



A MAKE-BELIEVE OUTING... A family poses for a group selfie in their balcony. The father said his six-year-old daughter has been upset for the last month as she couldn't leave the house and hasn't met her kindergarten friends. It was her mother's idea for all of them to dress up and come to the verandah to take photos, in order to cheer her up. The photo was taken last week from the capital's Tejkunipara.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Laying Covid-19 victims to a dignified rest

Volunteer organisation, city corporations conducting burials

HELEMI ALAM

For over two decades, charity organisation Hamza Al-Markazul has been involved in the burial process of the deceased, among other social works.

But they never thought they would have to bury people whose families wanted to bid farewell but could not because of Covid-19.

Since the outbreak of the virus in the country, they have been conducting funerals and burials of victims at the government-designated graveyard in Khilgaon-Taltola with the help from the two Dhaka city corporations.

As there was a fear of infection, initially family members of a deceased would not come to the graveyard during burial of their near and dear ones, but since the last one week the situation has changed, said Shahidul Islam, acting chairperson of the organisation.

"Presence of family members has started to increase since the announcement of the World Health Organization that a deceased person is unlikely to spread the virus," he said.

Still the grim reality remains that the number of deaths due to coronavirus continue to take place in the country and accordingly, volunteers of Hamza Al-Markazul carry on with their social and humane responsibility of performing the last rites of those succumbing to the deadly virus.

Till Wednesday, around 180 people have been buried at Khilgaon-Taltala graveyard, designated for the burial by the two city corporations.

Of them around 140 have been tested positive, Shahidul told this correspondent. "We have also sent bodies of 20 Hindus to the cremation field at Postagola following proper procedures," Shahidul Islam told this correspondent.

Over the last couple of days, family members of around 30 Covid-19 infected persons were present during the burial, he said. Shahidul said they have also handed over three bodies to family members who took those to Sylhet, Feni and Sirajganj for burial.

'A COMBINED EFFORT'

A 17-member group of volunteers are involved in the total process. Being informed by the health ministry officials, the team receives the body from a hospital or other places and brings it to the graveyard after disinfecting the body properly.

Tanzina Sarwar, chief social welfare official of Dhaka North City Corporation, said besides Al Markazul, two other organisations -- Quantum Foundation and Rahmat A Elahi -- are also involved with the burial process.

"We are making sure that the bodies are being disinfected properly at the hospital before bringing those to the burial ground," she added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

BDI mourns passing of Prof Jamilur Reza

CITY DESK

Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI), a U.S.-based non-profit corporation promoting socio-economic development in Bangladesh, mourned the loss of Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury, an honorary life member of BDI, a press release said.

In his passing, Bangladesh has lost one of its most distinguished citizens with a global reputation as a visionary engineer and educator, the organisation said. Through journal publications, consulting work, and presentations, he contributed to a corpus of knowledge that has improved our understanding of scientific theory to solve problems of poverty and economic development, it added.

Prof Choudhury began his academic career at Buet. He served as the VC of Brac University (2001-2010), and was serving as the VC of University of Asia Pacific at the time of his passing, a position he held since 2012.

He published numerous research papers on tall buildings, low-cost housing, earthquake-resistant designs, cyclones and storm surges, IT applications and policy and has patented methods in his name.

He received numerous awards and accolades for his work, including the Ekushey Padak in 2017.

Shouldn't make the same mistake again

Health experts call for institutional quarantine of returnees

RASHIDUL HASAN

Allowing Bangladeshis returning from abroad, especially the Middle East, to go into self-quarantine poses a big risk for public health. To avert that, the authorities concerned should arrange institutional quarantine facilities for the returnees and make it mandatory, recommended experts.

They said a home-quarantined returnee puts family members at risk of contracting the virus. At the same time, the process is also not socio-economically feasible, as most do not have living spaces that can follow proper guidelines.

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former Southeast Asia regional director of World Health Organization, explained the flaws of home or self-quarantine process for returnees.

"Many of us cannot follow quarantine guidelines at home. This is because most people simply don't have accommodations that provide separate rooms and bathrooms for the quarantined person during the 14-day period," he said.

Additionally, there is hardly any surveillance infrastructure in place to track whether the said person is indeed maintaining self-quarantine, which renders the whole process doubtful.

As an example, the public health expert cited Vietnam, one of the most successful countries in containing the spread of Covid-19, despite being a neighbour to the first epicentre, China. Prof Muzaherul said Vietnam simply did not allow any passenger to stay in home quarantine.

"Rather, they arranged institutional quarantine for every Vietnamese returning from abroad. For example, a woman who escaped from the airport was tracked and sent to institutional quarantine by police," he said.

Meanwhile, a doctor working at the health desk of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) tested positive for coronavirus on April 23, said Dr Nusrat, who works at the health desk.

Following that, she said, 10 of the doctor's co-workers -- four doctors and six sanitary inspectors and nurses -- were advised to go into home

quarantine.

The infected doctor last worked at HSIA on April 15 -- involved in screening 337 Saudi Arabia returnees. He developed Covid-19 symptoms on April 19, Dr Nusrat added.

Of the 337 Saudi returnees, 309 were sent to the institutional quarantine facility at Ashkona Hajj camp, while 28 were allowed to go home after they were advised to be under home quarantine for the mandated two-week period, doctors at HSIA's health desk said.

According to HSIA sources, around 3,000 Bangladeshis returned to the country through special flights since March 16 -- the day the government had imposed a ban on flying of passenger flights to and from Dhaka to contain the spread of Covid-19.

