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Amphan slams into the coast

Heavy rains, tidal surges up to 9 feet; at least 5 die; 50 lakh without electricity; over 24 lakh people moved to cyclone shelters

STAR REPORT

More than 24 lakh people were moved to safety in 19 coastal districts as Cyclone Amphan bore down on the country's coast yesterday afternoon, causing heavy rains and tidal surges up to nine feet.

The cyclone claimed at least five lives in Bhola, Barguna, Patuakhali and Pirojpur. The extent of damage could not be assessed immediately. Over 50 lakh subscribers were left without electricity in a dozen districts as Amphan battered the country's south-western part.

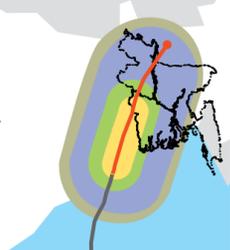
"The cyclone made landfall on the Digha coast in India yesterday afternoon and then moved towards Bangladesh through the south-western part," Shamsuddin Ahmed, director of Bangladesh Meteorological Department, told The Daily Star.

In a tweet, the Indian Meteorological Department said the cyclone made landfall on the Digha coast around 2:30pm (local time).

Bangladesh Met office said Amphan hit the country's coast around 5:00pm and kept moving inwards with gusts of up to 160 kilometre per hour. The wind speed in

Amphan made landfall at 2:30pm yesterday near Digha, West Bengal.

Crossed West Bengal and parts of Bangladesh between 4:00pm and 8:00pm.



Satkhira was recorded at 151 kmph around 9:00pm.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday evening, Enamur Rahman, state minister for disaster management and relief, said, "A total of 24,08,819 people took refuge in 14,636 cyclone shelters till 3:00pm." They also brought more than five lakh cattle to the shelters.

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Two men trying to take their dinghy to safety as the sea begins to get rough near EPZ Beribandh in Chattogram. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon, hours before cyclone Amphan made landfall. The cyclone hit the coast around 5:00pm and moved inwards.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



Sundarbans the bulwark

PINAKI ROY

Govt always responds fast to disasters

Says PM as Amphan makes landfall

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government, unlike the previous governments, always responded very fast to the forecast of any disaster by engaging every human and material support to reduce the loss of lives and properties.

She was addressing a meeting of the National Disaster Management Council to review the preparations to face the possible assault of cyclone Amphan.

"We have the preparations [to face cyclone Amphan]. We are taking all possible measures to protect people's lives and properties from the

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The Sundarbans have once again proved to be the key saviour of the country in times of natural calamity as the mangrove forest absorbed the fury of Cyclone Amphan, much as it had done before with similar forces of nature.

The forest is a gift of nature to Bangladesh as it acts like a wall whenever a severe cyclone hits the country, said green campaigners, forest and biodiversity experts, urging the government to halt all kinds of economic and commercial activities in and around the Sundarbans.

It could not be immediately ascertained how much damage the forest had sustained as it absorbed the worst of Amphan.

"We cannot say yet how much the damage could be. But we have evacuated our remote forest offices and brought all our staffers to safer places, knowing the cyclone will leave a heavy blow," said Amir Hossain Chowdhury, the acting Chief Conservator of Forest (CCF).

The acting CCF said they have evacuated all staff from nine offices, including in Kotka, Kochikhali, Shelarchar, Pashakhali, Baherakhali, Puspakathi, Notabeki, Kachikata, Kawakhali, located near the coast.

"Nearly 60 to 70 staff members are posted in those forest offices. We have brought them to other offices which have better structures," said Chowdhury.

The forest department has also asked all honey collectors who could not return from their excursions to take shelter at nearby forest offices, he said.

The forest department will start assessing damages caused by the cyclone in a day or two.

During Cyclone Sidr in 2007, the forest had suffered severe damage.

The cyclone hit the eastern parts of the forest, especially Chandpai range -- which includes Kochikhali, Kotka, Hiron Point, and Dublarchar -- leaving a trail of severe devastation.

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BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,617 New cases in 24hrs



26,738 Total cases



386 Deaths



5,207 Recoveries

Victims of denial

Patients being refused treatment without Covid-19 test results

AL-AMIN

Healthcare facilities by definition are supposed to treat each and every patient seeking their services.

But in the ongoing battle against the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been painfully noticed that hospitals and clinics in the country, especially the private ones, are not complying with the very commitment for which they had been authorised to operate by the government.

If you are running high temperature, having breathing difficulties, chest pain, need a surgery or dialysis, you are invariably running the risk of not being treated in any private hospital or clinic, a common complaint from many patients and their family members.

With those symptoms you are considered a Covid-19 suspect and you need to do the necessary PCR test to come out clean before getting any treatment.

Otherwise, you are left with the tortuous and often uncertain prospect of seeking medical support from the already-overcrowded public hospitals, which can treat only 30 percent of the country's people seeking healthcare services.

In the last week, this newspaper ran some stories and a few powerful pictures

that gave an indication of patients and their family members' untold sufferings while they were running around the city from one hospital to the other like virtual beggars desperate for treatment.

Also, a number of people died without treatment. Two cases perhaps deserve detailed deliberation just to grasp how painful their situations were.

Anwar Hossain's death in particular was cruel. The man in his 60s was taken to the capital's Mugda General Hospital on Saturday morning with breathing difficulties and fever. He died on a gurney and his wife, while lamenting outside the hospital around 1:30pm, told The Daily Star photojournalist Anisur Rahman that the hospital authorities did not treat her husband.

"The security guards at the main gate first did not allow us to enter. But after a lot of requests they allowed us in and we took my husband inside on a gurney [kept for carrying food for patients]. We waited in front of emergency for a long time with my husband struggling in pain. But no doctor or nurse turned up to treat my husband.

"As we were looking for help, some hospital staffers came and told us to take the

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Faster increase in new cases

WHO says Bangladesh is unlike other Asian countries; record 1,617 new cases, 16 deaths reported

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Bangladesh is now seeing a faster rise in Covid-19 cases compared to some other Asian countries, with the number doubling every five days, said the World Health Organization.

The number of positive cases has shot up as the government has ramped up testing.

The Directorate General of Health Services in its daily briefing yesterday said that Covid-19 positive cases surged to a record 1,617 in a single day with 16 new deaths.

A total of 10,207 tests were carried out at 43 labs in 24 hours since Tuesday morning, said Prof Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general (administration) of the DGHS.

Of the 16 dead, seven were from Dhaka, five from Chattogram, one each from Sylhet and Rangpur division.

The death toll now stands at 386.

Bangladesh reported its first confirmed Covid-19 case on March 8 and crossed 100 cases on April 9. It then exceeded 200 cases in two days, data shows.

"As of May 18, the cases doubled every five days," said the latest situation report by WHO.

The increase in the number of cases is higher in India than in Bangladesh. It is, however, lower in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Sri Lanka than in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, government officials and experts fear further spread of the infection in the coastal areas due to difficulties in maintaining social distance inside the cyclone shelters.

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THE BUSINESS

ROLLING BUDGET CAN GIVE GOVT MORE LEEWAY TO FIGHT PANDEMIC

In these extraordinarily uncertain times, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal could consider adopting a rolling budgeting exercise, which allows accommodation to unexpected changes and circumstances.

To begin the process, the government can articulate the most pressing expenditure needs for the first six months and consider financing options.

STORY ON B2

PANDEMIC WILL CHANGE THE AVIATION INDUSTRY FOREVER B2

TK 10,085CR NEEDED PER MONTH TO SUPPORT POOR, NEW POOR B1

BANGLADESH EYES FDI BOOM AS NATIONS RELOCATING FACTORIES B1

FIVE MORE PORTS OF CALL NOW FOR INDO-BANGLADESH TRADE B1

MARICO'S PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION MARCH CONTINUES B1

NEW DEADLINE FOR SETTING UP SALES REGISTERS WOULD BE IN BUDGET SPEECH B1



A man walking while holding his newborn after crossing the Postogola bridge. After police on Monday tightened checks in the area to prevent people from leaving or entering the capital, many have been walking across the bridge. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Gono University lead virology scientist Prof Dr Bijon Kumar Sil and his team have been agonisingly waiting for the approval of their rapid testing kits that they proudly announced can detect coronavirus within five minutes. Dr Sil and his team, and probably the country are waiting for the low-priced kits to pass the final test. The scientist from Nature usually avoids public attention but gave consent to an interview by Golam Mertoza of The Daily Star. Here is an excerpt of the conversation.

Rapid, low-cost kit awaits nod

Prof Bijon Kumar Sil, the brains behind it, explains why such kits are very important for us



The Daily Star (TDS): Tell us about the current status of your kit.

Bijon Kumar Sil (BKS): We have done our part regarding the 'G Rapid Dot Blot' kit that we invented for detecting coronavirus. Now the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) is conducting tests to have an assessment about the effectiveness of the kit. We have provided 400 kits to BSMMU for the trial and are expecting that they are also getting good results like we did.

TDS: You were confident from the very beginning that your kit would be a success. What makes you so confident?

BKS: We have developed a kit which is capable of doing both antigen and antibody tests. And if you can conduct both the tests, you will get the correct result in

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Amphan slams into the coast

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The country never saw evacuation of this scale during any natural disaster, mentioned Enamur.

"The districts near the Sundarbans -- Satkhira, Bagerhat and Khulna -- could be affected badly by the cyclone," the minister added.

Amphan, formed in the Bay of Bengal on Saturday, turned into a super cyclone within just 18 hours on Monday. But it gradually weakened and became an extremely severe cyclone.

Yet, it made landfall with a wind speed of 160 kmph and caused tidal surges up to nine feet in some coastal areas. Hundreds of villages were inundated in Bhola, Patuakhali, Barguna, Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira. And tidal surges battered the char areas in Barguna, Patuakhali, Bhola, Barishal and Laxmipur.

Almost all the coastal districts experienced rain and strong wind since early yesterday due to the influence of Amphan. It started raining heavily in the evening, reported our correspondents from different districts.

Dhaka and its adjacent districts also experienced gusty wind and rain since yesterday afternoon.

Many low-lying areas of Barishal, Chattogram and Khulna went under water due to tidal surges. In some areas, onrushing water breached protection embankments.

Barishal Divisional Commissioner Mohammad Yamin Chowdhury said scores of low-lying areas in the district went under three to four-foot-deep water.

The areas include Dhal Char, Char Nijam and Char Kalatali of Bhola; several villages of Rangabali and Galachipa upazilas of Patuakhali; and Majhir Char of Pirojpur.

The Meghna, Bhola, Baleswar, Bishkhali and Paira rivers were flowing above the danger mark at several points in Patuakhali, Barguna and Bagerhat, said Water Development Board officials.

"Some areas in Rangabali and Galachipa upazilas got flooded due to overflow of rivers," said Md Hasanuzzaman, executive engineer at the WDB Patuakhali Circle.

Different areas in Dacope and Koira upazilas of Khulna were also flooded as Rupsha, Shibshar and Pashur rivers were flowing above the danger level.

Onrushing water overflowed the protection embankment in Dakkhin Betkashi of Koira, said locals many of whom were seen putting sandbags on the embankment.

"We don't think it will work," said Harendranath Sarkar, Ward-9 member of Koira Sadar union.

Our correspondents in Khulna and Barishal divisions reported that people in the districts were experiencing

power cuts and disruption of mobile network since yesterday evening.

THE DEATHS

Shah Alam, the leader of a team of Red Crescent volunteers, drowned as a boat capsized in a canal in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila yesterday morning.

The body of the 40-year-old man was found around 6:00pm, said Asaduzzaman, assistant director of Kalapara Cyclone Preparedness Programme.

In the same district, a five-year-old boy was killed as a tree branch fell on him while he was on his way to a cyclone centre.

The victim was identified as Rashed, son of Shah Alam from Galachipa upazila, said Upazila Nirbahi Officer Shah Md Rafiqul Islam.

In Bhola, an elderly man was killed in a similar way in Charfashion in the afternoon.

A tree fell on Siddikur Rahman, 70, as he stepped out of his house. He died on the spot, said Mohammed Masud Alam Siddique, deputy commissioner of Bhola.

Besides, 50-year-old Shajahan Molla, a farmer from Pirojpur, was killed in a mudslide during the cyclone. Another elderly person died on the way to a cyclone shelter in Barguna early yesterday.

NO ELECTRICITY

Nearly 50 lakh subscribers of Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (BREB) in a dozen districts were left without electricity due to the cyclone, said BERB officials.

The districts include Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Barishal, Patuakhali, Pirojpur, Laxmipur, Jashore, Barguna and Noakhali.

Many of the subscribers had no electricity since yesterday evening, BREB Chairman Major General Moin Uddin (Retd) told The Daily Star around 9:30pm.

Moreover, around three lakh customers of West Zone Power Distribution Company in Barishal Division were left without electricity, said its Executive Engineer Amullo Kumar Sarkar.

CTG, MONGLA PORTS

Great danger signal 9 was hoisted at the Chattogram port due to Amphan, said Md Omar Faruk, secretary at Chattogram Port Authority.

Loading and unloading of goods at jetties as well as lighterage of goods from big vessels at the outer anchorage had been suspended since Monday evening. Delivery of goods was also suspended yesterday evening.

All 19 vessels from the berths and more than 50 vessels from the outer anchorage were sent to the deep sea by yesterday noon, said the port secretary.

At the Mongla port, 11 foreign ships were moved to safe locations away from the port, said Harbourmaster Sheikh Fakhruddin.

Sundarbans the bulwark

FROM PAGE 1

The uprooted trees and destroyed houses on the edge of the forest were reminiscent of the devastation wrought on the area by the cyclone of 1988, sources said.

The forest eventually recovered from the wounds made by cyclones and became green again within a couple of years. The weakened Cyclone Bulbul, which hit last year, did not cause as much damage to the Sundarbans as Sidr and Aila did.

Khasru Chowdhury, who has been visiting the Sundarbans for the last 40 years and working to save tigers, said the forest is acting like a shock absorber.

When asked about the role of the Sundarbans, Dr Reza Khan, eminent wildlife and forest ecology expert, told The Daily Star that the Sundarbans has been saving the country from cyclones as it is working as a wall.

"If the Sundarbans were not there, the entire Khulna Division would be like a desert without any tree or human habitation, because the cyclone would bring salty sea water and destroy all vegetation," said Dr Reza Khan, adding that what the Sundarbans is doing for the country

would be impossible to determine in financial terms.

Dr Reza urged the government to stop all kind of economic and commercial interventions in and around the Sundarbans immediately.

"The only intervention the government should continue there is to save the forest," he said.

Sharif Jamil, secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, who has been protesting against establishment of coal-fired power plants for a few years, said the Sundarbans has once more proved to be more important than any economic activity in the backdrop of the government's unwillingness to abandon destructive industrial activities in Rampal, Mongla, Taltoli and Kalapara.

When extreme weather comes from the sea, it eclipses even the danger of pandemics like the ongoing Covid-19 as people scampers to take shelter from nature's unbridled fury. Jamil said it was very frustrating to see the people's top priority is the last priority of the government in their development plans.

Bangladesh and India jointly share the unique mangrove forest, with 6,017sqkm in Bangladesh.

Govt always responds

FROM PAGE 1

cyclone," the PM said.

Hasina joined the meeting from the Gono Bhaban through videoconferencing. She sought blessings of Almighty Allah so that people's lives and properties were not affected by the cyclone.

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed the media after the meeting.

The premier expressed satisfaction at the overall preparations and thanked all concerned, including the disaster management and relief ministry, armed forces, police and local people involved in the process.

"Twenty lakh people have so far been evacuated to cyclone centres as part of advance preparations. As many as 13,241 cyclone shelter centres have already been opened to this end," she added.

Hasina recalled that the then BNP government took no steps when the deadly 1991 cyclone hit the country's south-eastern coastlines.

"Even they didn't care for the information about the disaster for which thousands of people were killed and air force planes, navy ships and other public properties got damaged in the cyclone."

The PM said then opposition Awami League leaders and activists reached reliefs to the cyclone affected people, before the government did.

She said disaster-related advance information is now being collected through satellite and agreements have been signed internationally to take prompt measures to disseminate information to the grassroots level to get prepared in advance to face any disaster.

Hasina said the people of Bangladesh would have to live facing various natural disasters due to its geographical location. "So, Bangladesh will always have to be ready to face any kind of man-made or natural disasters."

She said her government has achieved a great success in reducing risks and losses of lives and properties caused by various disasters like cyclone, which has gained international recognition.

Ministers concerned, the cabinet secretary and chiefs of the three services joined the meeting from the Secretariat in the capital through videoconferencing. The state minister for disaster management and relief took part in it from the Gono Bhaban.



Policemen charge truncheons on women garment workers who blocked the Dhaka-Mawa highway demanding arrears. Inset, police also fired tear gas canisters to open the road to traffic after the workers, who claim to be of Civic Apparels Ltd, kept the road blocked for several hours in Postogola area of the capital yesterday morning. Related story on page 12.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Rapid, low-cost kit awaits nod

FROM PAGE 1

almost all the tests. That may not be 100 percent correct but close to that mark. When we conducted the trial, we got 100 percent correct results. Let me give you an example for a better understanding (for both tests). Last Sunday, a doctor's family -- father, mother and son -- contacted us. All were tested positive for Covid-19 RT-PCR tests on May 12. We tested their samples with our kits and found the son developed antibodies, and the father developed antibodies so insignificant that it is hardly traceable. The mother has not developed antibodies. But both the mother and the father have developed antigen. Had we conducted only antibody tests we could have found one Covid-19 positive case. But by doing both the antibody and antigen tests we could identify three positive cases. And this is the specialty of our kits. We believe it is a complete kit capable of conducting Covid-19 tests in just five minutes. We are excited to present the kits to the nation and the whole world. If you ask me, it will be our biggest satisfaction.

