

## 3 die after showing Covid-19 symptoms

STAR REPORT

At least three persons have died with Covid-19-like symptoms in Faridpur and Noakhali since Sunday night.

In different areas of Faridpur's Sadar upazila, two of the victims, who were suffering from fever and diarrhoea, died yesterday.

A 35-year-old man of Alipur area in the district headquarters was suffering from diarrhoea for a couple of days. Later, he was taken to Faridpur Medical College Hospital around 9:00 am where on-duty doctors declared him dead, said Siddiqur Rahman, civil surgeon of the district.

Another 45-year-old man died at his house in Riazuddin Matbor Dangi village early in the morning yesterday. He was suffering from fever for the last seven days, the civil surgeon added.

Samples of both bodies have been collected to be tested for coronavirus. The bodies were buried as per the guidelines set by the World Health Organization, he added.

In Noakhali, a 34-year-old man died with Covid-19-like symptoms at Noakhali General Hospital on Sunday night.

The victim, from Hazipur area of Chowmuhani municipality under Begumganj upazila, was admitted to the hospital at around 3:00pm on Sunday with cough, fever and respiratory problems, said Syed Mohiuddin Abdul Azim, resident medical officer (RMO) of the hospital.

As his physical condition kept deteriorating, doctors referred him to Kurmitola General Hospital in Dhaka. But his family members did not take him to Dhaka.

The patient breathed his last around 10:00pm. His sample has been collected for Covid-19 test, the doctor added.

## Businesses

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the government directed the authorities to open markets and shops so that people did not face any problem to have iftar and sehri and they could buy goods ahead of the Eid.

Addressing public representatives and officials from eight districts of Rangpur division through videoconferencing from the Gono Bhaban, she said the government would provide cash assistance before the Eid to those who lost their jobs amid the coronavirus outbreak to ease their sufferings, reports BSS.

The Cabinet Division in the first gazette said all educational institutions would remain closed during the extended public holidays.

The ministries and divisions can open their offices as per their necessity and no one will be allowed to leave their workplace during the Eid holidays, it mentioned.

All factory authorities, including medicine industry and production and export-oriented industries, could keep their factories open ensuring safety and healthcare services for the workers, said the notification.

It also said services of all inter-district transport would remain suspended during the holidays.

On March 23, the government declared general holidays from March 26 to April 4 to slow the spread of coronavirus in the country. Later, the holidays were extended five times until May 5.

Shopping malls across the country also remained closed since March 25.

Speaking to public representatives and officials from Rangpur division, the prime minister yesterday said many people have taken loans from banks.

"But realising their loan interest has been suspended for two months as they [people] had no work and business in the last two months due to the pandemic."

Hasina said the government would take the next steps in this regard considering who have taken what amount of loan and for which sector.

The PM said the leaders and activists of Awami League, Krishak League and Chhatra League stood beside framers and helped them harvest their paddy.

"They are also engaged in the distribution of relief among the distressed people and I thank them sincerely for doing this."

She also thanked the health workers, including doctors and nurses, officials of the administration, members of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies, saying that they have been working round the clock to contain the spread of the disease, putting their lives at risk.

Pointing out that a number of media persons have already been infected with Covid-19, the PM requested them to perform their duties by protecting themselves.

Referring to transportation of goods, she directed the railways minister, who joined the video conference from Panchagarh, to take effective measures for transportation of all types of goods and food grains, particularly the perishable items, by trains.

About seasonal monga (a famine-like situation), which was once a common phenomenon in Rangpur region, the premier asked the authorities to take special measures so that the monga does not return.

PM's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus moderated the views-exchange meeting which was joined by the secretaries concerned.



Clad in PPE, a health worker administers a vaccine on a child at Barishal General Hospital. A programme for vaccinating children against measles and rubella is currently underway at the hospital.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

## Rule of law for Kajol indeed

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him, contacted his family and charged him with illegally entering Bangladesh under the Passport Act, a crime punishable by a Tk 500 fine or three months in jail.

The news of his sudden appearance went viral on the social and online media as journalists and concerned citizens followed developments every step of the way, anxiously waiting for Kajol to be released and reunited with the family. What remained, everyone thought, was the simple formality of a court appearance and obtaining a routine bail.

Much to the shock and disbelief of all concerned, Kajol was brought to the court, his hands tied behind his back with handcuffs. No regard was paid to his dignity of person. Police had no reason to enchain him in handcuffs which are usually used while handling terrorists or people accused of crimes like murder, rape, criminal assault or some such violent crimes. None of this applies in the case of Kajol who has been missing for 53 days.

