, as the above discussion shows, if the private universities are not allowed to take immediate actions to ensure an organised way of bringing the current semester to a close and if they are not allowed to take actions for the intake of new students, many of the universities won't survive this crisis (*tike thaka jabe na*). What would be unfortunate about that is the universities will fail not because of Covid-19 but because of a lack of leadership shown by the UGC.

The second problem with the UGC's proposed "strategy" is that we have no clue as to when normalcy will return. Not only that, normalcy, as we know it, may never return. To say that the education of our next generation must be paused may befit a dictatorial regime such as the Ershad government but it is not the kind of "bold" and "visionary" diktat we expect from a government which prides itself on building a "Digital Bangladesh".

Thus it is our earnest request to the UGC to allow the private universities to operate their business in an ethical and transparent manner, taking advantage of the digital infrastructure that is already in place in Bangladesh and also working closely with all the universities to develop new ways of reaching out to students so that the business of educating our young may continue in the new reality that is emerging in front of us.

Our future depends on it.

Tibra Ali is a professor at the Department of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of Brac University.

QUOTABLE Quote



CORETTA SCOTT KING (1927-2006)

American civil rights activist who was the wife of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

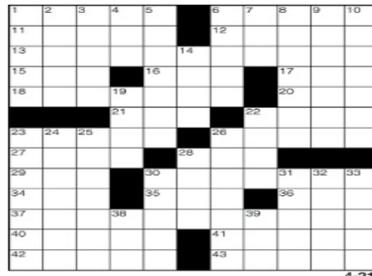
ACROSS

- 1 Wonderland visitor
- 6 Extra
- 11 Did a yard job
- 12 Grottos
- 13 Stamp collector
- 15 -- Vegas
- 16 -- Salvador
- 17 One -- time
- 18 Make better
- 20 Young one
- 21 Horse doctor
- 22 Had on
- 23 Madrid mister
- 26 Radials, e.g.
- 27 Rowing team
- 28 Ravine
- 29 Unrefined
- 30 Made fresh

DOWN

- 1 Plentiful
- 2 Lindsay of "Mean Girls"
- 3 "Wouldn't that be great!"
- 4 Animation frame
- 5 "Lou Grant" star
- 6 Play part

- 7 Buddy
- 8 Ace, e.g.
- 9 Do museum work
- 10 Manor settings
- 14 Diplomatic skill
- 19 State frankly
- 22 Use a sponge on
- 23 Compress
- 24 Sign of error
- 25 Cronkite, for one
- 26 Stein's kin
- 28 Start of an idea
- 30 Fraught with peril
- 31 Jeans measure
- 32 Cow of commercials
- 33 Out of style
- 38 Travel stop
- 39 Overly



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S P O T S SEAM
L E V E L ATLAS
A D I E U SCALP
P A N R A H S T U
S L E E P W A L K E R
L E E E A S T
A L O U D A G N E S
B O N D A D A
S W E E T T A L K E R
U S A A M P A L E
R U R A L T I R E S
D I T T O E R E C T
T H E N D E N T S

BEETLE BAILEY



2-24

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



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

INFRASTRUCTURE

The usefulness of ready-mix concrete in building infrastructures

DR MD TAREK UDDIN



Md Tarek Uddin

Ready-mix concrete (RMC) is produced at batching plants as per specifications of concrete and then transferred to the project sites. Wet mix plants are more popular than dry mix plants. In wet mix plants, all ingredients of concrete including water are mixed in a central mixer and then transferred to the project sites by agitator trucks. During transit, the trucks continuously revolve at 2-5 rpm to avoid setting as well as segregation of concrete. The whole operation of the plant is controlled from a control room. The ingredients of concrete are loaded in the mixer as per the mix design. The mix design of con-

crete is a recipe for production of one cubic metre of concrete. The mix design is to be changed with the variation of specific gravities of cement, coarse aggregate, and fine aggregate; moisture states of aggregates, etc. For example, if specific gravity of coarse aggregate is increased, the weight of coarse aggregate is to be increased accordingly. If aggregate contains extra amount of water over saturated surface dry conditions, the amount of mixing water is to be reduced accordingly. At the RMC plant, the Quality Control Engineer should make a check-list to ensure quality of the product.