TDS: Is it taking a bit longer than expected?

BKS: There are certain things that you cannot control. We are the first in the world to announce that we have developed Covid-19 detection kits. The United States and Europe followed suit. Senegal and other countries started the development after us but have already produced kits for public use. However, Senegal is conducting only antibody tests. A company in the United States has produced a kit capable of both antibody and antigen tests like ours and they have got the approval from the FDA last week. We have announced it first, but the others are already in the market and we are not.

TDS: People are asking what happened to the Gonoshasthaya-RNA Biotech Limited kits.

BKS: We had an opportunity or possibility to present our kit to the world first. Anyway, it's now in BSMMU under trial. They need to follow a certain process and they also have their limitations. We have submitted 200 antibody kits and as many antigen kits. They have got space constraints and that's why they are not taking the whole samples. We

are hopefully getting their report next week.

TDS: Tell us about your joining at Gono University and your involvement with the development of the kits.

BKS: When I joined Gono University in February this year, the coronavirus has already spread in China where it has originated. But the whole world was yet to take it seriously. Since I have previously worked during the SARS outbreak, which is 82 percent similar to Covid-19, I told Zafrullah sir (Zafrullah Chowdhury) that these types of viruses are lethal and that I want to develop testing kits for Covid-19. He endorsed the idea immediately and we started our work.

TDS: The world did not take Covid-19 seriously in February. What were your thoughts at that time?

BKS: When the coronavirus was detected in China in December last year, I think it was an ideal time for the virus to spread. It was the time for the Chinese New Year when around 20 to 25 crore Chinese people travel from one place to another. I was suspecting that the virus would spread like wildfire across the world thanks to the introduction of budget airlines and make no mistake there is not a single country in the world where you will not find a Chinese citizen.

I can also remember attending a meeting of Bangladesh Medical Research Council on February 18 when I warned everyone in attendance that if we take coronavirus lightly, we will make a big mistake. I have also requested to lay out an emergency plan so that we can prevent it.

The fact is that the whole world took it lightly. Even the United States and Europe failed to understand how quickly the virus can spread. Perhaps everyone thought this virus could be contained like the SARS virus in 2003. I could understand the gravity because of my prior experience with the SARS in Singapore.

TDS: Test and more tests are very important. Aren't we lagging behind in that aspect?

BKS: There are many things that I don't want to talk about. BSMMU is running trials of our kits. We are also continuing with our research and trying to improve every day. We are expecting to get the approval of the

kits next week. These kinds of kits are very important for us now. Many people might have been infected but they can't be confirmed without a test. If our kits get approval it will take only five minutes to identify.

TDS: If approved where and how do you want to conduct tests? Do you need a lab for that or it could be done without a lab?

BKS: We are working on it. What I can say is that it is very simple to test with our kits. Anybody can do the testing and a lab is not necessary. However, there is a certain element of risk for testing without a lab because if the test is not done carefully the person who is conducting the test might run the risk of being infected. That's why we are thinking of doing tests in labs. We can test samples outside a lab at a later stage. That's what we have planned at the moment.

TDS: Is testing samples in the lab an impediment for massive testing?

TDS: Not necessarily. A PCR testing takes two days to get results. For a lab to test 500 samples through a PCR machine, it takes 10 days. But with our kits, you can get 500 samples or more tested in a day.

TDS: You have already become popular as a research scientist. With people grappling with coronavirus pandemic, what is your advice for mass people?

BKS: Coronavirus pandemic has infected Bangladesh like the other countries in the world. We will have to face it. We should not panic and avoid thinking that we might die if we get infected. The infection trend in Bangladesh so far indicates that the damaging capability of Covid-19 here is weak. If you don't get nervous or panic after being infected, the virus will not cause you much harm. If you feel bad, run temperature or cough, drink raw tea with spice. Besides, vitamin C is most effective to protect ourselves from coronavirus. I would suggest everyone to take 500mg vitamin C every day, half in the morning and the other half at night. We must also use masks while going out.

I'm quite surprised that WHO is focusing more on coughing and sneezing. They are not talking about spitting which is a more serious vector of Covid-19 than coughing and sneezing.

Objects hidden

FROM PAGE 12

The items were likely hidden in the chimney because block 17 was used to house manual workers.

"It is no coincidence that a chimney was used as a hiding place in the very building where chimney sweeps were accommodated," the fund's structural consultant Johannes Hofmeister said, according to a press release from the fund.

The objects are not expected to be on display at the exhibition, due to open in 2021, but instead have been handed over to the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum for conservation.

One million European Jews died at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which Nazi Germany set up in occupied Poland in 1940 and which became Europe's biggest death camp.

More than 100,000 others including non-Jewish Poles, Roma, Soviet prisoners of war and anti-Nazi resistance fighters also died there.

Items scattered around the camp and its surroundings continue to turn up periodically during works.

Pandemic bites

FROM PAGE 12

And like US counterpart Donald Trump he has also promoted the use of anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine against the virus despite studies showing it has no benefit. Brazil's health ministry yesterday recommended using chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine to treat even mild and moderate cases of Covid-19.

CLASHES IN CHILE

Chile is also suffering from a sharp rise in cases and on Tuesday deployed soldiers on the outskirts of its locked-down capital Santiago after clashes with protesters angry about food shortages and job losses.

"People don't have work, they don't have money and they don't have food," said Monica Sepulveda, a 46-year-old unemployed security guard from El Bosque, a working class neighbourhood where residents armed with clubs and stones clashed with riot police.

Faster increase

FROM PAGE 1

AMPHAN CONCERN

Expressing fear that the risk of infection will rise among the people taking shelter at the cyclone centres, Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, executive director of COAST Trust, told this correspondent that the government should not move all the people from the coastal areas at the same time.

The local administration should move only the people from high-risk areas and evacuate them 10 hours before the cyclone hits, he said, adding that this would reduce exposure to the virus.

"Early transfer means they will have to provide food to these people. Naturally, during the distribution, social distancing regulations will be violated," he added.

Mohammed Masud Alam Siddique, deputy commissioner of Bhola, said they have so far moved 3.5 lakh people to about 1,104 cyclone centres.

He said they are requesting people at the cyclone centres to maintain distance, wear masks and wash hands regularly.

"It's difficult to manage such a huge number of people.... Officials working at the centres are also run the risk of contracting the virus."

Speaking to this correspondent over the phone, Dr Nasima said, "Like the people on the ferries, the people at the shelters have similar risks of getting infected."

Recently, a huge number of people thronged ferries to leave Dhaka.

Asked whether testing would be hampered in the coastal districts due to the cyclone, she replied, "It's obvious. But two or three days' delay will not be a big deal."

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former Southeast Asia regional director of WHO, on the other hand, said it is essential to detect Covid-19 infected people immediately. "Any delay at all will increase the risk of infection and spread."

He suggested that the government isolate the infected people and put them in institutional quarantine facilities immediately.

forgive the world!" said Sanid.

There are many others with similar horror experiences.

A health ministry circular last Monday clearly said that all private hospitals and clinics should have separate arrangements for treating suspected Covid-19 patients, and they cannot refuse any patient if they have the particular treatment facilities.

It also said: "No patient can be refused treatment if there are treatment facilities. If the hospitals are to refer the patients to other hospitals, that has to be done only after ensuring arrangement of treatment in consultation with the Covid-19 hospital control room of the health directorate."

The circular also said the kidney patients suffering for long and undergoing treatment, including dialysis, should be provided with necessary treatment if they are not Covid-19 positive.

Failure to comply with the government order will result in legal action, including revoking of licence, against the hospitals or clinics concerned if allegations are proved, the ministry circular said.

But still the appalling tales abound of ministry guidelines not being honoured.

These have been desperate times

Victims of denial

FROM PAGE 1

body outside. As I looked at my husband, I saw he was not breathing anymore," the woman recalled while crying profusely, creating a heavy atmosphere outside the hospital.

The woman, who was also accompanied by her son and brother-in-law, said they live in Muradpur on the outskirts of the city.

Shamim Newaz Khan, who had been suffering from a degenerative disease which causes the lungs to fill up with fibrous buildup, was another victim of denial.

Talking to The Daily Star on Saturday, his son Sanid Newaz Khan said his father died before they could put him on a bed at the DMCH around 9:00pm on May 11, after a futile 10-hour effort to provide him with life-saving CCU support.

While detailing the "darkest moments" of his life, Sanid said at least three private hospital in the city refused to treat his father after they were told that he was running high temperature. He said a couple of hours after IEDCR collected the samples around 11:00am on the day, his condition deteriorated. The fourth private hospital they tried agreed to admit the patient but upon arrival said that they will keep him in observation for two hours.

Around 4:00pm they gave a report saying that the patient had a heart attack but that they will not admit him because he has fever and breathing difficulties.

"They told me that they cannot give CCU support because this is a coronavirus-free hospital," said the son.

His request for providing his father with emergency care while looking for an alternative hospital with CCU support was also turned down by the hospital authorities, who referred the patient to the DMCH with the note on the prescription saying "he is a suspected coronavirus patient."

The note made things even more complicated, starting from getting an ambulance to carry his father to a hospital where he could get immediate CCU support.

"Around 9:00pm, I went to Dhaka Medical, but by that time his situation had worsened. He died before we could put him in a bed," said Sanid with a broken voice.

"The next day, I got a text message from IEDCR saying that my dad was coronavirus-negative," said Sanid, breaking down. "Now I feel like taking the report to that hospital and asking why they denied my father treatment."

"We never thought we would lose him like this. I am just not able to

for our healthcare system ever since the coronavirus pandemic hit the country in early March. The government is struggling to do the necessary Covid-19 testing due to limitations of facilities, is trying hard to overcome the shortage of PPE and has taken the praiseworthy decision to appoint additional doctors and nurses to battle the invisible enemy.

But the fight will not muster the necessary momentum unless private hospitals and clinics that treat an overwhelming 70 percent of patients of the country join the cause to overcome a novel menace, the cure for which is yet to be discovered.

It is time to think of humanity above all else.

While it is expected that the private healthcare facilities live up to that motto at a time when Covid-19 infections and deaths in the country are growing with every passing day, non-compliance deserves the toughest of actions from the government.

The onus is on the government to strictly monitor that the guidelines are fully enforced and a violation is dealt with swiftly and harshly.

After all, it is the commitment of the state to guarantee its citizens access to healthcare facilities and see to it that no one is denied of his or her fundamental rights.



WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE? A vendor in the capital's Shahbagh gathers up his stock of bright yellow marigold, ready to close up shop as the skies turned ominously grey yesterday. While celebrations and occasions where flowers would be a mainstay have been far from most people's minds amid the pandemic, many traders like him have to keep the business running, however slow, to earn their daily bread.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Patients in Ctg stuck in a coronavirus Catch-22

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

When Jamshed Haider, a banker and a resident of port city's Ameerbagh Residential Area, started to have breathing difficulties on the morning of May 11, his family took him to Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID), a government hospital dedicated for treating Covid-19 patients in Chattogram.

But without admitting the patient, doctors at BITID referred him to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), saying that he was a cardiac patient, alleged family members.

Jamshed died on the way to CMCH. "The doctors at BITID did not admit my brother. They did not even provide him with primary treatment," said Zia Haider, brother of Jamshed. "If they had given him oxygen support, he would have survived," he added.

Jamshed's health condition became more critical while being taken to CMCH, said Quamrul Morshed, a colleague of Jamshed.

This is not just a random case. In Chattogram, many critical patients are not being able to get admitted to hospitals and being deprived of treatment as the hospitals dedicated for treating Covid-19 patients suspect them as non-Covid-19 patients while the general hospitals suspect them as Covid-19 patients.

Besides, the private hospitals in most cases are not admitting any patient unless they can show test reports that say they are not Covid-19 patients. Many patients eventually lose the battle for life, deprived

of treatment.

Meanwhile, many hospitals are running out of isolation and ICU beds thus being unable to admit patients as well. According to sources, all the 100 isolation beds and 10 ICU beds in Chattogram General Hospital filled up on May 16 and patients with Covid-19 symptoms are not being admitted there. The hospital added 50 more beds yesterday to cope up with the situation.

Amid such circumstances, incidents of patients being denied treatment continue to take place.

Rights organisations have also expressed concerns over the matter.

Amnesty International in a statement on May 14 said it has found that hospitals are refusing to admit people with the symptoms, despite having the capacity to diagnose and treat them.

Calling upon authorities to investigate the allegations, it said, "The shortage of necessary medical equipment has not only made the frontline health workers' job difficult, it in fact puts them at the greatest risk of being exposed to Covid-19."

Not just Amnesty, Ain O Salish Kendra also expressed similar concerns. Citing media reports, the rights body said several patients had died after failing to get admitted to different hospitals.

This was not only the case for patients suffering from fevers, cold-coughs and respiratory problems, but also those without such symptoms were being deprived of treatment at private and government hospitals, said its recent statement.

Meantime, this correspondent spoke

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Healthcare in Gazipur taking a huge hit: study

Care Bangladesh finds massive drop in child delivery, neonatal services

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Covid-19 outbreak caused a 10 percent decline in the government's Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) coverage in Gazipur and its adjacent urban areas in March compared to February, said a Care Bangladesh report.

The programme covered 98.4 percent children in February while coverage reduced to 88.3 percent in March, said the report.

The outbreak also caused 35 percent reduction in TT vaccination services. There was a whopping 91 percent drop in child delivery services, and 66 percent and 87 percent reduction in antenatal care and postnatal care services respectively, it added.

The report "Rapid Assessment Findings on Covid-19 Effects on Urban Health" was shared during an online discussion arranged jointly by Care Bangladesh and The Daily Star yesterday.

"Covid-19 has had a massive impact on the overall health system in general, and on health and family planning services in particular," according to the report.

It was prepared based on interviews taken via telephone and in person with 141 respondents (80 female, 61 male) between April 23-26 in Gazipur city, Savar, and Bhaluka municipality of Mymensingh.

It said there was a 50 percent decline in number of patients in March from the reported number in February at Gazipur's four upazila health complexes.

The number of general patients in February was 1,26,725 which reduced to 65,220 in March.

Due to the unavailability of doctors and routine health services in the upazila health complexes, patient flow increased in community clinics, family welfare centres, and union sub centres, the report added.

In Gazipur, 24 percent of doctors, 15 percent nurses and six percent frontline health workers were tested Covid-19

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Tenants in capital struggle to pay rent

Home and shop owners not faring much better

HELEMI ALAM and SHAHEEN MOLLH

For the last three months, Belal Hossain (30) failed to pay his house or shop rent as the salon owner's livelihood has been seriously hampered since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak in the country in March.

The resident of Bauniabadh in the capital is now struggling to make ends meet as his income has dropped to Tk 70-100 a day from Tk 1,000-1,200 per day.

"It's getting very tough to run my six member family... I also have to help my workers as they are without work as well," he said.

"At times, I feel lost as I don't know what to do. I owe over Tk 20,000 to the landlords already," said Bilal. "They are offering me Tk 500 concession each on monthly rents but even with that I am unable to pay them," he added.

Not just Belal, a large number of tenants across the country are facing difficulties in paying their rents due to the ongoing lockdown.

Md Sohel, an employee of a buying house at Madarbari in Uttara, said he could not pay rent for two months.

His problems, however, did not just end there. "I used to send Tk 5,000 to my parents every month but I could send only Tk 1,000 this month," said Sohel.

He said he got Tk 7,000 in March, Tk 2,000 in April and Tk 1,000 in May from his office, which is closed now. He said he used to earn around Tk 20,000 every month.

The shutdown is not only putting the tenants in a tight spot, many homeowners who run their families with the rent money are also being affected.

Ruhul Amin, a homeowner in Uttara, said this was his only source of income. "I used to get around Tk 70,000 a month from rent. But I'm getting Tk 18,000-19,000 a month due to the crisis. I am struggling to maintain my family as most tenants

are not paying rent."

Though there is a clear instruction from the government not to force a tenant to leave in this crisis time, sometimes such incidents are taking place.

In Sylhet, a mother along with her two children was forced to leave from her rented house in Shaplabagh Residential Area on May 13 as she failed to pay Tk 700 rent to the owner.

Desperate, she took shelter on a footpath opposite Sreemangal Police Station that night. The incident became viral on social media.

Police took notice of it and took them to the house around 4 in the morning and asked the landlord not to oust them in this crisis period.

"We also gave food assistance to the family," said Alamgir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Sreemangal Police Station.

Meanwhile, law enforcers are also requesting landlords not to force tenants to leave their home if they are unable to pay rent during this crisis time, said OC Abul Hasan of Shahbagh Police Station in Dhaka.

"If any homeowner does so, we have asked them to complain to the police stations so that we can take necessary actions in this regard," he said.

Contacted, Mohammad Mostofa, joint secretary of Bharatiya Parishad, said there are many people in the country who are out of work and have no income now. "They are struggling to put food on the table, let alone paying rent," he said.

"When we hear that a family has been ousted by a landlord, we go there and try to take them back to their house," he added.

"We are demanding that the tenants are exempted from paying rent for three months. The government can help the owners in this regard so that they are also not in serious crisis," he said.