The story does not end there. Suffering the humiliation of being handcuffed, Kajol appears in court and obtains bail and is all set to be reunited with his son when the police arrest him again under section 54 of CrPC because there are some cases against him in Dhaka under the draconian and controversial Digital Security Act.

Kajol's nightmare started when the well-known daily Manab Zamin published a story on March 2, on the expelled Jubo Mahila League leader Shamima Nur Papi, saying that she has disclosed, under interrogation, many names of people who have helped her or benefitted from her notorious activities, without mentioning any names. But many people, including Kajol, shared this story on their Facebook pages inserting names of some people, including that of the ruling party MP, Saifuzzaman Shikhor, who, on

March 9, filed cases under the Digital Security Act (DSA) against the editor and reporter of Manab Zamin and 30 others. Of the 30, Kajol's name was the first. Hours after the filing of the case, Kajol disappeared.

So what does immediate future hold for Kajol? According to Jashore Kotwali Police Station OC, Moniruzzaman, "He has been arrested under section 54 because he has three cases under DSA and he is being held in prison so that the relevant courts can process arrest warrants against him and take him to Dhaka. He has been sent to Jashore Central jail where he will be under quarantine for 14 days." It is clear from the above that section 54 was used to detain him while other arrest warrants were being prepared. This is in clear violation of the 14-year old ruling of the High Court Division, subsequently upheld by the Appellate Division in 2016, which lays down clear guideline under which section 54 is to be used, if at all. The way the Jashore Kotwali Police Station used section 54 was a clear violation of this Appellate Division guideline. And now, according to family sources, he is unable to file his bail petition because the court is closed for the pandemic.

Such is our rule of law that a photojournalist disappears for 53 days and not a finger is lifted to find him. Now that he has surfaced, suddenly our law enforcement bodies are on an overdrive to keep him in prison under different laws and denying him his fundamental rights. When the court grants him bail under one law, he is immediately detained under another. Not only that he is kept confined and denied freedom, he is humiliated in public with handcuffs and treated like a common criminal and under the guise of quarantine denied family visitation.

In addition to the duplicity of the law enforcers, Kajol is being made a victim of the complexity of our legal system. As the court is closed, he cannot avail of any immediate step to

get legal relief.

So does dispensation of justice stay on hold when courts are closed? We vigorously assert that as long as the Constitution exists so does all the fundamental rights guaranteed by it. So what happens to protection of fundamental rights for individuals when courts are not functioning? Usually when violation of fundamental rights occur a citizen can and does go to higher courts to seek justice. Even during normal recess there are vacation benches to take care of urgent matters.

So, is Kajol to be denied his constitutional rights and rot in the jail just because courts are closed due to a virus? If we are to believe in that age old dictum that "justice delayed is justice denied" then whatever delay is caused by courts being closed amounts to "denial of justice" for those affected, like Kajol.

We appeal to the higher judiciary to kindly consider the case of fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution. The notion of "complete justice" under Article 104 may be considered to find a way out in this situation. Here we would like to suggest that if courts are unable to function physically, newer methods of accessibility to courts and dispensation of justice may be considered. In this regard, the idea of virtual courts may be thought of as has been done in India. And why not, when the whole society is going digital so should the courts. In fact, when physical constraints are removed it may lead to a justice system closer to the people.

While the general issue is being considered we appeal to the office of the Chief Justice as to whether the case of Kajol can be brought to its cognisance and he be ensured his constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights.

A parting note. Kajol, a photojournalist, was humiliated in public with handcuffs on the World Press Freedom Day. How ironic.

## Deadline may be pushed back

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the project is June 2021 and costs of the project rose to Tk 30,193 crore following several revisions. Once completed, the 6.15km bridge will connect the capital with 21 southern districts and is expected to boost Bangladesh's gross domestic product by 1.2 percent.

When work of most development projects remained suspended due to Covid-19 fallout, Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project work continues.

But it faces obstacles for lack of workers -- both Chinese and locals -- and supply of construction materials, officials involved with the project said.

When the overall progress of the project was 76.5 percent as of December last year, it reached 79 percent in the last four months, they said.

The physical progress of the main bridge and river training were 85.5 percent and 66 percent respectively as of December last year. It rose to 87 percent and 71 percent respectively until April this year, they said.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, on several occasions early this year, said all 41 spans of the bridge would be installed by July this year if everything remains okay. Twenty-nine spans have so far been installed.

