



DR ALI ASGAR
1900-2020

Eminent scientist Dr Ali Asgar passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent scientist Professor Dr Ali Asgar passed away early yesterday at a private hospital in the capital. He was 80 years old.

Survived by his wife and two sons, Professor Asgar had been suffering from neurological complications.

He was buried at the graveyard in Uttara sector-4 of the capital following his namaz-e-janaza, said his son Arif Asgar.

Professor Asgar was head of the department of medical physics and biomedical engineering at Gono Bishwabidyalay.

He was the recipient of prestigious awards such as Doctor Moniruzzaman Gold Medal, Doctor Kudrat-e-Khuda Gold Medal, Diploma Engineers Association Gold Medal and Mercantile Bank Gold Medal for his contribution to science.

Prof Asgar joined Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) in 1962. His roles there included that of professor, head of physics department, dean of engineering faculty and member of the syndicate.

Dr Asgar developed a modern magnetism laboratory at Buet's physics department in collaboration with Sweden's Uppsala University and formed the Dhaka Material Science Group for developing experimental facilities, training people in the field and forming a network with local, regional and international cooperation.

He had published over eighty technical papers in national and international journals and authored twenty books on science, education and development.

He designed and proposed national science week programme for innovative science education and made television and radio appearances to promote scientific education.

FAKE COVID REPORTS

Clinic sealed off in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Rooppur Medicare, a private hospital in Pabna's Ishwardi, was sealed off on charges of issuing fake Covid-19 certificates yesterday, a week after arresting its owner.

On July 8, police raided the clinic, recovered several fake test reports, and arrested its owner Abdul Wahab Rana.

The clinic had no permission from the health department to do such tests.

A case was filed against Wahab, his partners Sujon Ahmed, and Dr Abu Sayed, chairman of Brahmanbaria Medical College, a private hospital, for running coronavirus tests at the unauthorised clinic.

"Rooppur Medicare have collected samples of workers of different sub-contracting firms of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant without any legal permission. Without having the health department's approval, they were running the Covid-19 tests through Brahmanbaria Medical College Hospital," said Dr Asma Khan, Ishwardi upazila health officer.

After the law enforcers' drive, the clinic authorities did not stop its operations.

Yesterday, officials of Ishwardi upazila health department, along with the law enforcers, sealed off the clinic, she said.

Rooppur Medicare was running the tests illegally to make a quick buck, said Sheikh Nasir Uddin, officer-in-charge of Ishwardi Police Station.

The OC said they arrested the clinic owner and sent information of the other accused to the police stations concerned for taking actions.

A puzzling case

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Tarek had no symptoms on the day he gave samples.

When asked why he tested at two sites, Tarek said it was sought by his workplace -- a petroleum company.

Experts have long mused about the incidence of false positives or false negatives when it comes to RT-PCR tests.

"The limitation of RT-PCR is that the sensitivity depends on the sample collection, the kind of sample, the kind of media being used for testing," Dr M Shawkat Hassan, director of the department of laboratory medicine at Birdem hospital said at a webinar organised by Bangladesh Health Watch earlier this month.

Meanwhile Dr Bijon Kumar Sil, head of the microbiology department at Gono Bishwabidyalay, had previously told The Daily Star that when people were recovering from Covid-19, their test results may come out positive because the PCR machine detects the dead viral RNA in their sample.

COVID-19 TESTS

Many labs struggling for lack of manpower

39 deaths, 2,733 cases recorded in a day

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

As the health ministry asked the health directorate on Wednesday to inform the Covid-19 test results to the patients in three days, officials of the directorate said that would be difficult due to human resource shortage.

On Wednesday, Shamima Nasreen, deputy secretary and member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) issued two separate directives regarding Covid-19 sample collection and test results.

The directives were based on the recommendations of the NTAC's 14th meeting held on July 10.

Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) told The Daily Star: "This [publishing results] depends on the number of samples, human resources and technical issues. We will try to follow the directives."

In the 14th meeting, the NTAC stressed on "reducing the time between sample collection and result publication".

"When test results reach [certain organisations] late, isolation and [transmission] control become impossible," the NTAC said in a press release.

The NTAC also pointed out that increasing the capacity of the existing laboratories was more important than increasing the number of the laboratories.

According to the DGHS, there are 79 Covid-19 testing laboratories across the country.

Sources said, due to the shortage of human resources for collecting the samples, running the tests and generating the results, and the shortage of state-of-the-art devices, many of the labs failed to generate results on time.