Golam Rahman, president of Consumer Association of Bangladesh, said homeowners,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Ad agencies ask govt bodies to clear arrears

Seek loans at 2pc interest to survive economic fallout of Covid-19 pandemic

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To survive the financial crunch brought along by the coronavirus pandemic, the Advertising Agencies Association of Bangladesh (AAAB) has demanded immediate payment of arrears being withheld by government agencies. The organisation also asked the government to facilitate loans at two per cent interest to keep businesses afloat.

Ramendu Majumdar, president of the organisation, made the demands at a virtual press conference on Tuesday. AAAB Advisor and former Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor, AAAB General Secretary Munir Ahmed Khan and other members were present at the briefing.

Majumdar said 80 per cent of media revenues come from advertising agencies. But they are yet to receive outstanding bills from many ministries, government and semi-government organisations.

"As a result, advertising companies are not being able to pay bills to newspapers, televisions and radio channels. This has created a crisis throughout organisations and the media," he added.

He demanded government guidance to pay the arrears soon for resolution. Besides, advertising agencies will have to be included in the package announced by the government and will have to be given loans at two per cent interest.

There are around 18,000 people working in this sector. Not only those who make or manage advertisements, but people from event management and other sectors are also directly involved in the industry, Ramendu said, adding that there has been no income since the end of March, but costs continue to pile up.

He said they gave a memorandum to the prime minister on May 13, seeking cooperation of the government.

AAAB put forth four demands to overcome this crisis: stop deducting income tax at source, clear the outstanding bills, give loan facilities at two per cent interest for three years, and recognise the advertising industry as a necessary service sector.

"We are requesting the loan facility to meet 70 per cent of our expenses for one year. The agencies will repay the loan in three years. Interest will have to be introduced six months after taking the loan."

Elaborating on the business situation, he added that information provided by various agencies shows that 70 per cent of the business plan for 2020 could not be achieved.

Usually, from January to March, there is a business downturn. Business improves during the two new year celebrations and the last two-three months of the year. But this time, there was no business on Bengali New

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

250 isolation beds being added to Ctg hospitals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The government is adding 250 more isolation beds to three hospitals in Chattogram to provide treatment to the increasing number of Covid-19 patients.

Of them, a total of 50 isolation beds have already been added to the existing 100 beds at Chattogram General Hospital (CGH) on Tuesday, said Dr Hasan Shahriar Kabir, Chattogram divisional director of Directorate General of Health Services.

Dr Asim Kumar Nath, superintendent of CGH, said they have already started admitting patients to the newly included beds.

On the other hand, Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and Holy Crescent Hospital will get 100 isolation beds each within today, Dr Hasan Shahriar told The Daily Star.

According to the office of Chattogram Civil

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

FARMERS BANK SCAM

HC stays Rashedul Haque Chisty's bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday stayed till May 28 a lower court order that granted bail to Rashedul Haque Chisty, son of Farmers Bank audit committee's former chairman Mahbubul Haque Chisty, in a Tk 159 crore money laundering case.

The bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim came up with the stay order after virtually hearing a petition by Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) through email, seeking stay on the lower court order that granted bail to Rashedul.

The HC set May 28 for further hearing on the stay petition, and asked ACC to submit the lower court order.

Rashedul Haque Chisty cannot get released from jail following the High Court's stay order, ACC's lawyer Khurshid Alarm Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the High Court stayed the bail of Rashedul Haque Chisty considering the gravity of his offence.

Besides, the High Court had rejected a bail petition of Rashedul in October 2018 in the same case with some observations which the lower court did not consider while granting bail on Tuesday, the ACC lawyer said.

He said the ACC filed the case with Gulshan Police Station in April, 2018 against Rashedul, his father Mahbubul Haque Chisty and some others on charges of laundering Tk 159 crore.

Advocate Khurshid Alarm Khan said the lower courts in Dhaka have granted bail to Rashedul Haque Chisty in four corruption cases recently.

The ACC will move separate petitions before the High Court seeking stay on the three bail orders passed by the lower courts, he added.

On Tuesday, Rashedul got bail through hearings in two virtual courts in Dhaka in two money laundering cases.

Metropolitan Magistrate Md Sarafuzzaman Ansary passed the order after Rashedul's lawyer Shahinur Islam submitted a petition through email seeking bail for his client, in a case filed over laundering Tk 58 crore.



With the help of others, a woman gets on an already-packed pickup, heading towards Kanchpur from Narayanganj's Siddhirganj area yesterday. Thousands have begun to leave Dhaka for their village homes ahead of Eid, ignoring the risks of contracting coronavirus and spreading it to others. In absence of public transport due to the ongoing shutdown, many are travelling in such a risky way. This photo was taken on Dhaka-Chattogram highway.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Ahmed Fazlur Rahman Bahar passes away

CITY DESK

Former President of Bangladesh Indenting Agents Association Ahmed Fazlur Rahman Bahar has passed away on Tuesday. The 84-year-old was suffering from old-age complications, says a press release.

Rahman was a Deputy Honorary Consul of Austria. He was the owner of Liberty International; a member of FBCCI; and former director of Bangladesh-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce & Industry. He was associated with Lions Club and several other social organisations.

He is the elder brother of Mahbubur Rahman, president of International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh.

His namaj-e-janaza was held on the same day after Zohr prayer at Siddheswari. He was laid to rest at Banani Graveyard.

Rahman left behind two sons and two daughters, grandchildren and a host of relatives, friends and well-wishers to mourn him.



Tenants in

FROM PAGE 3

who have the ability, should be more considerate.

Contacted, LGRD Minister Tajul Islam said they have received a request letter from the BGMEA to provide support to their workers.

"Based on the request from the BGMEA president, we have issued letters to all city corporations, municipalities and union parishads to take necessary steps and reduce 50 percent house rent of RMG workers," he said.

The minister said authorities will sit with owners and tenants; as they cannot impose it directly on owners.

Asked, Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam said it is indeed a dilemma and they have to sit with both parties -- landlords and tenants -- to come up with a solution.

Ad agencies

FROM PAGE 3

Year and Eid-ul-Fitr, and Eid-ul-Azha will be the same.

"Although economic activities remain stalled since March, house rents and other expenses are being incurred. Paying workers is now a big challenge. As a result, there is a huge pressure on working capital. Such stress is difficult to handle," Ramendu said.

Asaduzzaman Noor said, "We did not ask the government for help just for us. Newspaper and television advertisements have decreased. In some organisations, the advertising division has collapsed."

"If the government does not help, many institutions will close, and a lot of people will lose their jobs. We don't want to lose our long-time colleagues," the former minister observed.

Munir Ahmed Khan said advertising agencies never went to the government for help; they have taken care of themselves.

"Now, we need some help to survive," he pleaded. Members of AAAB's executive council Sanaul Arefin and Syed Gousul Alam also spoke.

AAAB, that was formed in 1978, represents all major advertising agencies in the country.

Healthcare

FROM PAGE 3

positive within the time frame of this research.

Family planning has also been hampered, as 80 percent satellite family planning clinics can no longer operate, because house or spot owners are not providing them any space for sessions, according to the report.

Besides, 33 percent respondents mentioned facing problems in availing general health services from their previous health facility centres.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON THE RISE

Of the female respondents, 97 percent mentioned that they faced personal or familial issues, 38 percent mentioned they had developed conflict with their husbands, and 33 percent complained about being physically abused by their husbands.

The women mentioned an increase in mental pressure and emotional burden, as they are facing severe financial crisis after their husbands lost their jobs, and they are also panicked due to the pandemic.

Addressing the discussion, Gazipur Civil Surgeon Khairuzzaman said they faced some

problems regarding EPI coverage but could overcome those.

He said 25 new doctors have been appointed in the district recently and the civil surgeon's office is trying to provide necessary health services in the district.

He urged different factory owners to maintain proper health guidelines to ensure hygiene and health safety for workers there.

Addressing as chief guest, Gazipur City Corporation Mayor Jahangir Alam said they are ready to provide any sort of support to health workers to fight the pandemic.

In his welcome address, Care Bangladesh Deputy Country Director Prabodh Devkota said collective action from all including donors, NGOs, government and private sector actors is required to fight the pandemic.

Jahirul Alam, head of urban health at Care Bangladesh presented the report while the discussion was addressed, among others, by Mohiuddin Osmani, joint chief (planning) of health ministry.

250 isolation

FROM PAGE 3

Surgeon, a total of 972 persons have tested Covid-19 positive in the district as of yesterday, while a total of 127 patients have recovered, and 41 have died.

That means, a total of 804 patients were currently undergoing treatment.

Excluding the 250, a total of 180 isolation beds are available at three Chattogram hospitals dedicated for those infected with the novel coronavirus, the office sources said.

However, such patients are also being admitted to 14 upazila health complexes.

According to Chattogram Civil Surgeon's office,

a total of 315 isolation beds are present in the city and upazilas for treating patients infected with the novel coronavirus.

As the number of isolation beds is only 315 against 804 patients, a total of 489 infected persons have not had the opportunity to get hospitalised.

Asked, DGHS Divisional Director Dr Hasan Shahrar said most of Covid-19 patients have "no symptoms or mild symptoms" and so they receive treatment staying isolated at their houses.

"We will use Railway Hospital and Chattogram City Corporation General Hospital for treating Covid-19 patients, if needed," he said.

Returnees will need healthcare

FROM PAGE 12

restrictions, including curfew and shutdown, as well as imposed air travel ban.

IOM, the United Nations' migration agency, in partnership with Brac is focused on providing assistance to vulnerable migrants returning from the European Union countries and looking to secure additional funding to assist vulnerable migrants, particularly those returning from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries where there have been "large-scale, sector-wide retrenchments following the decline in oil prices", said the statement.

With EU support and under the coordination of the expatriates' welfare ministry, IOM is assisting migrants stranded abroad and vulnerable migrants who have returned to Bangladesh from the EU, it said, adding that 806 vulnerable migrants, returning from the EU countries, have been traced since March.

They were provided with Covid-19-related information, and counselled on how to cope with the adverse impacts of the pandemic, including mobility restrictions, unemployment, and growing debt.

After a needs and vulnerability assessment to identify the most vulnerable, eligible returnees will be provided with an immediate cash grant, long-term reintegration support, skills training, and psychosocial counselling support, IOM

said in the statement.

Besides, support and counselling are provided to callers to hotline set up by IOM for migrants and promoted and accessed through www.probashihelpline.com.

Since March, 1,11,470 migrants reached out via the website, either through social media interactions or through app-based calls, it said.

Expatriates' Welfare Ministry Secretary Ahmed Munir Saleheen said the ministry is involved in many initiatives to support migrants.

Ambassador Rensje Teerink, head of EU delegation to Bangladesh, said the EU stands ready to help governments to address the negative impact of the pandemic -- on the short, medium and long term -- in particular with the most vulnerable communities which include migrants.

Brac Executive Director Asif Saleh said, "... In this crisis, migrant workers are suffering tremendously, and we need to prioritise our support for them both at home and abroad."

In addition to providing support to vulnerable migrants, IOM is supporting the government to respond to the Covid-19 outbreak, build capacity at points of entry, and provide humanitarian support to Rohingya refugees and vulnerable members of the host community in 18 camps and settlements in Cox's Bazar.

Actor Ajmeri Zaman

FROM PAGE 12

and Mustafa Monwar. In 1966, she appeared in Tahmina Banu's drama, Tridhara, alongside Syed Ahsan Ali Sydney and Lili Chowdhury, wife of Munir Chowdhury.

Among the first generation of actors in the industry, Ajmeri Zaman Reshma was praised for her performances not only in Bangladesh but also throughout the Indian subcontinent.

"She had tremendous acting skills," said eminent actor, director and scriptwriter Mamunur Rashid. "She went on to expand her fame with works like Raja Shonashhi and many other notable productions. Alongside Bangladeshi ventures, she also worked in Urdu productions in her career. She has been away from the industry for many years.

Student union sweeps Ducsu

FROM PAGE 12

the other seat. Mujahidul Islam Selim and Mahbub Zaman are elected as the new vice president and general secretary respectively. Bangladesh Students Union also wins a full-panel victory in Rucsu (Rajshahi University Central Students' Union) elections.

ROOPPUR NUCLEAR POWER PROJECT WILL BE RESUMED

Dr Mafiz Chowdhury, minister for science and technology, informs today that the government is planning to resume the long-awaited Rooppur Nuclear Power project. The project had been adopted in 1961, for which 260 acres of land were acquired in 1963. However, the project could not make much headway since then.

The minister further says that the government is preparing a power development plan with an aim to reach power to every household. He seeks active support from the scientists and engineers in this regard.

SUGAR SHORTAGE CONTINUES

There has been an acute shortage of sugar in the capital for the last few weeks. It is reported that there is a good reserve of sugar in the mills in North Bengal. Due to the unavailability of transport and poor communication system these reserves cannot be supplied to sugar-scarce areas.

SOURCE: May 22, 1972 issue of Dainik Bangla.

3 tests crucial for containing transmission

FROM PAGE 12

The accuracy level of PCR test depends on the efficiency of swab collection from throat and nose. Its false positive of false negative can be between 30 and 40 percent, Prof Muzaherul further said.

"Our health system has a huge management problem. Are we prepared if 12 crore people of the country are infected and five percent of them are to go through hospital treatment?" he asked.

Prof Muzaherul raised the question at a time when 386 people died of coronavirus and the number of total infection was 26,738.

Meanwhile, a team of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, led by Dr Bijon Kumar Sil, developed Rapid Dot Blot kit that can test both antibody in blood and antigen in saliva.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra applied

for registration of the kit in mid-March, but has yet to get approval for mass production. The kit is now going through performance trial at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

At the seminar yesterday, Dr Bijon said no single test should be considered gold standard. Authorities should go for both antibody and antigen tests. "The new coronavirus can last in saliva longer than that in droplets of sneezing. If saliva is left on the soil, it dries and then the virus can mix into the air," he said, adding that they have found good result by antigen test in saliva.

Dr AK Azad Chowdhury, a noted bio-chemist and former vice chancellor of Dhaka University, said if anybody is found negative in antibody test, a PCR test

can be conducted on him for a comprehensive result.

Antibody and antigen tests may not be 100 percent accurate, but large-scale and quick tests are possible through this, he said.

Prof Kamrul Hasan Khan, former vice chancellor of BSMMU, congratulated Dr Bijon Kumar Sil for developing the Rapid Dot Blot, and added that there was nothing to make controversy out of it.

The kit is now undergoing trial at BSMMU, and if it is found successful, it will be fine, he said.

However, so far antibody tests are being used mainly for surveillance on population who developed immunity, not for diagnosis.

On the other hand, antigen test is yet to be used by any developed country and that there should be

caution about its use.

He also said Gonoshasthaya's way of dealing with the drug administration and blaming it for delay in approving the kit was not appropriate. Approving a kit has a rule that should be followed, he added.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra Founder and Trustee Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury said it is an emergency situation and the countries like USA and UK are issuing emergency authorisation of drugs, kits and vaccines.

"We should go for antibody and antigen tests alongside PCR tests for the sake of saving our people, our economy. We would also request BSMMU to complete the test before the Eid holiday begins because infection is going up every day and it's an emergency," he said.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer, DPHE
Bagerhat District, Bagerhat

শেখ হাসিনার মূলনীতি
গ্রাম শহরের উন্নতি

Memo No. 46.03.0100.061.07.032.15-554 Dated: 20/05/2020

e-GP Tender Notice No. 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 works. Details are given below:

Sl. No.	Package No.	Tender ID & Ref. No.	Description of works	Tender closing date & time	Tender opening date & time
1	VWSP-1751	461582, PD, VWSP, DPHE, MEMO No. 303, Dated-09/03/2020	Excavation of 02 Nos. pond construction fencing & plantation at Rampal upazila in Bagerhat district under village water supply project VWSP DPHE. FY-2019-2020	10/06/2020 16.00pm	10/06/2020 16.00pm

The interested persons/firm may visit the website www.eprocure.gov.bd to get the details of the tender.

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal is required.

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

F M Ismail Hossain
Executive Engineer

GD-885

Voices for Eid bonuses, pay, work get louder

FROM PAGE 12

The agitators said they gathered in front of the factory gate in the morning as the authorities earlier promised them that their bonuses would be paid yesterday. But they did not get their bonuses.

Amena Khatun, a sewing machine operator of the factory, said, "They promised us that they will give our bonuses today [yesterday], so we withdraw the demonstration."

The authorities agreed to give them 50 percent of their bonuses in a meeting with police, she said. Priton Sarkar, officer-in-charge

of Bayazid Bostami Police Station, they held a meeting with top officials of the factory and the authorities promised them of paying the bonuses as soon as possible.

Later, the workers withdrew the demonstration. Meanwhile, leaders of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) in a joint statement threatened to shut their factories if the incidents of unrest were not stopped.

Many factory owners have yet to get loans from the government announced Tk 5,000 crore stimulus package because of their insufficient documents.

The statement also said some factories were failing to pay their workers as they were short of cash for not getting payment from their buyers and for work orders from their international retailers and brands.

Our correspondents in Savar, Narayanganj, and Chattogram contributed to this report.

চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর কর্তৃপক্ষ
প্রকৌশল বিভাগ

নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী/নির্মাণ এর দপ্তর, বন্দর ভবন, কক্ষ ২১৯, ফোনঃ ২৮১৭০৮৪, পিএবিএক্সঃ ২৫১০, website: www.cpa.gov.bd

Memo No. 18.04.0000.327.07.001.20.2212 Dated: 19/05/2020

e-Tender Notice

Open Tendering Method (OTM)

Sl. No.	Tender/Proposal ID	Invitation Ref. No.	Name of Works	Tender Closing Date & Time	Tender Opening Date & Time
1	436934	163090.01	Construction of a 10 (Ten)-storied B-Type Building (Block No. 5) for accommodation of CPA staff at North Residential Area.	30/06/2020 at 12:30pm	30/06/2020 at 12:30pm

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 bank's branches within the date mentioned in Tender Notice. Further information & guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Shaif Uddin Ahmed
Executive Engineer/Construction
Chittagong Port Authority

GD-882

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Principal
Dhaka Medical College Hospital
Dhaka

DMC/2020/

E-Tender Notice

Sl. No.	Tender ID	Description	Tender opening date	Remarks
1	462797	Supply of Medical & Surgical Requisite	08-Jun-2020 12:30	N/A

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal, no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender please register on e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

Prof. Dr. Khan Abul Kalam Azad
Principal
Dhaka Medical College Hospital
E-mail: pe@dmc.gov.bd

GD-884

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
Closed	Closed	\$1,751.60 (per ounce)	\$36.17 (per barrel)	2.06%	0.79%	0.75%	0.51%	BUY TK 83.95	90.82	102.06	11.66
				30,818.61	20,595.15	2,561.94	2,883.74	SELL TK 84.95	94.62	105.86	12.26



Star BUSINESS

DHAKA THURSDAY MAY 21, 2020, JAISHTHA 7, 1427 BS • starbusiness@thedailystar.net

TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Needed: stimulus packages worth 6pc of GDP

Tk 10,085cr needed per month to support poor, new poor, finds survey

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh needs to spend Tk 10,085 crore per month to support the poor and the newly poor struggling to survive amid the coronavirus pandemic, suggested a new study.

Due to the income shock emanating from the pandemic, 77.2 per cent of the vulnerable non-poor fell below the poverty line, said the survey report styled "Livelihoods, Coping, and Support during COVID-19 Crisis".

This would imply that beyond the 20.5 per cent of the population officially recognised as poor there is a group of 'new poor' representing an additional 22.9 per cent of the population that needed to be brought within the discussion on poverty.

In reality, this percentage would be somewhat greater because even a portion of the households above the median income also fell into poverty.

"Providing assistance to such a large number of people within a short time efficiently and effectively will be a critical question," said the survey report, which had a sample size of 5,471 households evenly split

between rural and urban areas.

The Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and the Brac Institute for Governance and Development (BIGD) concluded the telephonic rapid response research project on the economic impact of the pandemic.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the PPRC, and Imran Matin, executive director of the BIGD, shared the findings of the research at a virtual discussion.

All indicators of vulnerability indicate that the urban poor has been more severely impacted by the crisis.

This is particularly an area of concern because social protection programmes in Bangladesh has mainly focused on the rural poor, it added.

As per the study, the country would require more than Tk 33,000 crore to support the poor and new poor for three months.

"And this is quite a big amount of money," said Shamsul Alam, a member of the General Economics Division of the planning ministry.

Almost half the population needs entitlement support, said SR Osmani, professor of development economics at Ulster University.

"They have to be supported for quite a long time."

Bangladesh would require almost 4 per cent of GDP to support the people for three months. The stimulus packages that the government has announced amount to about 4 per cent of GDP.

"But a huge part of the packages is actually loans

PPRC-BIGD Rapid Response Survey

By the numbers

- 75pc urban, 62pc rural respondents suffered income drop
- Income shock leads to 28pc cut in food expenditure by urban respondents and 22pc by rural respondents
- 77pc vulnerable non-poor group fell below poverty line
- New poor 22.9pc of population
- Total poor and new poor 7cr
- Total support required Tk 10,948cr per month

that have to be repaid," Osmani said, adding that the actual fiscal cost of the stimulus packages announced would not be more than half a percentage of GDP as most of the costs to be incurred by the

government are interest subsidies.

Those packages should be raised to 1 per cent of GDP.

Another 1 per cent of GDP should be needed for the healthcare system.

So, altogether, Bangladesh needs to put in place a support measure amounting to 6 per cent of GDP, according to Osmani.

"If you want to manage the health crisis properly and want to reopen the economy safely, you must have complete support for half of the population for nearly three to four months. If people don't get support, they will stop staying at home. If they start going back to work prematurely, the health crisis would worsen. Then you will have to need to impose restrictions again," he added.

The incentive packages that the government has announced are largely being offered through the banking mechanism as subsidised loans, said Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

How far this is going to translate into actual productive activity and feed into responding to some of the consumption and saving needs of the beneficiaries is an open question.

"It will put the entire risk of the incentive package on the already very vulnerable banking system with high degrees of default and financial indiscipline," Sobhan added.

Naaila Kabeer, professor of gender and development at the Gender Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, and Asif Saleh, executive director of the Brac Bangladesh, also spoke.

New deadline for setting up sales registers would be in budget speech

SOHEL PARVEZ

It's been almost three years since the revenue authority decided to set up the electronic fiscal device (EFD), a sales register, at shops to monitor the transactions to curb the scope of evasion of value-added tax, the biggest source of revenue for the state coffers.

Now, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) says it is ready but the pandemic has emerged as a new stumbling block for its installation.

The plan was to set up the devices in February and launch it marking the Mujib Year, said Md Jamal Hossain, member for VAT implementation at the NBR.

The Mujib Year runs from March 17 this year to March 26 next year to celebrate the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation.

But the plan was put on hold for the outbreak of coronavirus in Bangladesh in March.

Now, the NBR has to play a waiting game for when the situation becomes normal to install the devices, he said.

The board first decided to enforce its rule on the use of electronic cash registers (ECR) by the relatively larger shops in 2008. But the move fell through amid poor compliance and enforcement by field offices of VAT.

One of the major shortcomings behind the failure of the ECR venture was that the NBR had no server connected

to the ECRs at the retail level to ensure that sales receipts were issued through the devices and records were not erased.

The revenue authority later decided to provide EFDs and sales data controllers (SDCs) to 25 types of businesses, including shops, hotels, restaurants, sweets stores, clothing, furniture and electronics outlets and jewellers.

The EFDs and SDCs will be connected to a central server at the NBR and generate real-time data of sales, reducing the scope for evasion -- which is rampant.

The NBR approved the purchase 100,000 EFDs for Tk 316 crore at the beginning of this fiscal year from a consortium of Shenzhen-based SZTT Electronics and local Synesis IT.

The consortium was initially asked to supply 10,000 EFDs and has already brought 3,000 EFDs.

The devices are ready for installation, said Iqbal Hasan Ferdous, general manager of Synesis IT.

"We can supply and install the devices at shops if the NBR directs us," he said, adding that the data centre is ready while software installation has been complete.

End-to-end testing has been done too, he said.

It was planned that 100 EFDs would be piloted in selected stores and businesses mainly in Dhaka to see the results before rolling out the scheme.

And some training and awareness programmes were also conducted among businesses, according to revenue officials.

But the question is whether it is the right time to approach shop operators to set up the devices when their business nose-dived and cash flow has been nil for nearly two months because of the countrywide general shutdown put in place since March 26 to slow the spread of the deadly virus.

"Businesses are suffering. We should consider their issues. Would it be wise to bother a business that is closed now?" Hossain said.

There is likely to be a disclosure about the timeframe on the installation of EFDs in the finance minister's budget speech for next fiscal year.

"We will set up the device within the Mujib Year," he said.



Bangladesh eyes FDI boom in the post-pandemic era

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh expects a bigger inflow of foreign direct investment in the days to come as different nations plan to relocate their factories to countries like Bangladesh to bring down cost amid a cash crunch caused by the pandemic, said Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi yesterday.

In 2019, the country saw net inflows of foreign direct investment amounting to \$2.88 billion, down about 20 per cent from a year earlier, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

"We should remain prepared to grab the opportunity as Japan, China, Vietnam, India and Indonesia have already started moving their production lines elsewhere," Munshi said at his ministry's regular consultative meeting on investment at the secretariat in Dhaka.

Factory relocation will be even faster in the post-pandemic period, Munshi told the meeting, which was attended both in person and virtually by other ministers, lawmakers, trade body leaders and

government high-ups.

China's comparative advantage in manufacturing relatively simple, low-value products like clothing and plastic goods to more advanced and lucrative pursuits like smartphones, computers and auto parts is peerless, meaning it has gone on to become the world's largest manufacturer, accounting for roughly one-sixth of global economic output.

Now, thanks to the bad diplomatic blood arising out of the outbreak of coronavirus from one of its cities many nations are seriously mulling over cutting down their reliance on China for their material needs.

And Bangladesh could grab this opportunity, just like India and Vietnam are raring to go.

The Japanese embassy in Dhaka last week sent him a list of factories that want to relocate from China to Bangladesh, said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen.

Foreign investors often express their dissatisfaction over bureaucratic tangles that stand in the way of business operations and obtaining various licences.

"They particularly complain about the poor services at the Bangladesh Bank, the commerce ministry and the National Board of Revenue," Momen added.

The government should soon communicate with the foreign companies that want to move their factories to Bangladesh, said Salman F Rahman, private sector industry and investment adviser to the prime minister, while calling for forming a taskforce to that end.

"We should assess our competitors and offer the best investment regime to the companies interested in Bangladesh," said Sheikh Fazle Fahim, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Fahim suggested offering policy and tariff support such as corporate tax incentive, tax holidays, policy consistency, and efficient and professional trade facilitation.

Job cuts and the post-pandemic losses would be offset by the new investments as fresh job opportunities will be created in the small and medium enterprises and import-substitute industries, he said.

"We have reached out to bilateral and multilateral trade organisations urging them to give Bangladesh the highest priority in the post-COVID-19 investment relocation strategies as we enjoy competitive advantages on many fronts," Fahim said.

The government should set short-, mid- and long-term goals to attract more investment, said Rubana Huq, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

"We have to move beyond apparel, adopt new technologies and look for regional collaborative investment."

She went on to urge the government to launch aggressive roadshows in strategically important places to bring in more FDI.

"We need tailor-made researches and powerful content to convince the investors."

In the post-pandemic era, large investment and sizeable export would be required, she said, adding that cheap labour is unlikely to remain as a useful tool in future.

"Hence, skills and technology upgradation are necessary," she added.

Marico's product diversification march continues

Rolls out affordable beauty shampoo

AHSAN HABIB

Marico Bangladesh pursuit of product diversification in the personal grooming category continues, with the fast-moving consumer goods company now rolling out a shampoo.

Called Parachute Naturale Shampoo, it comes in three variants -- nourishing care, damage repair and anti-hair fall -- in 6ml sachets and 170ml and 340ml bottles.

The sachets are priced at Tk 2, and the bottles Tk 185 and Tk 320 respectively.

"Today's consumers in the female personal care category are more aware and beauty conscious than ever. To cater to their evolving personal care needs, we announced the launch of Parachute Naturale Shampoo," said Ashish Goupal, managing director of Marico Bangladesh, in a statement.

This latest product roll-out comes as the Mumbai-based company earnestly



looks to reduce its dependency on one product -- its ever-popular hair oil, the Parachute Coconut Oil -- although it has a portfolio of 25 brands in the personal care and food categories.

from 69 per cent from a year earlier.

This heavy dependency is weighing heavy on Marico management's mind, which is why it has been busy rolling out one product after another, hoping they would click with customers the way the Parachute Coconut Oil has.

In February last year, it rolled out a baby product range. And in February this year, it shelved out Tk 30 crore to roll out a male grooming product line by the moniker of Studio X. The line consists of shampoo, face wash and hair gel, all made in Bangladesh.

Then last month, it launched Mediker SafeLife range of hand sanitiser and handwash.

Marico Bangladesh, whose stocks traded at Tk 1,562 on March 25, the last trading before the bourses shut for the countrywide general shutdown to flatten the curve on coronavirus, saw its profits soar 30 per cent to Tk 264 crore in the financial year that concluded in March.

Five more ports of call now for Indo-Bangladesh trade

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh and India yesterday added five more ports of call to its existing six and two Indo-Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) water routes -- a move that would not only allow the neighbouring country get transit facility but also boost bilateral trade.

The five new ports of call in Bangladesh that were put in the Second Addendum to the Protocol on Transit and Trade are Rajshahi, Sultanganj, Chilmari, Daudkandi and Bahadurabad, while in Indian side are Dhulian, Maia, Kolaghat, Sonamura and Jogigopha.

The inclusion of Jogigopha in India and Bahadurabad in Bangladesh as a new port of call will provide connectivity to Meghalaya, Assam and Bhutan, said the Indian High Commission in a statement.

Both sides have also agreed to introduce trade between Chilmari (Bangladesh) and Dhubri (India) through the use of shallow draft mechanised vessels.

This initiative will allow export of stone chips and other Bhutanese and North East cargo to Bangladesh and easy access for the traders to the hinterland of Bangladesh, enhancing the local economy in Bangladesh and the lower Assam region of India.

The move would help reduce transport cost in exporting bulk amount of cement to Tripura and the other north-eastern states, said Md. Shahidullah, managing director of Metrocem Cement and first vice-president of Bangladesh Cement Manufacturers Association.

About 5 per cent of the country's total cement production head out to the north-eastern states of India.

Two more extended ports of call -- Tribeli (Bandel) and Badarpur on the Indian side and Ghorasal and Muktarpur on Bangladesh side -- were added through the addendum, which is the outcome of a two-year-long discussion between the two countries' shipping ministries.

Besides, the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) routes were increased

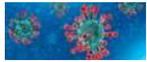
from 8 to 10 after the Sonamura-Daudkhandi stretch of Gumti river (93 km) was added.

The new route, which will be connecting all existing IBP routes, will improve the connectivity of Tripura and its adjoining states with India, said a shipping ministry official.

The protocol, which was first signed 1972 was last renewed in 2015 for five years with a provision of its automatic renewal for another five years, giving long-term assurance to various stakeholders.

"It is expected that these additions to the protocol will greatly facilitate bilateral trade, with improved reliability and cost-effectiveness for the business community and the people of both the countries," the Indian High Commission said.

Excellent connectivity provided by the existing and the newly added protocol routes is all the more pertinent in the present COVID-19 scenario as it will be instrumental in providing an economical, faster, safer and greener mode of transport, it said.



TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

Perhaps a rolling budget can give more leeway to fight pandemic



AHSAN H MANSUR and ABDUR RAZZAQUE

Making the budget for next fiscal year in this time of pandemic will most likely be the most challenging task shouldered by a finance minister yet.

The crisis is unprecedented in nature, with little scope of drawing lessons from the past.

Even after several weeks of countrywide shutdown measures, the infection rate remains unabated and is actually rising.

It has already taken its heavy toll on economic activities, the actual cost of which is not yet known.

The export outlook remains unusually depressed for the coming months. In April, exports earnings were \$563 million, down 82.9 per cent from a year earlier.

Remittance hit a 34-month low of \$1.08 billion in April, down 25 per cent from a year earlier. And its outlook is extremely clouded, too.

Manufacturing and services sectors -- including hotels and restaurants, construction, transportation, etc. -- have taken massive hits due to the lockdown measures and shrinking demand.

The implementation of the annual development programme (ADP) is likely to less than 60 per cent.

The finance ministry is also grappling to come to terms with the fact the GDP growth rate for the current fiscal year is likely to be much lower than the envisaged 8 per cent.

Even if the government's claim of 8 per cent growth in the first eight

have virtually stopped during the shutdown. For instance, the banking, inflation and balance of payment data have not been compiled during the shutdown period.

Even after several years, the National Household Database, as recommended by the National Social Security Strategy, could not be made operational by BBS with the objective of targeting the poor and vulnerable households.

This has already proven to be a missed opportunity for reaching out to the households most severely affected by the current crisis.

The BBS could hardly provide any reasoning when its various growth, employment and poverty incidence estimates were called into question by many economists.

It is no wonder then that the impact of coronavirus will likely to continue as 'guesstimates', aiming to keep the economy as close as possible to normal years.

This is already reflected in media reports that the GDP growth target for fiscal 2020-21 has been set at 8.5 per cent, revenue growth of 30 per cent from the likely actual collection, and the budget size Tk 5.6 lakh collection.

All these figures appear to be unrealistic under current circumstances and global outlook.

This need not be so. It is perfectly possible to be candid about not having all information and having huge uncertainty about growth, revenue prospects and a recovery process.

All this can be reflected in the budget-making process and its implementation. This is an extraordinary time and it perhaps needs an extraordinary out-of-box policy effort.

One option the finance ministry

support, the government initiatives of distributing in-kind benefits, selling rice at Tk 10 kg and supporting 5 million urban households through direct cash transfers (of one-time Tk 2,500 to each beneficiaries) deserve due appreciation.

However, the support will have to be deepened further both in terms of coverage and duration.

We believe that at least 12.5-15 million households need to be supported for at least three to six months.

The rolling budgeting exercise should keep a provision of at least six months' support and make sure that the beneficiary list is correctly matching the information contained in the national identity database.

For recovery management, it needs to be borne in mind that Bangladesh does not have any experience of dealing with such a largescale public intervention to revive the economy.

Given the record of weak institutional capacity and governance, selection of the firms for support and management of fund could be a challenge, and failure to deal with that could result in wastage of resources without contributing to economic recovery.

Whether the banks have the capacity for handling stimulus packages should be taken into consideration.

We must recognise that the weak banking system in Bangladesh cannot shoulder the risk and liquidity requirements associated with the recovery/stimulus package.