The problem began in January when a good number of Chinese nationals working in the project went home on leave to celebrate the Chinese New Year and could not return timely due to Covid-19 outbreak in China.

The headquarters of the Chinese company building the bridge, China Major Bridge Engineering Co Ltd, is in Wuhan city, the first epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak.

Although 39 out of 41 spans reached Bangladesh from China before the outbreak, the company in China constructing the remaining two spans remained closed.

When the situation in Chana became normal, almost all of the Chinese nationals returned to Bangladesh and joined work after staying in 14 days' quarantine. Covid-19 hit Bangladesh.

Around 60 percent local workers left the project in March and the

authorities continue the work with the limited workers for around a fortnight, officials said.

"Actually, we lagged behind around four months from our deadline due to coronavirus outbreak," said a project engineer, wishing anonymity.

**SITUATION IMPROVES LITTLE** Now, all the Chinese engineers and workers are working and the number of local workers has also increased, Dewan Md Abdul Kader, project manager (main bridge), told The Daily Star. "Almost 70 percent local workers are now working," he added.

About the two spans, he said most parts of the spans already reached Mongla Sea Port and are expected to reach Mawa construction yard within a week.

The remaining parts are expected to reach Bangladesh within the first week of June, he added.

"We are expecting to install at least two spans every month. In that case, it may take November to install all the spans," he added.

Siltation during the rainy season caused problems in the channel between 17 and 38 piers on the Janjira end and so they would try to install two spans between 25 and 27 piers within June, he added.

He said the 29th span of the bridge linking the 19th and 20th piers was installed around 10:45am yesterday at the Mawa end, bringing into view 4.350 kilometres of the structure.

**BACKGROUND** A feasibility study on the project was conducted with the assistance from Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) from 2003 to 2005. The original cost was estimated in 2007 on the basis of the study.

Then the cost was Tk 10,161 crore. However, it did not include the cost of railway lines on the bridge.

With financing from the Asian Development Bank, the work on a detailed design of the bridge had started in 2009.

The cost almost doubled to Tk 20,507 crore when the first revision was done in 2011, including the cost of the railway lines.

According to the first revision, the

project was scheduled to be completed in 2015.

The authorities in 2015 revised the project cost by 40 percent, raising the estimated cost to Tk 28,793 crore. The deadline for completion of the project was extended to 2018.

In 2018, the deadline was extended to December 2019, and the cost shot up to 30,193 crore to acquire additional land. Last year, the deadline was extended to June 2021.

The World Bank withdrew its \$1.2 billion loan in 2012 over the allegations of corruption conspiracies, which the government always strongly rejected.

The country then moved to build the bridge with its own funds.

## Another doc

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members "were sick and in isolation at home".

Prof Moniruzzaman, in his 60s, worked at Anwar Khan Modern Medical College Hospital and was also involved in three other private hospitals in the capital, said Prof Md Eklasar Rahman, principal of the medical college.

The physician came to Anwar Khan Modern Medical College Hospital (in the morning) and had saline after he felt ill, he added.

After he felt better, he returned home following a visit to another hospital he was engaged with, the doctor said.

He was taken to the CMH when his condition worsened. He died around 6:00pm on Sunday, Eklasar added.

Moniruzzaman was buried at Banani Graveyard yesterday in presence of two of his close family members, said cousin Kawser.

Bangladesh reported the first death of a physician, Moyeen Uddin, an assistant professor of medicine at the Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital, on April 15.

According to Bangladesh Doctor's Foundation data updated until May 2, 540 doctors have so far been infected with the coronavirus.

## Brazil lockdown destroying jobs

Says President Bolsonaro

AFP, BRASÍLIA

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro railed against the country's lockdown Sunday in a speech to thousands of anti-confinement demonstrators as the number of confirmed Covid-19 infections passed 100,000, with more than 7,000 deaths.

Bolsonaro blamed state governors for continuing the lockdown in a speech outside his presidential palace in Brasilia.

"The destruction of jobs by some governors is irresponsible and unacceptable. We will pay a high price in the future," the head of state said in a speech broadcast live on Facebook.

Bolsonaro has repeatedly clashed with state governors, insisting that strict containment measures they are imposing are an overreaction, and damaging to the economy.

The country registered 101,147 confirmed cases of the virus by Sunday, according to figures released by the Brazilian health ministry, with 275 deaths from Covid-19 within the previous 24 hours.

Experts believe the overall number of Covid-19 cases could be 12 to 15 times higher, due to a large number of undetected cases given the lack of testing availability across the country's 210 million population.