RMC has many advantages over on-site mixing. RMC (i) allows for quick construction, (ii) reduces cost associated with labour and supervision, (iii) has superior quality control through accurate and computerised control of ingredients of concrete, (iv) helps in minimising cement wastage, (v) is relatively pollution free, (vi) helps early completion of the project, (vii) ensures durability of concrete, (viii) helps in saving natural resources, and (ix) is an effective option for construction in a limited space.

On the other hand, RMC has some limitations also: (i) the transit time from the plant to the project site is a critical issue as concrete sets with time

and cannot be used if concrete sets before pouring at site, (ii) agitator trucks generate additional road traffic, and (iii) the roads may become damaged due to the heavier load carried by the trucks. If a truck carries 9 cubic metres of concrete, the total weight of the truck would be about 30 tonnes. However, there are ways to minimise these problems. By using a chemical admixture, the setting time of cement can be prolonged. The roads can be designed considering the

concrete is a great challenge. Mineral-based cement is effective for this case also. Mineral-based cement has many other advantages, such as long-term strength development, reduction in environmental pollution, long-term durability, and sustainability of construction materials. Some particular mineral admixture based cements, such as slag cement, have proven records in terms of strength development as well as long-term durability of concrete in harsh

aggregate from other countries. A problem related to reaction of coarse aggregate with cement was found in many countries (known as alkali-silica reaction (ASR)). Therefore, the possibility of ASR of aggregate is to be checked. Water that does not have unusual taste, odor, colour or turbidity and that is suitable for drinking can be used. Impurities in water may affect setting time, strength, and durability of concrete and also cause discoloration. The amount of chlorides, alkali carbonate and bicarbonate, and sulfates should be within the specified limits. The pH of water should be within six to eight.

As concrete is to be delivered from the plant to the project site, a chemical admixture having both water-reducing and retarding properties is to be used to keep concrete soft for a prolonged time. In a research study in Bangladesh, it was found that sulfonated naphthalene polymer-based chemical admixture and polycarboxylic ether-based chemical admixture have better performance compared to the other admixtures. The dosage of chemical admixture should not cross the specified maximum limit. The admixture should not cross the expiry date. The admixture should be agitated properly when it is added in the mixture plant. The solid portion of the admixture may settle at the bottom of the storage tank and if admixture is pumped from the top of the tank, the admixture will not work properly. Before RMC production, trial mixes are to be prepared to verify the strength requirement as well as slump retention. For proper quality control, it is necessary to record a Quality Control Data Sheet (QCDS) for each agitator truck covering mix design parameters, material properties, travel time, site location, workability at site and plant, strength of concrete, etc. Based on this data, statistical analysis can be carried out to set the target strength of the future RMC production against the design strength of concrete as per ACI 318. It will also build confidence of the team members of the RMC plant and will be a very useful document that can be used as reference, if there is a conflict with the client. RMC suppliers should discuss possible technical concerns and measures with the clients for successful completion of a project using RMC.

Dr Md Tarek Uddin, PEng, is Professor, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE), Islamic University of Technology (IUT).



Discharging RMC through a chute



RMC Plant

weight of agitator trucks. RMC can also be transferred by smaller trucks having carrying capacities of one to seven cubic metres of concrete. Considering the advantages of RMC over on-site mixing, RMC is popular worldwide. It can be noted that almost half of the total volume of concrete consumed globally is produced at RMC plants.

The ingredients of RMC are cement, coarse aggregate, fine aggregate, water, and chemical admixture. Under our cement standards, 27 kinds of cement are specified. CEM Type I is a purely clinker-based cement. In other types, a part of clinker is replaced by a mineral admixture, such as fly ash, slag, etc. Due to the slow rate of chemical reaction with water, the mineral based cements are better compared to the purely clinker cement. Mineral based cement delays setting and keeps concrete workable for a prolonged time. It also reduces heat accumulation in concrete due to slow reaction with water.