One of the main causes of the delay is the manual extraction of samples instead of using an auto-extraction machine, an official of the DGHS told The Daily Star.

The NTAC recommended the appointment of skilled human resources in the labs and use of auto-

extraction machines.

In a separate letter, the ministry also directed the DGHS to collect samples from the patients over 50 years old from their homes.

During the last few days, the number of daily tests have decreased.

According to statista.com, Bangladesh tested 5,866 samples per million population while India tested 8,991 and Pakistan tested 7,365 samples.

"After the fees were imposed, fewer people are coming for tests. Besides, flood situation in many areas may be another reason," Dr Mushtuq Hussain, consultant of the IEDCR told The Daily Star recently.

Prof Nasima Sultana Sultana added, "Fear of Covid-19 has reduced among people. Our sample collection booths stay idle after 1:00pm daily."

DAILY UPDATE

In yesterday's briefing, Prof Nasima said 39 Covid-19 patients died, taking the tally to 2,496 -- around 1.27 percent of all confirmed cases.

A total of 2,733 people tested positive for coronavirus, which takes the total number of confirmed cases to 1,96,323, which is 19.76 percent of all samples tested.

Including the 12,889 samples tested yesterday, a total of 9,93,291 samples were tested since January 21.

Of all patients, a total of 1,06,963 -- around 54.48 percent -- recovered including yesterday's 1,940.

Of those reported dead yesterday, 31 were male and eight were female; 35 died in hospitals and four at home.

Around 79 percent of all deceased were male and more than 73 percent were aged over 50.

One of those who died yesterday was under 10, one between 11 and 20, two between 31 and 40, three between 41 and 50, 12 between 51 and 60, and 20 were over 60.

Eighteen were from Dhaka, six from Chattogram, one from Rajshahi, six from Khulna, two from Barisal, and three from each Sylhet and Rangpur divisions.

Nurse the youth

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daunting task without universal health insurance and that lack of urban infrastructure is still a deterrent to urban development.

"There is huge risk of a large number of students not coming back to school when the pandemic ends. They may fall victim to child marriage, trafficking...", said Swapan Kumar Guha, executive director of Khulna-based NGO Rupantar. He stressed on this being a potential deterrent towards reaching the SDGs.

Underprivileged children have not been included in online classes because of a digital divide, said Mishal Bin Salim, a youth leader from National Girl Child Advocacy Forum.

"Thirty-two percent of the girls who enrol in secondary schools end up dropping out, compared to the five percent of boys," pointed out Orla Murphy, country director of Plan International Bangladesh. "60 percent of girls are married under the age of 18 while 82 percent of young girls become victims of violence."

"Covid-19 has deepened the fault lines between the youth population that is thriving and the group that is vulnerable, which includes women and young girls," said Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue, who also moderated the session. "There needs to be a safeguarding policy, an adjusting

policy for the youth following the pandemic."

The Covid-19 outbreak has adversely affected the financial situation of small local NGOs who provide essential community services to the youth, said speakers.

"The challenge we have as a government is coming back on track on the SDGs and at the same time responding to the pandemic," commented Saber Hossain Chowdhury, a parliamentarian.

"If we keep the government's involvement in youth affairs limited to sports and recreation, then we will not be able to use the demographic dividend."

Currently, the government department tasked specifically with youth issues is the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

"We need to innovate now to make sure that services will find people wherever they are and help them," said Asa Torkelson, UNFPA Bangladesh Representative, speaking on the issue.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said that while there is a group of youths involved in the SDG process, there is a far larger group who is left behind, in terms of education and employability. The demographic dividend is there -- but how much have they been incorporated?

Rashidul Islam, director-general of NGO Affairs Bureau, also spoke at the event.

Financial issues

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Responding officers discovered a clothed torso, bags containing a head and arms and the electric saw in the living room, police said.

Investigators also recovered security video showing Saleh exiting an elevator that leads directly into the full-floor, two-bedroom apartment earlier on Tuesday afternoon, closely followed by someone dressed entirely in black, including a mask, according to a law enforcement official who was briefed on the case.

It also shows a struggle between the two at the entrance to the apartment, said the official, who was not authorised to discuss the investigation and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Police believe the relative may have interrupted the intruder before he could finish off the cleaning job. He fled through a back exit, Daily News tabloid reported citing sources.

The medical examiner ruled the death a homicide after an autopsy found the cause of death to be multiple stab wounds to the body. Investigators were checking security camera videos from the neighbourhood to try to locate the suspect.

As NYPD detectives sought the black-clad killer, his family issued a plea for justice.