The BB must inject liquidity, as needed, and must also share the risks associated with such a massive lending operation, particularly with regard to lending to small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Waiver of interest payments for borrowers, if so desired by the government, should be factored into the budget.

Banks cannot shoulder such financial burden and such a unilateral action may amount to confiscation of private income by the government, even if it is for a good purpose.

But from where will the additional resources for these priorities come from?

It is inevitable that domestic resource mobilisation will take a big hit over the next several months.

Lack of credible reforms in tax policy, tax administration and absence of automation have brought Bangladesh to the point that the government is almost against the wall.

The scope of discretionary spending is rather limited due to diminished fiscal space resulting from falling tax-GDP ratio, which is unlikely to improve in a year with an economic downturn.

Nevertheless, serious considerations should be given to initiate genuine reforms in VAT, direct tax, and customs tax policies and administrative reforms so that the situation improves in the next two-three years.

The crisis should be used to initiate fundamental reforms in the banking system and to improve the business climate and special economic zone infrastructure to attract foreign direct investment.

To overcome the resource constraint, the government has appropriately requested development partners to grant budgetary and BOP support. And, significant amount of support is on the way.

The government can also ask all its ministries and departments to slash non-essential expenses and divert all funds allocated for Eid bonuses to income support programmes.

Private sector workers, in most cases, are not even getting 50-60 per cent of their basic salaries and it would be improper that public sector employees get Eid bonuses with taxpayers' money while taxpayers are in deep financial trouble.

Such expenses are likely to be quite significant and can help generate resources for the priority sectors.

Bangladesh is passing through an exceptional time, requiring exceptional measures.

Preparing a full-year budget in the conventional manner will misdirect out attention from the pressing national priorities of the moment.

A two-segment rolling budget -- with focus on the three priority areas and reforms noted above -- in our view would be the practical and proper way to go.

Ahsan H Mansur and Abdur Razzaque are executive director and research director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh respectively

Pandemic will change the aviation industry forever

Says deputy managing director of Regent Airways

RASHIDUL HASAN

The global coronavirus pandemic will leave a long-lasting stain on the aviation sector, said a top official of Regent Airways, a domestic private carrier.

"The impact on the aviation industry is unprecedented and it has happened suddenly," Salman Habib, deputy managing director of the private local carrier, told The Daily Star in an interview recently.

Governments around the world have imposed restrictions on air travel, while most countries have banned international and domestic commercial flights altogether to flatten the curve on the rogue virus.

In the middle of March, Bangladesh banned passenger flight operations with all countries but China, plunging the sector into mounting losses.

"Airlines have had no choice but to ground their planes, and, in some cases, their entire fleet," he said.

Subsequently, the pandemic could erode passenger volumes in Bangladesh and wipe \$190 million, or Tk 1,615 crore, off the airline operators' revenues this year, according to an estimate by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

The IATA forecasts that airlines across the globe will lose \$314 billion in passenger revenue in the current year amid the coronavirus outbreak, while those in the Asia-Pacific region will witness a slump by \$113 billion.

Airlines that have a mixed business model are faring better than those that rely solely on scheduled passenger services, Habib said.

"For example, airlines that are doing medevac or transporting cargo, such as urgently needed medical supplies, are still operating. Some airlines that are doing charter work, particularly for government agencies, are continuing to fly."

Private airlines in Bangladesh will be affected more by the immediate aftermath of the crisis because they have smaller balance sheets and fewer financial resources to weather the storm.

Airlines that operate by leasing aircraft are in a far more precarious financial situation as they cannot afford to ground the vessels because they are still expected to pay for the lease.

Asked about Regent's strategy in coping with the evolving situation, Habib said it is difficult to come up with an immediate strategy as of now with all the uncertainties looming large.

"We can't predict when air travel is going to return to normalcy."

Regent, with four Boeing 737-800s and two Dash-8 Q300s in its fleet, is now waiting for the government to



Salman Habib

lifts the ban on air travel.

"We will then devise plans on how to restore operations at full throttle."

Asked about what they expect from the government, Habib said the IATA has called upon all the governments in the region for a combination of direct financial support, loans, loan guarantees and support for the corporate bond market and tax relief for the aviation industry.

Responding to the call, aeronautical charges for Bangladesh's domestic flights have been waived until 2021 and 50 per cent for international flight operations until December 2020, while non-aeronautical charges have completely been lifted for all until December 2020.

"This is a good short-term move and it will help the operators to a certain extent," Habib said.

However, the private airlines are discussing with the authorities concerned about the long-term changes required in policies, tax and value-added tax relief, along with comprehensive changes in the regulatory charges.

"It's also important to note that all the countries where Bangladeshi airlines operate have already announced significant direct financial support to both their private and state-owned carriers."

For Bangladeshi airlines to be competitive and sustainable against the operators from those countries, similar support should be given by the

government, Habib said.

By doing so, the country will not lose valuable foreign currencies, which would be retained by the local airlines.

When Regent started in 2010 as a subsidiary of Chittagong-based Habib Group, its forte was domestic operation. However, as time progressed, international flights took precedence. Regent currently serves three domestic and five international destinations.

"And we did quite well."

Habib said they intended to have an airline in line with some of the successful carriers in the region, concentrating on customer service, while operating to core destinations and serving the people of Bangladesh.

About the barriers the country's aviation sector faces, Habib said the policymakers should at first look at why historically so many private airlines have failed in Bangladesh.

"Infrastructure is the second most important pillar. All our airports are underdeveloped, while the domestic traffic has grown beyond 200 per cent in recent years, which is quite unique in Southeast Asia."

The airports in Dhaka, Cox's Bazar, Jashore, Chattogram and Sylhet require immediate attention, he said, adding that policies on the gateways of the country need a master plan for the next 15 to 20 years rather than a stopgap solution.

"With the addition of the third terminal for the Dhaka airport, we will see major growth in this sector."

Dhaka can be made a future hub for both passenger and cargo flights. Airlines will use this perfect location to move traffic among European countries, China, Korea, Japan and Australia.

To meet the future demand, he called for establishing an institution in the country to train the young generation on aviation management, said Habib, who has a Bachelor's degree in Business Management from the UK's Queen Mary University.

The airline's long-run strategy would be to keep a balance and review the model as well as invest in technology to ensure sustainable operation.

"I think it is now time that we look in bilateral codeshares and move into a revenue and cost model that can sustain the operation."

But major reforms are needed to iron out the imbalances in the regulatory, fuel prices and taxation structures to ensure that Regent's costs are in line with its peers.

The regulatory charges and taxes in the aviation sector are on the higher side compared with other industries, Habib added.



months of fiscal 2019-20 is accepted, a conservative assessment of a negative growth of -9 per cent for the remaining period will yield an overall growth 2.25 per cent in fiscal 2020-21.

Revenue shortfall is likely to be more than Tk 1.1 lakh crore, and the prospects of a pick-up are looking increasingly bleak in the face of reduced economic activities.

Even in the recent past normal years, with touted economic booms generating 7-8 per cent GDP growth, tax collection has been appallingly low and declined to 8.6 per cent of GDP last fiscal year, putting the country amongst the lowest in the world in term of tax-GDP ratio.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) fell short of the target massively even before the coronavirus-related disruptions due to the sluggish economic activities and import slowdown.

And most importantly, the fallout of the most extraordinary global health crisis in recent times will continue to unfold with no way to predict the outcomes.

Given the uncertainty, private investors' confidence will be at a critically low level. This would further reduce domestic investment and private sector credit growth, which had already sunk to an 11-year-low even prior to the crisis.

In this backdrop, one important question is if we can continue with a routine annual budget-making exercise for the next fiscal year.

One insurmountable problem now faced by the government is the lack of a credible outlook of the economy.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and the Bangladesh Bank (BB) are the two major agencies that provide useful information and rapid assessments to help the government come up with realistic financial and contingency plans.

But data collection and compilation

could consider is adopting a rolling budgeting exercise.

A rolling budget is a continuous budget that is updated regularly when the earlier budget period expires or we can say it is an extension of the existing period budget.

Also known as budget rollover, it allows accommodation to unexpected changes and circumstances.

To begin the process, the government can articulate the most pressing expenditure needs for the first six months and consider financing options.

There is a general agreement that in the first six-months (July-December), the government should have three key priorities: (1) COVID-19 health crisis management; (2) livelihood support management; and (3) economic recovery management.

These activities will require additional budgetary allocations, while allocations for other areas should be kept unchanged or reduced to generate savings.

The unutilised part of fiscal 2019-20's ADP with some prioritisation could be rolled over into the first half of fiscal 2020-21.

The health system in the country has broken down and must be immediately strengthened.

While healthcare professionals and workers are increasingly being infected, both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients are not receiving treatment and planned immunisation of children is lagging behind.

This crisis should be considered an opportunity to rebuild the long-neglected national public health system.

Out-of-pocket expenses of Bangladeshi households are highest amongst the global economies and it is high time to address this unfair, inequitable and non-functioning healthcare system.

For livelihood management

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Chattogram City Corporation
 Tigerpass, Chattogram
www.ccc.org.bd

স্বাধীনতা সড়ক-পারমর্ষ
 ১১৯০৪ নম্বর কার্যালয়

১১/০৫/২০২০

Memo No: ১০০(পরিচিতি)/১১-২/১-২০ **e-Tender Notice-CE/ADP-716(R)/2019-20/01** Dated: 11/05/2020

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 of following packages from the National e-GP system portal have to be deposited online through any registered Bank branches up to particular date specified on tender notice.

Sl no	Package No	Name of works	Tender ID	Last date & Time of selling Documents	Last date & Time of submission Documents
1	DRFD/CCC/W-17Lot-3.	Development of chowdhurypara abbaspara moinnapara ward office adjacent B-block road at 26 no ward	462212	15-06-2020 13:50	15-06-2020 13:55
2	DRFD/CCC/W-7	Development of Egol Star Road at 9 no North Pahartali Ward (Ch. 0.914m-1.914m)	462226	15-06-2020 13:50	15-06-2020 13:55
3	DRFD/CCC/W-29.	Construction of Retaining wall of Nazir khal at 10 no North Kattali Ward	462257	15-06-2020 13:50	15-06-2020 13:55
4	DRFD/CCC/W-6	Development of Hill view road-bihar hat bazar lane and Shah amanat H/S road at 7 no ward	462265	15-06-2020 13:50	15-06-2020 13:55
5	DRFD/CCC/W-6.	Development of rahman nagar bylane CDA punorbashan road Baby super market bylane and Jane alam road bylane at 8 no ward (lot-5)	462266	15-06-2020 13:50	15-06-2020 13:55
6	DRFD/CCC/W-5	Development of mahuri bari road and habildar bari road at 6 no east sholashahar ward	462267	15-06-2020 13:50	15-06-2020 13:55

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and from e-GP help desk (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

Engr. Rafiqul Islam
 Project Director &
 Additional Chief Engineer
 Chattogram City Corporation
 Tigerpass, Chattogram

GD-883

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA THURSDAY MAY 21, 2020, JAISHTHA 7, 1427 BS

Gear up efforts to address post-cyclone challenges

Health check-ups of evacuees crucial to contain Covid-19 spread

AS cyclone Amphan made its landfall in West Bengal yesterday afternoon, being weakened from a "super cyclone" to an "extremely severe cyclonic storm," it ripped through the coastal districts of the Indian state, unleashing heavy rains and windstorm, blowing away thatched houses, uprooting trees, electric poles and swamping towns and villages on its way, according to reports in the media. Although the cyclone mostly hit West Bengal, its impacts on our coastal regions—mostly in Satkhira, Jessore, Khulna, Nijhum Dwip, Hatia, Bagherhat, Jhalakathi, Pirojpur, Borguna, Patuakhali, Bhola and Barishal—were no less devastating since large parts of the low-lying areas of these regions have been inundated by the high storm surge as the cyclone passed through our land last night. As of writing this editorial, the number of injuries or casualties could not be verified.

Post-Amphan, the immediate challenges for the government would be to ensure safe drinking water for the people, since all the freshwater sources, including tube-wells, in the affected areas have been inundated by salt water; immediately repair the parts of the coastal embankment that have been severely damaged by the tidal surge; and dig canals through the coastal embankment to remove salt water that has flooded the fish farms and cultivable land, etc. Salinity intrusion would particularly pose a threat because cultivating vegetables or crops in the land would be difficult with increased salinity level. Moreover, the affected people should be given necessary financial and food assistance by the government.

Another big challenge for the government would be to conduct health check-ups of those who had been evacuated to the cyclone centres. Needless to say, it would be very difficult because around 24 lakh people were evacuated before the cyclone made its landfall. As we have seen in media reports, social distancing and other safety measures were largely ignored by the people at the cramped cyclone shelters. Now, these people should be screened for Covid-19 symptoms and those with symptoms should be isolated immediately. The volunteer teams ready by the district administrations should help in this regard.

It should be mentioned here that the government has done a commendable job in evacuating people at the right time. All the district administrations concerned have listened to the government's directive in this regard. We now hope that the government with all its agencies concerned will immediately address the post-cyclone challenges that the people of our coastal regions will face in the coming days.

Aviation industry on the brink of collapse

Air travel as we know it could disappear without support

ACCORDING to an estimate by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the coronavirus pandemic could wipe off USD 190 million or Tk 1,615 crore off the revenues of Bangladeshi airline operators in 2020. IATA data suggests that airlines, airport operators, airport on-site enterprises (restaurants and retail), aircraft manufacturers, and air navigation service providers employ 17,000 people in Bangladesh, and a total of around 129,000 jobs are supported by air transport and tourists arriving by air—all of which are now at risk.

The Bangladesh aviation industry has managed to connect the country in a way that seemed impossible even a few decades ago, providing an essential means of transportation and communication that has boosted economic activity in the region. However, due to the pandemic, almost all of these flights have been grounded, and plans for future expansion have been put on hold while airlines struggle to cope with huge financial losses. Airlines have warned that without government support, air travel is unlikely to return to normal in the foreseeable future.

Biman Bangladesh has already secured a loan worth Tk 10,000 million to help offset its negative cash flow, and we urge the government to consider doing the same for the private commercial airlines operating in the country. The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) has also asked the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism for an immediate waiver of aeronautical and non-aeronautical charges to stop the industry from collapsing. We urgently ask the government to consider even partially waiving these charges, even at the risk of reduced revenue for the CAAB. The long-term impacts of reduced revenue can be dealt with in a planned way, such as by postponing the expansion of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, whereas the collapse of the aviation industry is a concern that needs to be dealt with immediately. The local airlines' demands for reducing fuel prices and operating costs, reconsidering the decision to impose VAT on aeronautical services and implementing a transparent regulatory and policy regime, should also be carefully considered.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

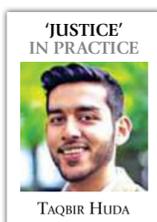
letters@thedailystar.net

Virtual courts a reality now!

Since late March, the regular activities of courts across the country remained suspended due to the ongoing pandemic. However, earlier this month, the president issued an ordinance allowing the courts to run their activities by using information technology, which I think is a very timely and praiseworthy initiative. This marks a new chapter in the history of our legal system. The Supreme Court of Bangladesh has already issued Practice Directives for the Appellate Division, the High Court Division and the subordinate courts for conducting judicial proceedings through video conferencing. Therefore, many people who were accused in criminal cases are now being able to secure bail despite the nationwide lockdown. I think this initiative will help us progress towards a sustainable e-judiciary in the days to come.

Nowshin Jahan, Dhaka

Virtual courts and the future of justice



TAQBIR HUDA

'JUSTICE' IN PRACTICE

ON May 9, 2020, the president of Bangladesh sanctioned the operation of virtual courts by the judiciary by passing the *Adalat Kortrik Tothyo Projukti Byabohar Odhyadesh* 2020 (roughly translated as the "Use of Information and Communications Technology in Court Ordinance 2020"). Typically, laws are passed by parliament and are called "acts" but Article 93(1) of our constitution allows the president to promulgate ordinances when parliament is not in session and "circumstances exist which render immediate action necessary", and it would have the "like force of law as an Act of Parliament".

The preamble to the ordinance states that the objective of the law is to empower the courts to make use of information technology to enable virtual attendance of parties to a case during trial and to allow the court to hold inquiries or hearings of applications and appeals and take evidence or deliver orders or judgments. "Virtual attendance" is defined as the presence or participation of a person in any judicial proceeding of a court through audio-video or any similar electronic medium. The ordinance is applicable to all courts of Bangladesh.

In finally opening the doors to virtual courts, Bangladesh has joined a list of countries across the world where the justice system has similarly responded to the coronavirus-induced lockdown with increased digitalisation. However, to think that the need for virtual courts only arose in the aftermath of lockdown would be to deny reality. It has been a long time coming. Coronavirus and the national lockdown aside, the formal justice system in our country is by and large painfully inaccessible to those who need it the most. Instead, courts are treated as a last resort by those whose rights have been violated, when all alternative means have failed. A survey by the Ministry of Law found that two of the biggest challenges justice-seekers face are the corruption of police when initiating cases and the long distance of district courts from their homes and the ensuing costs associated with travelling back and forth

for seemingly endless court sessions (The Access to Justice in Bangladesh Situation Analysis, 2015).