For mass concrete, mineral-based cement can be used. For high-strength concrete, a large quantity of cement is necessary and control of heat of this

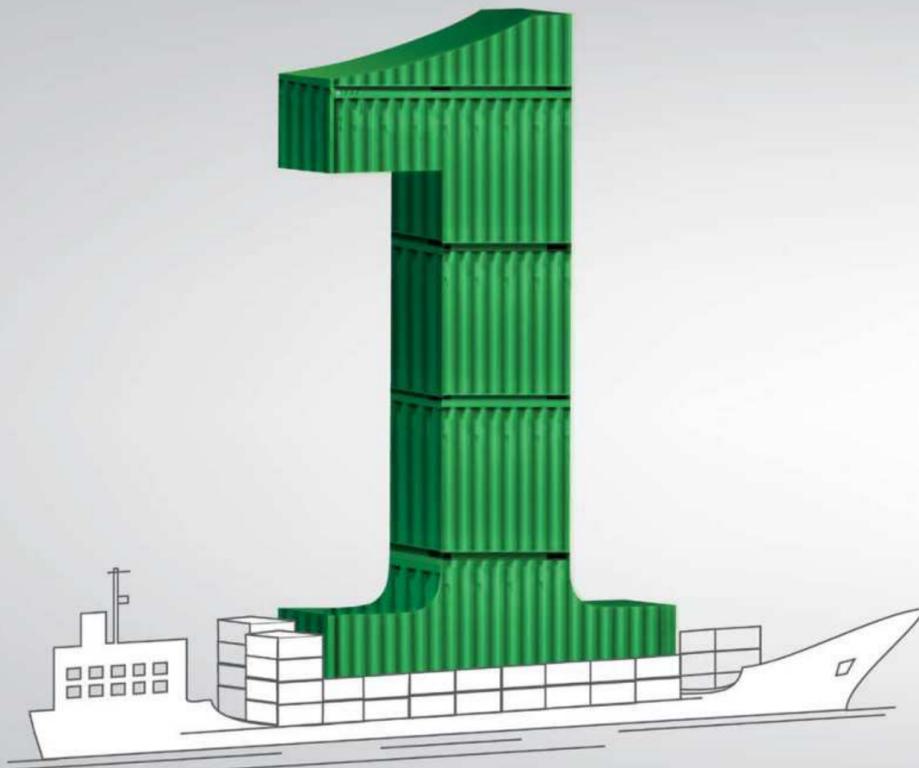
seawater environment. In harsh environments, it is also necessary to reduce permeability of concrete by limiting the amount of water in concrete.

Fine and coarse aggregates occupy 75 percent of the volume of concrete. Fine aggregate is locally available with different coarseness. Coarse sand reduces the demand of water due to the reduction of total surface area and eventually gives more strength. The fineness modulus (FM) of sand should be within the range 2.3 to 3.1. The grading and other properties of fine and coarse aggregate should satisfy ASTM C33. The aggregates should not contain over 5 percent clay and silt, should be free from salt, and should be inert. In general, 20 mm downgraded coarse aggregates are used in Bangladesh. If the quantity of smaller sized aggregates (below 12 mm) is low in aggregate, they are to be added separately to control proper grading. At least 30 percent of the total aggregate should be below 12 mm. The aggregate should be strong and should not contain a large quantity of flaky or elongated particles.

Our RMC plants import coarse ag-

THE EXPORT LEADER

Crown Cement has achieved National Export Trophy thrice for its outstanding performance in cement export. Demand for Crown Cement is gradually increasing at home and abroad for its quality. With the export of Crown Cement, Bangladeshi products are also getting the fame. In addition, Crown Cement is contributing to the national development through foreign currency earning. It's a pride for Bangladesh.