According to the health desk, of the 3,000 Bangladeshis, only 590 were sent to institutional quarantine and the rest were advised to stay in home quarantine.

A FAULTY PROCESS?

Dr Jahirul, a doctor at the health desk, said passengers who showed medical certificates stating that they were tested negative for Covid-19, were allowed to go home with advice of staying in self-quarantine for 14 days.

But officials of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) said there are flaws in the process.

For example, they said 290 Bangladeshi migrant workers returned from Oman on April 24 and were allowed to go home instead of keeping them in institutional quarantine.

"The workers showed a common medical certificate, stating that they are not infected with Covid-19, which cannot be accepted," said Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman, chairman of CAAB.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, he said, "We have strongly advised the authorities concerned that from now on, none will be allowed to go home from the airport if they fail to show medical certificates stating they are Covid-19 negative."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

'They're not locusts'

Specialists confirm insects in Teknaf are grasshoppers

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Ctg

A high-level expert team comprising of plant protection experts, entomologists and agricultural scientists visiting Teknaf upazila have identified the locust-like insect reported in Teknaf as spotted grasshopper.

The 10-member team came up with the findings after visiting the infested spot yesterday.

The insect swarm was first spotted in a deserted farm at Sadar union of Teknaf upazila on April 18, raising fears of a locust attack.

Nasir Uddin, coordinator of the team and additional director (acting) of Department of Agriculture Extension (Chattogram region), told The Daily Star that they identified the insect as spotted grasshopper, following thorough investigation.

"It is not locust. There should not be any fear among countrymen about the insect, as it can't fly and spread like locust. It is not as destructive as the locust. All it eats is the leaf, leaving the venation of wild plants. It was not seen to attack other common vegetative species", Nasir told this newspaper.

The scientific name of the grasshopper is Aularches miliaris, belonging to family Pyrgomothridae, he described.

The team also observed the insect did not spread from the farm and any increase in number. It can be easily killed by using pesticides, they said.

Nasir also urged people to immediately contact the concerned agriculture office if anyone of any part of the country comes across such insects.

On April 18, people of Lombori village of Teknaf Sadar union discovered the insects eating the up leaves of trees at an abandoned poultry farm, prompting them to contact the local agriculture office, which later collected samples and sent those to the agricultural research centre in Chattogram.

Sketch leads to arrest of rapist in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After a six-year-old child was raped in the city's Kadamtoli area a week ago, police managed to find clues on the perpetrator from CCTV footage. They suspected an youth, but could not identify him as he was wearing a mask.

Then, an officer commissioned a professional artist for a sketch of the suspected youth, and pasted it in different points of the city to get information on him.

Finally, a local identified the youth. Based on a tip-off, a team of police carried out a raid and arrested Tutul (22) from Muradpur in Kadamtoli on Friday night, said Shah Alam, assistant commissioner (Shyampur Zone) of DMP.

"In primary interrogation, Tutul admitted that he raped the girl on April 25," said Shah Alam, who led the drive. Tutul told police that he took the child to the rooftop of a building, the AC added.

After the child was rescued from the five-storey building, her father filed a case with the local police station.

Police collected footage from 16 CCTV cameras of nearby areas and one partially shows a man wearing a mask standing in front of the building, holding the child's hand.

As per the suggestion of Wari Division's Deputy Commissioner Shah Iftekar Ahmed, the AC sought help from an artist for a sketch, which led to the arrest, he said.

VIRTUAL HEARING OF CASES

40 lawyers, magistrates, officials being trained

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 40 magistrates, lawyers and court officials of Dhaka are being given training for holding virtual court hearing of urgent cases including bail petitions in need.

The representatives from the Judicial Reforms Committee of the Supreme Court and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are providing the training for few days through video conference which is expected to end today, Supreme Court Spokesman Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the committee and UNDP are also working to develop a software in this regard with the assistance from the government's Access to Information (a2i) programme.

Once the software is developed a manual will be

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

M'SINGH UNIV STUDENT MURDER

Dying declaration prompts arrest efforts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Law enforcers are trying to arrest the killers of a university student in Mymensingh based on the victim's dying declaration.

Towhidul Islam Khan (24), an honours final year student of finance and banking at Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University in Trishal, died at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital on Friday, hours after he was stabbed in his house at the city's Teenkona Pukurpar.

Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mahmudul Islam said, "He [the victim] talked to them at the hospital before his death and we are conducting drives following his information."

The OC, however, did not disclose the statement for sake of investigation.

Towhidul, who was from Netrakona's Rameswarpur village, used to live alone in a rented room on the second floor of a two-storey building in Mymensingh city.

Around 3:30am on Friday, unidentified miscreants entered his room, as the door remained open during sehri time, said the police officer.

They stabbed him in the chest and other body parts, he added.

Hearing screams, his landlord and neighbours rushed to the spot, and took Towhidul to the hospital where he died in the morning.

Victim's father Saiful Islam Khan filed a case with the police station accusing unknown persons, the OC told this newspaper.

Talking to The Daily Star, the university Proctor Dr Uzzol Kumar Proddhan demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of the killers.



After a long break, development work around the city has started here and there. As some of the busiest roads of Dhaka now remain empty due to the shutdown, workers are fixing the street in front of Shapla Chattar, left, while heavy machinery is being used to reconstruct part of Manik Mia Avenue, top right. Meanwhile, a group of workers tend to the rain-damaged Bijoy Sarani, one of them submerged in the freshly-dug hole, bottom right. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED, PRABIR DAS