Indeed, from my own research I have found that the physical distance to courts operates as a crippling factor for litigants even when conveyance is provided for court-related travel by legal aid providers, such as BLAST, who reimburse travel costs to all clients as a matter of policy. This is because transport cost is not the only factor making distance troublesome for litigants. Often times they are day labourers or otherwise employed in a job in which they must forego a day's wages every time they have to attend hearings in court. Additionally, female litigants from conservative families often require male relatives to accompany them to the main cities where the district courts tend to be located, and such relatives may not always be readily available as they too may need to forego their daily earnings. The same is true for aged litigants who may not be able to travel on their own. As a result, many clients simply lose interest in pursuing cases when they see endless court dates being scheduled with no signs of the case being settled in the near future.

Therefore, the virtual court system, in allowing people to attend hearings online and for judges to issue decisions therein, has immense potential in eliminating the distance factor and corruption issues. However, the extent to which the virtual court system can mitigate two of the biggest challenges hindering access to justice largely depends on how it is fleshed out in practice. The ordinance itself is quite vague and brief with only five generic sections. To this end, section 5 of the ordinance empowers both branches

of the Supreme Court (Appellate Division and High Court Division) to issue Practice Rules (Special or Ordinary) in relation to the virtual court system. The day after the ordinance was passed, both branches of the Supreme Court duly issued 15-point "Practice Directions for Virtual Courts" on the Supreme Court website. Although issued separately, the Practice Directions of branches are largely identical in nature. The first of these directions states



that "Any lawyer wishing to file an application/petition is to file such application/petition via email address of the Bench Officer of the concerned Court along with an application requesting virtual hearing giving reason for urgency within 1 (one) page." The tenth direction states that upon receipt of the case application or petition by email by the Bench Officer, "the Judge shall, upon considering the urgency of the matter, fix a date and time of hearing and accordingly inform the Bench Officer concerned." From this, it becomes clear that individuals themselves are unable to file cases directly, rather it must be done through a lawyer. Additionally, not every

In finally opening the doors to virtual courts, Bangladesh has joined a list of countries across the world where the justice system has similarly responded to the coronavirus-induced lockdown with increased digitalisation.

UN needs a paradigm shift to lead us out of the crisis

MOHAMMED PARVEZ IMDAD

THE first Secretary-General of the United Nations, Trygve Lie, remarked in 1948, "The United Nations may need to adjust to new realities and respond to unforeseen circumstances that the world is not aware of today—and thus it has to demonstrate its relevance to withstand the test of time." The time is opportune to assess the UN's response to critical issues and challenges raised by Covid-19 and how effectively it can support the international community in these critical times. It's also important to explore whether the UN is headed for a paradigm shift in view of restructured perspectives.

Covid-19, as it stands, shows no signs of letting up. There is a basis for continued concern as a severe crisis looms over critical areas related to economic and social development. It mostly pertains to declining GDP growth levels, food security, unemployment and the external sector. Progress achieved so far in realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is likely to diminish, should the crisis continue unabated. The whole gamut of globalisation and overall functioning of market mechanism may encounter severe challenges and gradually weaken in the short to medium term. There are concerns regarding high budget deficits, massive shrinking of trade and reduced competitiveness globally.

This may erode development sustainability and propel uncertainties in global geo-politics, stability, peace and security.

The United Nations came up with some policy responses, mainly in the past few weeks, as the virus spread to an alarming extent. The UN secretary-general requested G-20 leaders to support stimulus packages undertaken by countries, inject massive resources for economic recovery, and remove trade restrictions on medical equipment and inputs to fight the virus. In the online summit-level meeting of Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) Contact Group in Response to Covid-19 on May 4, the secretary-general emphasised the need for concerted efforts to end the pandemic, and address its socio-economic impacts and recovery to "build back better". Despite its alertness and policy interventions, the UN obviously needs to plan further in the weeks ahead to effectively tackle the gruelling impacts of Covid-19.

To meet the expectations of the international community, the UN can

concentrate on two key aspects: (a) monitoring and strengthening World Health Organization (WHO) programmes in fighting this pandemic; and (b) enabling countries to overcome the severe economic and social challenges due to Covid-19. The overall effectiveness of the UN role at these times will further be reflected through efficient mobilisation of support to and collaboration with countries in mitigating current risks and facilitating recovery.

This is the most critical challenge faced by the UN since it was born in 1945. Obviously, the UN was not around during similar crises, for example, the cholera crisis (1800-1802) and Spanish Flu (1918-1920). Never before has the UN faced such a threat to global peace, security and development. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Charter (Articles 1(3) and 25) emphasise the importance of food security and health. Understandably, the UN may have strategic barriers and operational limitations even in implementing its priorities. However, to better achieve its Charter objectives, the UN needs to effectively monitor member countries' programmes, especially on food security, massive loss of jobs and sharp decline in global trade. The UN needs to support member countries' efforts towards fast-tracking scientific and medical initiatives to fight the virus, as well as to reduce the critical dilemma most countries are faced with in the trade-off between implementing and easing lockdowns. The UN needs to chart appropriate strategies in advance for recovery in post-Covid-19 scenarios that would enable countries to achieve expected GDP growth levels with inclusivity, as well as build up significant economic resilience to cushion future external shocks.

In terms of its political and policy mandate, it is highly relevant to hold urgent virtual consultations of the UN Security Council to deliberate on the current crisis and assess immediate means of combating it with utmost priority. Following this, the UN Security Council may consider a Declaration on Effectively Combating Covid-19, which would highlight concrete actions to combat the crisis as well as urgent actions to enable member countries to tackle economic and social challenges. The United Nations General Assembly session in September this year may consider the following core themes: "Food Security and Prevention of Famine" and "A New Horizon for Perspective Health and Human Welfare." In this context, increased resources

for health and human development and substantive reduction in non-development related expenditure could be issues of priority discourse by world leaders.

As regards economic imperatives, it is high time the UN reviewed the outcomes of its commitments for international development assistance that mainly remains unachieved. There should be a blend of need-based and demand-based approaches in the restructured terms of reference for development assistance given by multilateral and bilateral financial institutions. UN specialised agencies and multilateral development institutions within the UN umbrella should be asked to present a focused Plan of Action for

A prolonged Covid-19 crisis could adversely impact the benefits of globalisation and weaken Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and targets, and impede progress achieved so far. If this persists, there may be unwarranted shifts in current geopolitical structures.

"Emergency Assistance" on extremely concessional terms (preferably grants) to developing countries. While respective multilateral institutions have in place their respective country programmes, a comprehensive Programme of Recovery and Development Sustainability based on the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Harmonisation principles and Accra 2009 Aid Effectiveness mechanisms should be considered. In this context, the UN-led Emergency Assistance Consortium is proposed to assess requirements and monitor resource allocation and utilisation. The proposed Consortium should also support respective country programmes and ensure Priority Debt Relief. Side by side, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) may be tasked to form a Compensatory & Debt Relief

case filed will necessarily be heard, rather the key determinant will be "urgency". It is not yet clear what the Supreme Court judges would consider urgent. On the other hand, the Supreme Court also issued Practice Directions for Subordinate Courts and Tribunals, which specifically state that they are to only hear matters relating to bail petitions. The decision to treat bail hearings as a matter of priority is justifiable given that an astonishing 81.3 percent of our total prison population comprises pre-trial detainees, i.e. those who have not yet been found guilty of committing any offence (World Prison Brief, 2019).

However, what about the victims of severe human rights violations whose evidence is especially time-sensitive, such as victims of rape and domestic violence (which has reportedly shot up in the lockdown)? It is vital that they too are able to seek recourse through the virtual court system.

Notably, in the past, there have been modest attempts to digitalise our judiciary in the context of violence against women by both parliament and the Supreme Court, but without much in the way of results. Section 20(6) of the Nari O Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain 2000 (Amended 2003) commendably introduced in-camera trials for rape survivors. However, this is seldom, if ever, implemented, as it is not mandatory. Additionally, in *Naripokkho and others vs. Bangladesh* (2018), the High Court Division led by Justice Farah Mahbub (who also happens to be leading the committee established by the chief justice to reform High Court rules to facilitate virtual courts) issued a directive in 2018 requiring the government to launch a designated website "enabling the informant to register his/her complaint online". Sadly, this website is yet to see the light of day.

The introduction of virtual courts undoubtedly marks the onset of a historic era for our judiciary. Whether it can live up to its potential, and maximise access to justice for those who need it the most, very much depends on our recognising it as not only a temporary solution for the present but also the permanent solution for the future.

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Revolving Fund to compensate for export and remittance losses. UN specialised agencies such as UNDP, IFRI and UNIDO need to be advised to gear up technical assistance to promote capacity and skills enhancements in strategic sectors. Of critical importance would be creation of the Global Forum on Food Security and Prevention of Hunger and Famine. The WHO should be advised to promote and strengthen coordination with global, regional and in-country healthcare systems.

A prolonged Covid-19 crisis could adversely impact the benefits of globalisation and weaken Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and targets, and impede progress achieved so far. If this persists, there may be unwarranted shifts in current geopolitical structures that may trigger political and social instability in different regions of the world. A renewed look at SDGs due to the impact of Covid-19 would also warrant stocktaking of critical impediments that countries are faced with concerning unemployment, safety nets and social protection, environmental and climate change related issues. Current targets, indicators and schedule timelines for SDGs need to be reviewed in light of the severe challenges emerging from the Covid-19 crisis. Further to this, the UN could consider advising global and regional NGOs/CSOs and private-sector driven corporate agencies to create a Special Post Covid-19 NGO & Private Sector Fund to support countries to meet cash needs for the unemployed and vulnerable groups.

Will the UN be able to fulfil its mandate of supporting recovery and growth in the medium to long term? How effective are current UN mechanisms to salvage the unprecedented economic and social perils countries are faced with? Will the UN that we have at the moment, with its current structure, charter and functional modes, be sufficiently capable of meeting the challenges that confront the market mechanism and liberal economic and social settings? The UN may have to undergo a strategic transformation as well as structural and operational adjustments towards a much-envisioned paradigm shift. An inability to respond appropriately might usher in proposals for restructuring the United Nations. Hopefully, the UN is fully aware of its responsibilities in meeting the unprecedented challenges it is facing today.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Preventing a Covid-19 food crisis

CARMEN M. REINHART and ROB SUBBARAMAN

EVEN before the pandemic, there were signs that global food prices could soon surge. Extreme weather events induced by climate change have become more common. African swine fever wiped out over a quarter of the world's pig population last year, causing food prices in China to increase by 15-22 percent year on year so far in 2020. And more recently, the worst locust blight in 70 years has destroyed crops in East Africa. In Kenya, the price of maize, a staple food, has risen by over 60 percent since 2019.

Covid-19 is amplifying the risk of a worldwide food-price spike, which would trigger outright crises in many developing countries. In the poorest of these, food accounts for 40-60 percent of the consumption basket, about 5-6 times its share in advanced economies.

While lockdowns have led to a collapse in demand for durable goods and discretionary services, the opposite is true of food. In cities around the world, reports of panic buying and food hoarding have proliferated since the pandemic began.

On the supply side, global grain stockpiles are healthy but could quickly be depleted as the virus disrupts food production and distribution. And shortages of animal feed, fertilisers, and pesticides have increased both the costs of farming and the risk of bad harvests.

Moreover, from harvesting fruits and vegetables in India to operating meat plants in America, labour shortages are becoming increasingly apparent as cross-border travel restrictions in much of the world disrupt the normal seasonal cycle of migrant farm workers. And transportation shortages are making it more challenging to get produce to market—when there is one.

Farmers need to reconfigure their supply chains away from bulk



With the pandemic threatening to wreak even more economic havoc, governments must work together to address the risk of disruptions to food supply chains.

PHOTO: REUTERS

wholesale to (currently closed) restaurants, hotels, and schools, and toward grocery stores and home delivery. But that takes time, not least because commercial and consumer food products are prepared and packaged differently. In the meantime, fresh produce has had to be destroyed.

Furthermore, some major food-producing countries have already imposed export bans or quotas in response to the pandemic, as Russia and Kazakhstan have done for grain, and India and Vietnam have done for rice. Meanwhile, other countries are stockpiling food through accelerated imports, as is true of the Philippines (rice) and Egypt (wheat).

Such food protectionism may seem like a good way to provide relief to the most vulnerable segments of the population, but simultaneous interventions by many governments can result in a global food-price surge, as happened in 2010-11. The World Bank estimates that protectionism accounted for about 40 percent of the increase in the global price of wheat and 25 percent of the rise in maize prices at that time.

One can understand these countries' nervousness. While the Covid-19 pandemic has led to falling growth, rising unemployment, widening fiscal deficits, and soaring debt in advanced and emerging economies alike, the

appearance of new infection hotbeds in developing countries will mean an even starker trade-off between saving lives and protecting livelihoods.

Moreover, developing countries are already facing a sudden stop in capital and remittance inflows and a collapse in tourism, while the terms of trade and currencies of the many oil and primary-commodity exporters among them are crashing. Even before Covid-19, many low-income countries were at serious risk of debt distress. And many of these economies are also highly vulnerable to a spike in food prices.

Nomura's Food Vulnerability Index ranks 110 countries based on their

exposure to large food-price swings, taking into account their nominal GDP per capita, the share of food in household consumption, and net food imports. The latest reading shows that of the 50 countries most vulnerable to a sustained rise in food prices, nearly all are developing economies that account for nearly three-fifths of the world's population.

In fact, surging food prices would be a global problem, because they are highly regressive everywhere. Even in developed economies, a jump in food prices would drive a bigger wedge between the rich and the poor, exacerbating already-severe wealth inequality. No one should ignore the age-old connection between food crises and social unrest.

Multilateral institutions have mobilised quickly during the crisis to provide emergency loans to a record number of developing countries, while G20 creditors have agreed to a temporary suspension of debt-service payments from poor countries that request forbearance. But because the risks posed by surging food prices do not apply only to the most vulnerable economies, temporary debt relief may need to be extended to other countries as well.

With the pandemic threatening to wreak even more economic havoc, governments must work together to address the risk of disruptions to food supply chains. More broadly, some modicum of global policy coordination is essential to prevent food protectionism from becoming the post-pandemic new normal.

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Can AI prevent the next pandemic?

MUHAMMAD IBRAHIM

THE technology I have in mind as our saviour in the next pandemic is Artificial Intelligence (AI). In proposing this I am inspired by two things. Firstly, the conclusion of some recent reviews that AI development has been progressing at a much faster rate than previously anticipated. Even such challenging goals as conducting an intricate surgical procedure and doing independent scientific research seem to be quite achievable within a few years. The progress can, and should, be expedited keeping the present crisis in mind.

My second inspiration comes from the realisation that most of us, including most of the global leaders, have learned our lessons from Covid-19. It creates the hope that when this crisis is over, the international community will move towards a concerted action including the installation of the services of AI to avoid a repetition. The global investment and efforts required for AI to manage or stave off another pandemic will pale in comparison to the cost that all countries will have to pay without it. I believe that we can take AI to an extraordinary height soon if we want to. And at the same time we can avoid—by keeping it under global control—the apprehensions of the naysayers that AI will take away our jobs in every sector, that the surveillance power it creates will jeopardise our privacy, and that it may even overpower and annihilate us.

To begin with, the AI under global control will continuously analyse Big Data that encompasses worldwide medical records for any sign of a mutated new virus infecting a human being anywhere in the world, and alert the relevant authorities immediately. At a simpler level, this may seem somewhat similar to the case when

an all-AI news agency became the first in the world to find out and publicise the news of the assassination of the elder brother of the current North Korean dictator in a foreign airport. AI will, along with human scientists, immediately study the virus, its mutations, possible lethality, and its transmission. It will help in the isolation of the human carrier and trace his/her contacts so that they too can be immediately isolated. Hopefully, that will be the end of the threat. Such



AI progress should be expedited keeping the present crisis in mind.

PHOTO: REUTERS

detective works in all kinds of places in the world have been found to be extremely difficult and dangerous for human experts, to say the least.

If, unfortunately, a particularly unpredictable virus escapes the net and threatens to start a crisis, the moment it happens, the precisely programmed AI protocol will start the research for a vaccine and a drug for this very mutation. With advanced AI, the speed

and parallel progress of it can be much greater. But even then, a usable vaccine may need some time to develop, so AI will gear up its next lines of defence. For example, it will bolster the usually maintained reserves of food, medicine, hospital equipment, PPEs, and other essentials for emergency by its robotic manufacturing facilities, all distributed around the world.

Now imagine: when a lockdown becomes unavoidable because of the start of the community transmission

correctly updated about the virus, and will make the best projections for the coming days. With these timely actions, the crisis will soon be over, and with all humans in the world properly vaccinated, the time will come to go for business as usual.

However, in the worst case scenario, Phase II in AI-assisted defence may have to be invoked. Phase II kicks in when the reserve is exhausted but it is too early to lift the lockdown yet. Now it will be AI's turn to keep the economy afloat. This is a situation the thought of which is normally dreaded by many—AI taking over the economy and doling out the subsistence to the people who have no work. But this is not normal times, and it would be for a very short period of crisis economy after all. AI continues to produce under the guidance of human policymakers and to provide goods and services to all. These would come from highly flexible, highly robotised, multitasking, digitally controlled special fabricators, always ready for special occasions, each type programmed to produce multiple things round the clock. Many prototypes are already working. 3D printers may be a simpler case in point. Essential services will be kept on, dominantly by using AI-run emergency automations such as self-driven vehicles and robots. The human actors in economy can take over again as soon as possible.