CROWN CEMENT
FOR SOLID FOUNDATION

JOTA CROWNED EPREMIER LEAGUE WINNER

Wolverhampton Wanderers forward Diogo Jota won the ePremier League Invitational title for his club on Saturday after beating Liverpool full-back Trent Alexander-Arnold with a golden goal in the final after the match ended 1-1 in regular time. A number of top-flight players had signed up to represent their clubs in the virtual tournament to generate funds for Britain's National Health Service (NHS) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Raul Jimenez scored the winning goal for Wolves and Jota in the FIFA 20 match after Georginio Wijnaldum put Liverpool ahead late in the first half, only for Adama Traore to level the scores after the interval.



—REUTERS



Fans wearing protective face masks are seated with social distancing in mind. Despite most sport being cancelled around the world as the spread of coronavirus continues, Buffalo Boxing in Managua, Nicaragua continued and caught the eye of a worldwide audience.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Coaches go online to help peers, booters

ANISUR RAHMAN



"As there are hardly any fitness trainers at club level, most coaches have to look after the fitness aspect of the players. So I think the initiative of sharing fitness knowledge has helped coaches who have participated in this online class," was the simple admission from Haider Kabir Prince, head coach of Rising Star Club of Chottagram Premier Division Football League for the last 18 years.

Maruful Haque, Saiful Bari Titu and Julfikar Mahmud Mintu, three of the top coaches of the country had arranged a discussion on fitness of footballers for the coaches, players and organisers online in a time of social distancing due to the coronavirus pandemic.

AFC A licence holder Titu and Mintu presented aerobic and anaerobic fitness training respectively while UEFA A licence holder Maruful discussed strength and endurance. The online classes were attended by 60 persons on Friday and Saturday.

them. As I work with age-group players, I learned what is necessary for fitness training of the budding players. After the discussion I feel I can train the players in a more effective way."

"There were many things to learn from the discussion and I think continuous discussions will help the coaches and virtually benefit the country's football," said another BKSP coach Mustakim Wazed. Titu however was a bit frustrated after the low turnout of the Bangladesh Premier League clubs' dugouts.

"We arranged the discussion from our responsibility. If anyone is benefited, then it is our success," Titu said. "It was just a token discussion but the individual has to study to improve as we have just shared our knowledge and experience with them."

"Muktijoddha Sangsad coach Abul Kaiyum Sentu, Bashundhara Kings assistant coach Abu Faisal and national women's team coach Golam Rabbani Choton participated in the discussion, but there were no other coaches from the Bangladesh Premier League. I think this discussion would have been far better had other BPL

Arsenal to restart training

AFP, London

Arsenal's squad will be allowed back to their training ground from next week, although the club stressed they would still have to maintain British government guidelines designed to combat the spread of the coronavirus.

The Premier League side's players will have access to training pitches but on a strict rotational basis that will see them uphold social distancing measures.

"Players will be permitted access to our London Colney training grounds next week," said a club spokesperson.

"Access will be limited, carefully managed and social distancing will be maintained at all times."

"All Colney buildings remain closed. Players will travel alone, do their individual workout and return home."

This week saw Arsenal become the first Premier League club to agree a coronavirus pay cut with their players as manager Mikel Arteta and his stars slashed their wages by 12.5 percent. The club's current wage bill is around £230 million.

I was 'clueless' on Test debut: Sachin

PTI, New Delhi



Sachin Tendulkar says he was "clueless" on his Test debut and almost cried thinking it was all over for him.

When he walked out for the last time 24 years later, Tendulkar would do so as a batting great with a record 200 Test appearances to his name.

"I was clueless, I have to admit that. I played the first Test as if I was playing a school match," Sachin told Nasser Hussain on Skysports.

In his first Test in 1989, Tendulkar was up against a Pakistan pace attack comprising Imran Khan, Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis. Recalling the outing, he said, "Wasim and Waqar were bowling quick, and they were delivering short balls and all sorts of intimidating things they could do. I had never experienced anything like that, so the first outing wasn't a pleasant one."