## No clue when the outbreak

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At the daily briefing yesterday, officials said five Covid-19 patients died, taking the total toll to 182.

Judging the curve and the latest extension of the shutdown, health officials and experts say, it is difficult to predict the course of the pandemic.

Health officials earlier predicted that by the end of this month, the number of infected cases might be between 50,000 and 100,000. But they are now saying that the extension of the shutdown by nearly two weeks will slow down the spread.

"The virus is on course to reach the peak slowly. However, we cannot say exactly when it will peak," said Mushtaq Hossain, epidemiologist and consultant at the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control And Research (IEDCR).

"If we do not allow people on the streets and relax social distancing orders, the virus will take longer to spread, and we will get the time to take preparations. But any wrong decision will cause a tsunami-like situation," he told The Daily Star.

Experts maintain that the actual number of infected people could be much higher in Bangladesh. Unless many more cases are detected through widespread testing, community transmission will continue and the situation will be out of hand.

"The situation is very complex. Community transmission is going on and the numbers are rising, while the rate of detection is still low. We have to increase the number of tests by a lot to fathom the situation," Benazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) of the DGHS, told The Daily Star.

He said if the shutdown is not properly enforced, the peak will come soon.

"Due to the shutdown, we have managed to slow the spread, but if we could identify all the cases, it would be easier for us to tackle the situation," he said.

During a meeting last month, health ministry officials expressed fear that the pandemic would worsen in May with up to 50,000 cases and 1,000 deaths.

## Police struggle to enforce

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Covid-19 hotspot.

It's hard to believe a nationwide shutdown is in place, he said.

Robin Hasan, a private jobholder, went to an ATM booth in Moghbazar from his Eskaton home to withdraw money yesterday noon.

Talking to the correspondent later, he said, "I travelled on my motorcycle. For the first time since the shutdown began on March 26, I had to honk to get through people."

**DANGER LURKS**

In the battle against the outbreak, police is one of the few government organisations that have witnessed a surge in infection numbers. Of the 953 infected, 449 work under the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

Another 181 showed Covid-19 symptoms and currently are in isolation, while 1,162 others, who were in close contact with the infected patients, are in quarantine, according to data from the police headquarters (PHQ).

Talking to The Daily Star, an additional deputy police commissioner working in specialised branches like the anti-terrorism unit, the counterterrorism unit and the Detective Branch were also getting infected, though they were not engaged in "corona duty".

"Most of those infected live at barracks or police lines. As their living places are overcrowded, they get the infection from their colleagues," he said.

The authorities have taken initiatives and tried to make some space in those barracks and police lines by making arrangements for some officials to sleep at hotels, school compounds, but some officials said it was already too late.

"The virus is spreading among our officials and other personnel," said an official, wishing not to be named.

To reduce chances of police members being exposed to the coronavirus, police have brought changes to its manpower deployment.

An officer-in-charge of a police station in the DMP area, requesting anonymity, said they divided the station's manpower into two groups. Each group works at the field for a

week and stay in quarantine for the next week when the other group discharges duties.

Asked about PPE, the OC said they received some safety equipment but they were "totally inadequate".

"We are trying to distribute that equipment among our officials and collect some safety gear like masks, hand gloves locally on our own," he said.

Though police as a whole is exhibiting bravery in this crisis period, some of its field level officers, reportedly, were trying to avoid duty at crowded places, said sources.

Two more OCs of the DMP made similar statements.

Meanwhile, different units of Bangladesh Police have filed around 3,356 cases between March 26 and April 29 against 1,366 people and owners of 108 vehicles and 177 shops for not maintaining social distancing. During the same period, they collected a fine of Tk 49.12 lakh from them, shows PHQ data.

**CROWD ON ROAD**

Replying to a query, A DMP deputy commissioner said a huge number of people were coming out of their home to earn their livelihood, while some others were doing the same simply because they get bored with staying indoors for over a month, frustrating the very objective of the government-announced shutdown.

He also said police were working in a weekly roster system and that's why the presence of the law enforcers was thin on road.

The law enforcers, however, continue ensuring action against those who were not following social distancing through eight mobile courts in DMP areas.

Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general at the PHQ, said the operations of mobile courts went in line with the magnitude of the corona situation in the country.

Replying to a question, he said they were trying to retain their mental strength by ensuring a safe place for accommodation and providing security equipment to their field level officers.

The state and the force would always stand beside those officials and their families, said the AIG.