The UN, or better still, a UN-like global body with more authority and effectiveness, should be able to guide, regulate, and make happen the appropriate AI. It should ensure global vigilance, make the AI systems available to countries in need, and formulate global policies in using them. The rest can be left to the national authorities, with details best suited to the circumstances of a country. Such global control and even global R&D are

not unthinkable. Yes, the world is not coming any nearer to a unified entity, as the war of words and demonstrations of naked self-interest have shown in recent times (and even during this current crisis). But perhaps because of the sheer instinct of self-preservation and because no alternative is in sight, a change of heart will come.

Let us take the pilot-autopilot collaboration in a flight as a metaphor for our AI-rich life. One may ask, if the autopilot can do so much in a crisis, why then do we need the pilot at all? Why don't we let the autopilot fly the plane all the time? Our answer: the pilot should be there because that is the way we human beings like it. We want human beings to be in ultimate control at every stage. During a normal flight, the autopilot relieves the pilot of all monotonous chores in the flight, removes all the sharp edges from it, tries to give the pilot and the passengers a refreshing flying experience. Our advanced AI will do exactly the same by giving us a better quality of life during normal times, without taking anything away.

Are the epidemics and pandemics only crises where the above scheme with AI will apply? Not at all. The scheme can be adapted to any major emergencies and disasters, local or global. Also, there can be global disasters with greater threats to humanity, not yet anticipated by us. But some of these technologies, properly developed and prepared, and prudently used by us, may prove to be the difference between life and death for millions, even billions, of people. Who says a meteorite of the size that killed all dinosaurs might not strike us one of these days?

Muhammad Ibrahim, PhD, is a science writer and populariser, and retired professor of physics at Dhaka University.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



FIRST NONSTOP SOLO TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT

May 21, 1927

American aviator Charles A Lindbergh completed the first nonstop solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean on this day in 1927, traveling from New York to Paris in the monoplane Spirit of Saint Louis in about 33.5 hours.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

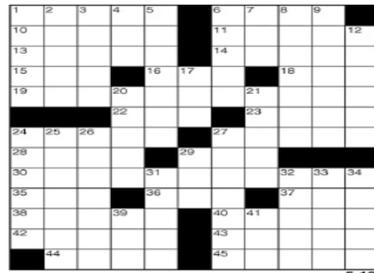
ACROSS

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- 6 Military sch.
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- 11 Timber wolves
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- 18 Frozen over
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- 22 Butterfly catcher
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- 43 Stage direction
- 44 Like an abyss
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- 39 "Roses -- red"
- 41 Singer Yoko



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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



The Daily Star

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: SITUATION OF WORKING PEOPLE, CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD TO FUTURE OF WORK

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies-BILS in association with The Daily Star organised a virtual roundtable titled "COVID-19 pandemic : Situation of working people, challenges and way forward to future of work" on April 30, 2020, where a number of trade union leaders, government and non-government high officials, civil society and development organisation representatives, researchers and academicians participated. BILS Chairman Md. Habibur Rahman Shiraz chaired the session while BILS Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan was present as the moderator. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



NAZRUL ISLAM KHAN,
Secretary General and
Executive Director,
BILS

The current situation of COVID-19 pandemic has caused most countries of the world to close their borders. The global supply chain has hence been severely impacted. Now, one main issue is the drastic decrease in remittance from our migrant workers, with a fall of USD 170 million.

The lockdown since March 26 has resulted in all establishments, including factories, closing, pushing millions of our workers towards unemployment. This pandemic has also left most workers in the informal sector unemployed. The World Bank has stated that if this situation continues, our GDP growth will decrease significantly. Unlike China, Bangladesh's COVID-19 recovery rate is lower than the infection rate. The working people are suffering the most during this pandemic.

The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) has created multiple task forces throughout the country. These task forces need to be tripartite so that the workers can have a platform to voice their opinions.

ILO Director General Guy Ryder has taken the initiative to urgently hold discussions with the government, brands, buyers, factory owners, and trade union leaders to find a way to save the RMG industry. We hope this will help improve the situation in a way that is comparable to how the industry recovered after the Rana Plaza disaster.



CHAINA RAHMAN,
Secretary General,
Industrial All Bangladesh
Council-IBC

The labourers are the most adversely affected by the pandemic. Every day, hundreds of workers gather and protest in front of their factories for their wages. Proper social distancing cannot be maintained during these protests, resulting in further increases in the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

The initiatives by the government and factory owners are insufficient in covering the losses of the workers. After the lockdown was extended in April, the workers were not given clear instructions about factory closures. Hence, they returned to the city in large groups, risking more transmission of the virus.

During this time, the workers should at least be paid an amount that is sufficient to run their households. Workers cannot be laid off at this time or be forced to work in an unsafe environment.



NAIMUL AHSAN JEWEL,
Joint Convener, SKOP
and Member, Advisory
Council, BILS

12 percent of our labour population consists of shop workers, amounting to around four million people. The shop owners' association has claimed that they are at a loss of 10.47 billion taka per month. These workers contribute 13 percent to our country's GDP. In the context of May Day, we should acknowledge how neglected these workers have been during this pandemic. These shop workers are not being benefitted by the labour law and hence cannot form trade unions. As a result, they are unable to assert their rights. After shop closures, these workers did not receive their salaries, and no one considered how these people and their families would get by during this time. Precise steps need to be taken to help these people.



MD ABDUR RAZZAK
General Secretary,
Imarat Nirman Sramik
Union Bangladesh

There are around 3.5 to four million construction workers in our country. According to government directives, these construction workers were supposed to receive their payments via digital transactions. Since these workers do not have any official papers, they have been facing myriads of problems to get their wages. The construction sector is highly unorganised, and to date, we still do not know how all these workers will be paid their due wages.



ABUL HOSSAIN
Coordinator (Acting),
Domestic Workers
Rights Network
(DWRN)

Domestic workers have always been our most neglected population, which is more clearly proven at a time like this. Bangladesh has around 2.5 million domestic workers of all ages.

There are currently two kinds of domestic workers in the country: permanent housekeepers and those who work in multiple houses throughout the day while living in their own places. This second kind of domestic worker is mostly left unemployed due to this lockdown.

The state-directed stimulus or relief packages were not able to reach the domestic workers since they do not have any organised committee which can reach out for help on their behalf. Consequently, these workers have almost been left starving even after our Honourable Prime Minister directed that not a single person should go hungry.



**RAZEKUZZAMAN
RATAN,** President,
Samajtantrik Sramik
Front

Laws in other countries concerning our migrant workers will tighten as their own workers will suffer from unemployment concerns. We need to utilise our expatriate welfare funds to reduce all sorts of burdens on workers who will return to Bangladesh. We can check if they can take loans to start small businesses. We also need to think of those who have already escaped their job uncertainties and returned to Bangladesh.

During the post-COVID-19 situation, we should facilitate different types of training, especially in the IT sector. Or else, we will not be able to send our workers abroad. We also need a proper database showcasing the actual number of workers who are coming from and going abroad.



**DR WAJEDUL ISLAM
KHAN,** General
Secretary, Trade Union
Centre & Jt. Secretary
General, BILS

Adequate protection in the RMG sector must be ensured since many garment factories have opened now. For example, work can be done in two shifts to maintain social distancing. The RMG workers' representatives can discuss among themselves and take the lead on behalf of the workers to help solve the crisis they are facing.

We also need to resolve the complications related to relief disbursement. I would request to disburse relief in the form of packages to the workers to ease the procedures. Besides, an adequate number of area-based ambulances should also be arranged so that these workers can be hospitalised in the shortest possible time if they fall prey to COVID-19.



INSUR ALI, General
Secretary, Jatiya
Rickshaw-Van Sramik
League

Since the general holiday across the country from March 26, 2020, around 10 million workers are sitting idle, including workers from all sorts of transportation facilities. Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation, which leads the Bangladesh transportation workers, collects around 2,500 crore taka yearly for the welfare of the transportation workers. Still, we are not seeing them being fully supportive of these workers now. I would request the councillors of individual areas to prevent any sort of inequality arising in area-based relief distribution.



K M AZAM KHASRU,
General Secretary,
Jatiya Sramik League

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and the Ministry of Food have undertaken initiatives as per the directives of

For Government

- Engage TUs with other stakeholders in terms of decision-making in industrial/services sectors
- Initiate effective social dialogue with a view to determine which sectors to reopen and to what extent
- Take necessary steps through social dialogue for development and implementation of the "COVID-19 Health Safety Rules" in the following issues:
 - Number of workers in a floor
 - Distance between two workers
 - PPE items
 - Measures of checking for COVID-19 at entry
 - Hand washing and sanitising arrangements
 - Transport arrangements
 - Treatment facilities when affected
- Activate the Tripartite Consultative Committee, Crisis Management Committee and the Tripartite Forum on Occupational Health and Safety
- Establish a dedicated cell in the Ministry for quick response to industrial and workers' crises
- Engage experts and develop and execute a decent and direct cash assistance programme. Secure workers urgently, who are employed in the industrial/services sectors, which are shut down
- Involve TUs to prepare victim workers' list up to divisional level; however, the industrial zone-wise list is preferred in this regard
- Ensure sector-based worker representation in all relief distribution committees
- Ensure that the 'Workers Welfare Fund' is responsive to workers' need
- Ensure that the transport workers are supported by their collective fund
- Reintroduce the ration card and ration shop system
- Reduce the money transfer fee to 1 taka per 1,000 taka
- Employ the needy workers in the haor regions for harvesting work, provide agricultural workers with appropriate PPEs and ensure uninterrupted supply chain and fair prices for agro-products
- Protect returnee migrant workers from cruelties/rights violations and ensure their food, income and living
- Channel resources in the next budget for ensuring social protection and health insurance for workers
- Constitute a tripartite watch committee to monitor workers' safety, working conditions, wage disputes and retrenchment
- Register informal workers with a view to issue cards for them, which might help provide economic support for them and consequently, a database could be prepared
- Register returnee migrant workers to help them reintegrate. Formulate effective plans to utilise their skills in our country because it might be tough for them to go back again
- Ensure sanitation in washrooms at the factory level and in workers' living areas like mess, dormitories, slum areas etc.

For Employers

- Respect the social dialogue and prioritise tripartite solutions for managing emerging crises

our Honourable Prime Minister to help the underprivileged people during this crisis. Recently, the concerned ministries were provided with the details of the beneficiaries who will be provided with QR code-embedded relief cards. Besides, the special OMS Food Friendly Programme (FFP) will be effective very soon, which will help 6.25 million families.

Therefore, we need to think collectively about how we can help our government more and ensure the smooth operation of all the relevant procedures. We also need to consider whether we can help our workers through our workers' welfare fund. The privileged people should also come forward to help.



ANWAR HOSSAIN,
President, Bangladesh
Jatiyatabadi Sramik
Dal and Vice
Chairman, BILS

RMG workers are now moving around helplessly, akin to the refugees during the liberation war of 1971. We need to ensure all incentives reach workers effectively. Proper monitoring of whether these incentives are adequately benefitting the workers is also required. Bangladesh has a track record of speedy post-disaster rehabilitation, if survival of the population is ensured. Therefore, day labourers and daily wage workers must be given that hope of survival.



**SHAH MOHAMMAD
ABU ZAFAR,** President,
Bangladesh Labour
Federation, Member,
Advisory Council,
BILS and Member,
Bangladesh Labour
Welfare Foundation

We have created lists of those who are most in need of relief, but the Deputy Commissioner and mayoral offices stated that they have no instructions to provide relief based on these lists. Who, then, are eligible for the aid? If relief is to reach workers adequately, then sector-based worker representatives must be present in all relief distribution committees.

The government should ensure all

CALL TO ACTION

- Disburse wages and Eid bonus timely. Refrain from factory lay-off and workers' retrenchment during this pandemic
- Communicate with brands/buyers with a view to resolve supply-chain issues
- Ensure appropriate protection for workers at workplaces, especially for the reopened factories
- Provide PPEs to both workers and employers
- Ensure free COVID-19 treatment, institutional quarantine and isolation facilities for Coronavirus-affected workers, because they have no scope of maintaining health-safety at their homes
- Ensure compensation for Coronavirus deaths
- Pursue brands and buyers to contribute to central fund
- Establish living quarters for RMG workers near factories

For Brands/Buyers

- Practice ethical buying policy
- Move away from cancellation/suspension of buying orders misusing 'force majeure' clause
- Consider not imposing cost reduction on an earlier placed order
- Pay export prices on time
- Ensure that workers in the sourcing factories are protected against COVID-19
- Contribute to the central fund aimed at helping workers infected with Coronavirus
- Consider lead time for shipment.

For Trade Unions

- Raise voice to continue the social dialogue in case of industrial crises
- Link up with the regional and global TUs. Identify the brands/buyers who are cancelling orders and are offering less or delayed payment. Carry out campaigns in these cases
- Continue communication and follow-up to ensure that workers and TU members are supported in times of vulnerability and have access to proper treatment during COVID-19 emergencies
- Update workers with required information so that they can act properly
- Monitor workers' awareness about COVID-19 and the respective response in case of abiding by health-safety rules
- Ensure that:
 - Workers are not terminated illegally
 - Factories do not lay-off workers unlawfully
 - Workers are not deprived of wages/facilities
- List the most vulnerable workers and, if possible, ensure relief for them
- Keep records on irregularities associated with the factories and workers and inform concerned authorities about these
- Raise voice unitedly about workers' safety, wages, retrenchment and compensation during this Coronavirus crisis
- Form a trade union monitoring team, collect information, and act
- Maintain regular correspondence with the government and employers about any dispute
- Establish a secretariat to collect, maintain and correspond properly
- Appoint volunteers from trade unions to perform COVID-19 contact tracing of workers



**DR RASHED AL
MAHMUD TITUMIR,**
Professor, Department
of Development
Studies, University of
Dhaka

The government has announced loan packages for export-oriented businesses. It would not be possible for marginal, small businesses to avail these packages since the same interest will be charged for both large and small businesses. Equal interest will not generate high profits for banks; therefore, banks will not be incentivised to provide these loans.

A three-year reformative plan should be formulated by the government, given the current weak state of the economy. The budget should be announced under this three-year plan, after reviewing what changes are required, in terms of allocation, to aid workers' welfare.

Since a vast majority of the population is facing financial shortages, universal basic income grants are now a necessity. The government has not arranged this yet. Bangladesh's average expenditure per household is 15,402 taka; hence the universal basic income grant should amount to 15,000 taka per household.

Additional funds must be allocated to the public healthcare system. National health cards, which people can use to avail healthcare, should be launched. Social security programmes catering to children, young adults, mothers, etc., should be formed.



SOHRAB HOSSAIN,
Joint Editor, Prothom
Alo

Numerous workers have been unfairly laid off, and a majority of them have faced wage cuts, even though barely a month of lockdown has passed. Most of the support packages are meant for people who have some sort of regular shelter facilities. What about the floating people? The government should actively think about how to reach these marginalised people with assistance.

There are so many digital innovations that can be used to help people in need, but the government is yet to take any fruitful initiative in this regard.



SHIH NATH ROY,
Inspector General,
Department of
Inspection for Factories
and Establishments

Since the issue of reopening factories emerged after a while, BGMEA submitted a health and safety guideline to the factories and us after consulting with ILO. We let BGMEA know that factories could be opened without an influx of workers to avoid crowding. The health safety of the workers should also be considered once they rejoin the factories. The factory owners agreed to not lay off any worker in the process and ensure full salaries for those who join work and 60 percent salaries for those who would not be able to join in April.

We have formed a crisis management committee with DIFE to ensure the health, safety and any other concerns of workers. This committee will also prepare a list of all workers who are not getting any aid and send that list to the Deputy Commissioners. The committee will submit a weekly report to us, which we will present to the ministry to help make further decisions regarding the workers.



**MD. HABIBUR
RAHMAN SHIRAZ,**
Chairman, BILS

Our current Prime Minister is trying her best to improve the condition of the workers. She is likewise worried about the safety of the workers during this pandemic. The government announced a stimulus package of 5,000 crore taka for export-oriented industries to pay the salaries and wages of workers and employees. It is unfortunate that despite such a well-timed initiative taken by the government, a large number of workers remain unpaid till date. The owners' associations such as BGMEA and BKMEA owe a sincere explanation to the government and people as to who is responsible for this suffering of the workers.



**DR HAMEEDA
HOSSAIN,** Coordinator,
Sramik Nirapotta
Forum-SNF

Living quarters should be established for RMG workers near the factories. Schools, madrasas, community centres, and health complexes can be transformed into temporary living spaces for the workers. This will help reduce the risk of infection during their commute to and from their homes, which are usually far from their workplaces.

Trade union committees should be formed for each factory to ensure equal focus on workers from all factories. Trade unions should appoint worker volunteers to carry out contact tracing - identifying the people with whom COVID-19 infected workers were in contact. This will help reduce the spread of COVID-19 among workers. Trade union volunteers could also create lists of daily wage workers at Upazila or union-level, and plan how they can be assisted.



**MESBAHUDDIN
AHMED,** President,
Jatiya Sramik Jote and
Member, Advisory
Council, BILS

Agriculture significantly contributes to our production and economic development. Therefore, farmers should be adequately supported. Besides, additional investment is required in the public health sector since we do not have sufficient resources to tackle the current health crisis.

I believe the RMG sector will be able to recover from this financial crisis swiftly since the global demand for inexpensive clothing will increase after the pandemic, and hence, exports will rise.



Serie A fate to be decided on May 28

AFP, Milan

Italy's Serie A teams have been given the green light to resume group training but will have to wait until May 28 to know whether the season can resume, Sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora said on Tuesday.

Spadafora said that government scientists had accepted the Italian football federation's (FIGC) revised health protocol.