"Occasionally, I got beaten by their pace and bounce, and when I got out on 15, I felt embarrassed when I walked back to the dressing room. I was like 'what have you done, why did you play like this' and then I went straight to the bathroom, and I was almost in tears."

Now the owner of innumerable records, Tendulkar, at that point in time, felt he was not good enough for international cricket.

"I felt I was completely out of place. I looked at myself and questioned myself and said: 'looks like this is gonna be your first and the last outing'. I felt that I'm not good enough to play at this level. I was upset and feeling low," Tendulkar said.

He said a conversation with Ravi Shastri, now the coach of the Indian team, helped him.

"I still remember the conversation I had with Ravi Shastri. Ravi said, 'you played as if it was a school match. You are playing against the best bowlers; you need to respect their ability and their skill'."

"Then I told Ravi that I got beaten by their pace. To which Ravi said: 'That happens to quite a few, you don't worry. You just look to go out and spend half an hour in the middle and then you will get adjusted to their pace'."



and everything will fall into place after that."

Tendulkar was picked for the second Test and showed he had it in him with a gritty half-century.

"When I was picked to play in the second Test at Faisalabad, the only thing on my mind was, I'm not gonna look at the scoreboard. I will only look at the clock and not worry about scoring runs."

"I batted for half an hour, and I felt really comfortable and I scored 59 runs in that match and after that things started changing," Tendulkar said.

Chelsea opt against 10% pay cut

AFP, London

Chelsea have said they will not impose a pay cut on their first-team squad in response to the coronavirus outbreak.

But the Premier League side added Saturday they had asked players to continue donating to charities during the ongoing pandemic.

It has been reported the west London club has been in talks with their players about a salary reduction of around 10 percent in a bid to reduce costs at a time when football has been suspended because of the virus.

That figure, however, is significantly lower than the Premier League's suggestion of 30 percent for all clubs.

But that has not stopped Chelsea from taking their own course of action as they highlighted the #PlayersTogether initiative launched by players earlier this month, which aims to raise and distribute funds for charities supporting Britain's state-run NHS.

The Blues also said they would not be taking advantage of the UK government's coronavirus job retention or furlough scheme.



Maruful



Titu



Mintu

"If any player has good skill and technique but doesn't have good fitness, then he won't be effective. So he must have the knowledge of how to maintain fitness and his coaches will play a key role in this regard," AFC B licence holder Prince said, adding that he also checked whether he was in the right direction of training by discussing the method with the speakers."

AFC A licence holder Masud Parvez Kaiser, assistant coach of Sheikh Russel KC, also attended the online discussion to rekindle the lessons he had forgotten.

"It was a good initiative indeed because there is no limit to learning. They discussed how to work with the players' fitness and coaches at different level. I believe I have been benefited by the discussion as I remembered lessons I had forgotten," said Kaiser, who is also involved with national team.

BKSP coach Imrul Hasan Imu, who played for Brothers Union last season, said, "I want to know more about fitness and training and I have got the guidelines from

coaches participated," Titu lamented. The former national team coach also informed that they are planning to hold such discussion classes more in future but everything depends on the interest of the participants.

TARAFDER DONATES TO STRUGGLING COACHES

Sports organiser Tarafder Ruhul Amin came to help the insolvent football coaches at the district and divisional level.

He donated Tk 25 lakh, providing financial assistance to 200 coaches who are in trouble due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Tarafder said that they enlisted three or four coaches from each of the 64 districts through the district football associations.

The president of the Bangladesh District and Divisional Football Associations (BDDFA) also informed that he would help coaches involved in lower-tier football leagues in Dhaka after scrutinising them through Dhaka Club Association.

UK govt to hold restart talks with major sports

AFP, London

The British government plans to hold talks with major sports during the next week in a move designed to see a return of action as soon as possible amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The pandemic has led to the suspension of established sport in Britain.

But it is understood the government accept the potential boost to national morale that could come with a resumption of sport after months of Britain being in state of lockdown.