"The Scientific Technical Committee have approved the FIGC protocol for the resumption of team training," Spadafora told Rai. "It is excellent news."

Spadafora said he has scheduled a meeting on May 28 with FIGC president Gabriele Gravina and Serie A chief Paolo Dal Pino to decide on the return to competition.

"We will then decide if and when Serie A will restart," he said. "The important thing will be to restart with the intention of completing the league, then the federations will decide the modalities and formats to be adopted."

FIGC president Gravina welcomed a "decisive step on the path of restarting football in Italy."

Gravina said that FIGC Medical Scientific Commission were now working on the protocol for the return to competition.

Italian players' union president Damiano Tommasi said Tuesday that footballers would need at least a month of training before returning.



Barcelona started training in groups of a maximum of 10 players from May 18 and star forwards Luis Suarez and Lionel Messi, who were part of one such group, were seen sweating it out at the Joan Campes Training Ground. La Liga stakeholders are reportedly hoping for a June restart.

PHOTO: COLLECTED.

Ceferin sleepless but resolute

REUTERS

UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin says he is having sleepless nights due to the COVID-19 pandemic

with European soccer's governing body set to lose "millions and millions" of dollars after the season came to a halt.

European leagues and UEFA competitions have been suspended since March or had their seasons cut short. While the German Bundesliga resumed over the weekend, it is unclear when, or if, other top flight leagues will restart, with the season set to spill over into August when the 2020-21 campaign is set to kick off.

"There is so much information and so many calendar issues. So many

millions, dozens of millions of dollars, that we will lose," Ceferin told the Guardian. "It's hard to fall asleep at night. You would be quite irresponsible if you fell asleep immediately."

"The situation for UEFA is not that alarming, we're not in a dangerous situation, but we still care about the clubs and the leagues and the stakeholders so it is a lot of work."

Ceferin said he did not expect football to change once the situation returns to normal but added that Financial Fair Play (FFP) regulations could be adapted to the "new times."

"This will not happen very soon but we're thinking of improving (FFP), modernising it and doing something more about the competitive balance. We're also considering some sort of 'luxury tax', if it's possible."

Asked whether he would bet a million dollars that Euro 2020 would be played in 2021, he said: "Yes, I would. I don't know why it wouldn't be. I don't think that this virus will last forever. I think it will (change) sooner than many think."

"I don't like this apocalyptic view that we have to wait for the second and third waves or even a fifth wave."

Ceferin said football would follow recommendations but was optimistic normal service could resume in the near future. "I'm absolutely sure, personally, that good old football with fans will come back very soon."

And Ceferin said he did not expect the game to change. "Football didn't change after the World War II, or World War I, and it will not change because of a virus either," he said.

Long camp essential ahead of qualifiers

SPORTS REPORTER

Footballers were maintaining fitness with the hope of returning to action through the

Bangladesh Premier League, but the abandonment of the league and the cancellation of the rest of the season due to the coronavirus pandemic will mean a break in their fitness regime which could have an adverse impact on the national team, who still have four more fixtures of World Cup Qualifiers left.

Although the resumption of the qualifiers is uncertain, a Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) official hinted that FIFA is likely to resume the qualifiers in late November or early December. In that case, the footballers will remain out of competitive matches for another four to five months until the new season gets underway or the qualifiers resume.

Considering the domestic scene, the footballers want the national team's camp to start at least two months before the next qualifying fixture and they want practice matches arranged so that they can get match-fit and get the right team combination in place.

"As there will be no competitive matches in domestic circuit, there will be an impact on the international matches no matter how hard we work at gym individually. Training along with other team members is totally different from individual training which can't push the individual to a level of fitness he needs to play at competitive level," opined defender Bishwanath Ghosh.

Left-back Rahmat Mia believes they need at least one month to regain fitness.

"All players will stay at home and their fitness will definitely deteriorate, so we need long-period training including one month of fitness training," Rahmat said.

Centre-back Tapu Barman said: "To be frank, our preparation for international matches is done through matches in the domestic circuit but it will not happen as the season has ended. So, we have to make a plan for the qualifiers as early as possible."

I think we should start a training camp two months before the qualifier against Afghanistan because we need to work on fitness, team combination and game plan."

Head coach Jamie Day was used to having only 10 days' training ahead of international fixtures, and he believes the players will need four to five weeks of training to get their fitness back.

"Once we know when the qualifiers are, we can put a plan in place to get the players up to speed. If the qualifiers resume in November or December, we will have the players in the camp before those fixtures. It will take four to five weeks to get them fit," said Day, who is expected to renew his expired contract within a few days.

BCL scrapped

SPORTS REPORTER

The BFF yesterday cancelled the scheduled Bangladesh Championship League (BCL).

The decision was made at an online meeting of the professional football league committee (PFLC) where nine out of 13 clubs joined, with BFF's senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy in chair.

"We have taken this decision after discussing with the participating clubs. It comes as a continuation of the BFF executive committee's decision of abandoning the BPL and cancelling the Independence Cup. Most of the clubs expressed helplessness in managing funds for players. So, considering the clubs' financial constraints and the coronavirus situation, we have cancelled the BCL," BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said after the meeting.

However, BFF has decided to open players' transfer window for both the BPL and the BCL for the next season in the same time frame.



Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp makes his way into the Melwood Training Ground to oversee the Premier League leaders' session as English clubs returned to small-group training from Tuesday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Cummins wants options

AGENCIES

Australia pacer Pat Cummins has urged lawmakers to sanction the use of an artificial substance to shine the ball now that saliva looks set to be banned.

"If we remove saliva, we have to have another option. Sweat's not bad, but I think we need something more than that," he told cricket.com.au. "We've just got to make sure at the start of the spell we're sweating and we're nice and warm."

The use of wax applicators, which have been developed as substitutes, would require a change to The Laws of Cricket.

Stop talking to pacers about slow wickets: Wasim

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Anyone who has seen Wasim Akram run in and bowl from the striker's end would know that strange feeling -- a mixture of awe and fear of what is coming at them.

Wasim's passion and aggression could shake the resolve of the most experienced and established batsmen, but when the big-hearted former Pakistan captain made a cameo on Tamim Iqbal's Facebook Live chat on Tuesday night with three heroes of Bangladesh's ICC Trophy triumph in 1997, there was only the sense of warmth and love for Bangladesh cricket within the Sultan of Swing.

"Bangladesh has always been close to my heart. The people, the food, the country and of course the cricket," Wasim beamed after greeting the host and guests Minhajul Abedin, Akram Khan and Khaled Masud. "For me, it is a proud moment to see Bangladesh improve immensely over the last 10-12 years."

For many, exactly what had lured Wasim to the Dhaka Premier League in the 90s, is unfathomable. "Even the first game... the crowd... it was packed. I was amazed to see the interest," he said about his first game for Abahani.

The sheer weight of his talent and



character harkens back to the golden days of Bangladesh's domestic league, which then had more colour and spirit of competition than at any time since.

Wasim was looking for new cricketing experiences but inadvertently gave the country a taste of what world-class bowling really looks like. If for many it is hard to understand how Bangladesh were able to even stand in front of quality bowling lineups in the 1999 World Cup in England, they should probably look at the fact that the competitive means in the domestic league had prepared them somewhat

for what to expect.

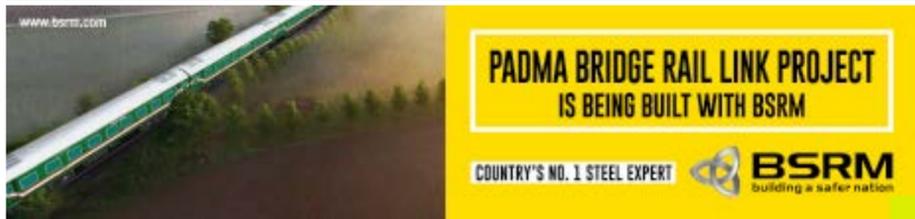
There could not be a better expert to ask for advice on producing fast bowlers than Wasim, given that he has not only bagged a hat-trick in Bangladesh, but also because the wickets in Pakistan and Bangladesh have a flat nature. Yet, Pakistan have kept producing fast bowling talent like no other. Tamim asked Wasim for advice to budding Bangladeshi pacers.

"If any young bowler wants to improve, they need to get into two or three-day cricket at 16, 17 years of age. Nowadays everyone wants to play T20 cricket but that is a very easy format."

"Any youngster you see who is fast and has potential, stop putting into his mind that he can't get wickets on slow wickets. What happens is, that as a young guy, if you hear all around you that 'I am not going to get wickets', psychologically he will be negative on those wickets. He has to learn how to swing the ball and bowl fuller on slow wickets. I enjoyed bowling on slow wickets, especially in Tests, since you can swing the ball and contain the batsman," Wasim said.

Akram and Minhajul detailed how Wasim's involvement in Bangladesh cricket had prepared them for the next level but what Wasim said about grooming youngsters should also be held as a remarkable advice from the great contributor.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার	
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আউটসোর্সিং পদ্ধতিতে জনবল সরবরাহের দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি	
স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়ের স্বাস্থ্য সেবা বিভাগের আওতায় স্বাস্থ্য অধিদপ্তরে আউটসোর্সিং পদ্ধতিতে জনবল নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে সরকার কর্তৃক স্বীকৃত জনবল সরবরাহকারী/সেবা প্রদানকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।	
১।	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ নাম
২।	সেবা প্রদানকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নাম ও ঠিকানা
৩।	দরপত্রের সূত্র নং ও তারিখ
৪।	দরপত্রের পদ্ধতি
৫।	বাজেট ও অর্ধের উৎস
৬।	দরপত্র সিটিউল সংগ্রহের তারিখ ও সময়
৭।	দরপত্র সিটিউল প্রাপ্তির স্থান
৮।	দরপত্র দাখিলের স্থান, তারিখ ও সময়
৯।	দরপত্র খোলার স্থান, তারিখ ও সময়
১০।	দরপত্র কাজের বিবরণী
১১।	দরপত্র সিটিউল সংগ্রহের পদ্ধতি
১২।	দরপত্রদাতার যোগ্যতা
১৩।	দরপত্র জামানতের পরিমাণ
১৪।	যোগ্যতার বিবরণী
১৫।	দরপত্র মূল্যায়ন পদ্ধতি
১৬।	দরপত্র বিষয়ক তথ্যাদি
১৭।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারীর নাম
১৮।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারীর পদবী ও ঠিকানা
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Pandemic bites Latin America

Brazil sees record daily deaths as Peru, Mexico, Chile report steady rise in cases

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazil has seen a record number of coronavirus deaths as the pandemic that has swept across the world begins to hit Latin America with its full force.

After Asia, Europe and North America, Latin America has seen coronavirus infections surge in recent days and now accounts for about 580,000 of the world's nearly five million confirmed cases.

Brazil has been hardest-hit in the region, rising to the third-highest number of cases in the world, as Peru, Mexico and Chile also see steady increases in infections.

Health officials in Brazil reported 1,179 new coronavirus deaths on Tuesday, the first time the daily toll exceeded 1,000, but far-right President Jair Bolsonaro remains bitterly opposed to lockdowns, having described them as unnecessary over a "little flu".

With the outbreak in the world's sixth-largest country expected to accelerate until early June, many Brazilians are deeply worried about the next few weeks.

"Our country is going from bad to worse," said retiree Gilberto Ferreira in Rio de Janeiro.

Bolsonaro has refused to accept experts' advice on responding to the pandemic, pressing regional governors to end stay-at-home measures.

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Writhing in labour pain, 24-year-old Jhuma resting her head on her husband Sujon on a footpath near Shaheed Minar in the capital at 5:00am yesterday. She had gone into labour prematurely two hours ago. Coming all the way from Gazipur, the couple ran around for hours from hospital to hospital, but Jhuma was denied treatment because she ran a fever, a symptom of Covid-19. As they were plumb the depths of despair, an ambulance crossing them decided to help. Finally, a hospital back in Gazipur did not turn them away, and she gave birth to two healthy babies via C-section at 12:40pm. She may have found people willing to help, but will others be as lucky?

BANGLADESHI MIGRANTS Returnees will need healthcare, food, shelter

IOM warns

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The most vulnerable of the returning Bangladeshi migrants will require immediate support to meet their needs for food, shelter, and healthcare, said IOM.

"In the medium to long-term, they will require debt mediation assistance, and diversification of livelihoods assistance to build their resilience and ensure sustainable reintegration," said Giorgi Gigauri, chief of International Organisation for Migration in Bangladesh.

In a statement yesterday, IOM said it was supporting the Bangladesh government to "plan for the return, reception, and reintegration of the migrants."

A few hundred thousand Bangladeshi migrant workers are expected to return home from various labour-receiving countries this year once the countries relax restrictions and airlines resume flights, it said.

"For many of these migrants, it isn't a happy homecoming as they have lost their source of income and due to the global recession, it is unlikely that they will be able to return to work abroad until the global labour market recovers from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic," said Gigauri.

To contain Covid-19 infections, different countries enforced various

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3 tests crucial for containing transmission

Experts at Gonoshasthaya Kendra seminar vouch for antibody, antigen tests

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government should incorporate antibody and antigen tests alongside the PCR tests for Covid-19 to elevate screening capacity that is crucial to contain the virus transmission, said experts.

The government approved only PCR tests until now, but the number of tests being conducted -- around 8,000 to 10,000 a day -- is very small compared to the required testing facilities for the population of 17 crores, they said.

They also said that both the PCR and the antibody tests have some limitations, but now is the time to use both types of kits.

The recommendations came from a virtual seminar organised by Gonoshasthaya Kendra yesterday.

Prof Muzaherul Haque, former advisor to the World Health Organization, said, "We don't know the actual number of people infected by Covid-19 because the rate of test is very low here. We cannot devise an effective strategy based on this rate of tests."

Therefore, antibody and antigen tests should also be approved, apart from the PCR tests, he said, adding that antibody is developed in body a few days after infection, while antigen can be detected from the day one of infection of Covid-19.

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FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

Student union sweeps Ducsu elections



Members of the Student League call on Bangabandhu at his official residence on 21 May, 1972.

May 21, 1972

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

WORK TO ESTABLISH SOCIALISM

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today urges the members of Student League to continue their struggle to protect the hard-earned independence of the country and establish socialism. Shahjahan Siraj and ASM Abdur Rab, along with some elected Student League members in the Ducsu elections, call on the prime minister today at his residence to seek his blessings.

STUDENT UNION WINS DUCSU POLLS

Bangladesh Student Union wins a landslide victory in Ducsu (Dhaka University Central Students' Union) elections. The student organisation bags 17 out of 18 seats including the posts of vice president and general secretary. Bangladesh Student League wins

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RMG WORKERS' DEMO

Voices for Eid bonuses, pay, work get louder

STAR REPORT

Workers of at least 50 garment factories in Ashulia, Savar, Gazipur, Narayanganj, and Chattogram demonstrated yesterday, demanding their arrears, Eid bonuses, and salaries for the month of May, said industrial police.

They also vandalised factories and put barricade on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Gazipur.

In Ashulia, around 500 workers and staffers of Reza Fashions Ltd at Gorat took to the streets, demanding reopening of the factory, full Eid bonuses, and arrears.

Workers said the authorities closed the factory for an indefinite period as workers demonstrated inside the factory.

Police said the factory has more than 1,000 workers and 200 staffers. They indulged in vandalism inside the factory on Tuesday.

The Daily Star could not reach Shawkat Reza,

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Objects hidden by Auschwitz prisoners found



AFP, Vienna

Renovation works at Auschwitz have turned up spoons, forks, cobbler's tools and other objects hidden beneath a chimney flue -- some that might have been used to plan escapes, a national fund said Tuesday.

The objects, which also include knives, hooks, scissors, pieces of leather and parts of shoes, were found last month in block 17 of the main camp, Austria's National Fund for Victims of National Socialism said.

The fund commissioned the renovation and restoration works in the block at the former concentration camp in Poland in preparation for an exhibition.

"These utensils, kept out of sight of the SS guards, were perhaps used by shoemakers, or to prepare an escape or simply to be able to eat," fund secretary general Hannah Lessing told AFP on Tuesday.

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A woman clad in PPE showing her registration text message for Covid-19 test at the entrance to BSMU Fever Clinic yesterday morning. On May 18, BSMU began an online registration system to cut down hassles people face over testing.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Actor Ajmeri Zaman Reshma passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent television actor Ajmeri Zaman Reshma passed away yesterday at 2:30pm, said her son Rahber Khan and daughter-in-law Farhana Mithu.

Known for her performances in Mukhra Romonir Bashikaran, Shesher Kobita and Dhupchaya, Ajmeri Zaman Reshma shared the screen with noted artists, including Dilara Zaman

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CONDOLENCE

M. Shamsul Alam (1937-2020)



Mr. M. Shamsul Alam, a former Director, Vice-Chairman and Chairman of Board Audit Committee of Bank Asia Ltd. has passed away due to old age complications on 20 May 2020 at United Hospital, Dhaka. He was the Chairman of General Produce International Ltd. and Director of Reliance Insurance Ltd. Mr. Alam was the former Chairman & Managing Director of both Sadharan Bima Corporation and Jiban Bima Corporation. In recognition for his outstanding contribution to the insurance sector of Bangladesh, he was awarded with "Bima Padak" by the Honorable Prime Minister of People's Republic of Bangladesh.

We deeply mourn his demise and pray for the salvation of his departed soul. We also express our heart-felt condolence to his bereaved family.