This week saw Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden tell MPs he had been having "productive talks" with governing bodies from across British sport on restarting following the coronavirus shutdown.

Meanwhile England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive Tom Harrison said his organisation had been asked by Dowden's department to lead a cross-sport group also including football, horse racing, tennis and rugby.

A source told the BBC that the upcoming meeting, the first of a regular series, represented a "quickening of the pace" and was intended to help sport resume "within weeks", if progress was made.

The meetings, however, are regarded as "preparatory", and meant to avoid a further delay to seasons being resumed once approval is granted, rather than indicate an imminent resumption of normal sporting activity.

Sports will be looked at on an individual basis, meaning some could resume sooner than others, although there is an acceptance any fixtures would have to be behind closed doors as things stand.

Any return of live action would also have to pass government guidance on hygiene, virus testing, and the maintenance of social distancing. They will also likely involve strict limits on the numbers of people allowed.

The coronavirus has led to the suspension of the 2019/20 seasons in both English football's Premier League and Football League. The start of the cricket season in England and Wales has been delayed until July, while this year's London Marathon, due to be run on Sunday, has been pushed back until October.

But the 2020 British Open golf and Wimbledon tennis championships have been cancelled completely, with the first nine races of the Formula One season called off.



With Covid-19 keeping sports stars indoors, retired tennis great Maria Sharapova and Australian cricketer Pat Cummins gave glimpses into their morning routine with these pictures on Instagram.



PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Archer had 'gone mad' after losing World Cup medal

AFP, London



England fast bowler Jofra Archer said Saturday he'd "gone mad" looking for his World Cup winner's medal after losing the prized piece of silverware while moving house.

Last year saw the Sussex quick establish himself on the global stage as he helped England win their first men's 50-over global title, with Archer's 20 wickets at 23.05 the most taken by any member of the

champions' squad.

The 25-year-old, who only made his international debut in 2019, was also given the daunting responsibility of bowling the Super Over in the final at Lord's.

Archer, however, held his nerve brilliantly as England edged out New Zealand in a thrilling finish decided on boundary countback after the teams' scores were level after both regulation play and cricket's answer to 'extra time'.

But the Barbados-born quick, who spent a lot of time on the sidelines in the recent past and was named as one

of Wisden's top five cricketers of 2019, admitted that he had lost the medal while moving to a new home.

Asked Saturday about where his medal was now, told BBC Radio: "I had it hanging off a portrait someone did for me and sent to me, I had my medal hanging on that."

"I moved flat and the picture is on the new wall but there's no medal. I turned the house upside down for about a week but I still haven't managed to find it."

"I know it should be in the house so I will keep eyes out for it but I've gone mad looking for it already."

Warne revisits his dismissal on 99

NZH



Better known for his ability to terrorise batsmen with the ball in hand, the closest he came was scoring 99 against New Zealand in 2001 - before being caught on the boundary after trying to slog-sweep Daniel Vettori.

The all-time cricket great would never better that score, and recounted the innings speaking with Newstalk ZB's Martin Devlin.

"I had been batting pretty well for the day and we were in a lot of trouble," Warne said.

"New Zealand had played beautifully, were outplaying us and had been ahead. I walked out to bat knowing we had to pass the follow-on."

Warne batted away and reached 99, when Black Caps captain Stephen Fleming took the opportunity to try and get in the head of Warne.

"Flem comes in, says 'there's plenty of gaps out there for you' and I was thinking to myself, 'don't do anything silly, just pick the right ball'," Warne said. "So a couple of balls go past and I think 'right, that's it. This one's going'."

"In my head, I just thought a little sweep out to the boundary where there's a couple of fielders. Just sweep it along the carpet and get a single. I took this almighty wind up and tried to hit it for 12 back to Melbourne from Perth and bloody Mark Richardson had to take the catch."

However, the Australian believed he was robbed of the momentous achievement that day, with replays showing Vettori had bowled a no-ball.

To this day, Warne remains the cricketer with the most career test runs in history without notching a century - with 3154 runs.