"No words or actions to provide any of us comfort except the capture of the person who exhibited nothing short of evil upon our loved one," the family statement said.

"We need and urge the NYPD and other members of law enforcement to work diligently to get to the bottom of this horrific crime and bring justice for Fahim."

The family described the brutality of

the killing as beyond comprehension.

"The headlines talk about a crime we still cannot fathom," the statement said, going on to say that the loss was more enormous than anyone but those who really knew Saleh could understand.

"Fahim is more than what you are reading. He is so much more. His brilliant and innovative mind took everyone who was a part of his world on a journey and he made sure never to leave anyone behind."

Besides Pathao, Saleh was the chief executive and co-founder of Gokada, a motorcycle ride-sharing service that operated in Nigeria—one of his latest ventures in an entrepreneurial career that began when he was in his teens.

Friends dubbed the entrepreneur the "Elon Musk of the developing world," NBC reported.

Following his death, Saleh's former Co-Founder at Gokada, Deji Oduntan, tweeted: "I am utterly shocked and deeply saddened by the news of Fahim's death."

"Fahim was passionate about building our Ecosystem and left an indelible mark in it."

According to his LinkedIn profile, Oduntan was the Co-Found and CEO until March 2019. Oduntan stepped down amid unconfirmed allegations of mismanagement, digital barker reported at the time.

Gokada raised \$5.3million in funding in May 2019, Techcrunch reported, and documents show the company filed a security offering of \$1.7million in June 2019.

However, in February of this year, the company laid off 75 percent of its workforce following a ban on tricycles and bikes in Lagos, local media reported.



PHOTO: PTD

Marking the National Tree Plantation Campaign 2020 and "Mujib Borsho" (Mujib Year), Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurates the distribution and plantation of one crore saplings across the country on Gono Bhaban premises.

Bangladesh to move forward

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She said coronavirus is not a problem for Bangladesh alone, but for the whole world. "We pray for all in the world so that they get rid of the pandemic."

Talking about her imprisonment day, Hasina, also the Awami League president, said it is a special day as the then caretaker government arrested her on this day in 2007 by filing false cases.

"I express my gratitude to the people of Bangladesh, expatriate Bangladeshis and the world leaders as well as thank millions of leaders and workers of Awami League and its associated bodies for their protest against my imprisonment."

The premier said the caretaker government was forced to release her due to protests by the people and pressure from national and international levels.

The PM said 12 false cases were lodged against her by the former BNP-Jamaat government, while the then caretaker government filed five more false cases.

"I, at that time, said every case will have to be investigated and that

was done. By the grace of Allah, I was acquitted following their probe," she said.

Expressing her gratitude to the people, Hasina said she was freed on June 11 in 2008 due to their overwhelming support.

Talking about the country's forest coverage, she reiterated her government's goal of increasing it to 25 percent.

"When we formed the government in 1996, the country's forest coverage was only 7 percent. We raised it to 17 percent. Now, our target is to enhance the coverage to 25 percent and we are working relentlessly to achieve the goal."

The premier called upon the people to plant more trees to protect environment, saying that saving natural environment is a must.

"I would like to urge all to plant trees at places whatever you have and whatever you can. Those who live in towns can plant trees on rooftops or tubs of the balcony of their house."

"If you plant trees, you feel good and

your mind will always remain fresh. Besides, it will bring your solvency... you feel well if you eat a green chili of the tree planted by yourself. So, let's come forward to plant trees together," she said.

The PM said plantation of trees is very much essential for ensuring food and nutrition of the people.

She recalled that Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had first initiated the tree plantation campaign after the country's independence. "Today, we have taken up the programme in his memory."

Earlier, Hasina launched the distribution and plantation of one crore saplings across the country by planting three trees -- "chalta", "tentul" and "chhatayan" -- on the Gono Bhaban premises.

Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Md Shahab Uddin, Prime Minister's Office Secretary Md Tofazzel Hossain Mian, Environment Secretary Ziaul Hasan and PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim were present, among others.

Virus curbs in disarray

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CONTRADICTIONS, CHANGING MINDS

Signed by the Health Services Division Deputy Secretary Samima Nasrin, the letter to the Public Safety Division read, "... you are requested to take steps to stop people's movement from these cities to other areas." It said the recommendations were made to curb the virus spread.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader in a video message yesterday said, "I want to clarify that public transport would be operated during Eid-ul-Azha holidays."

Goods-laden vehicles, except those of emergency services, carrying drugs, cattle, and garment products, would remain off the roads from three days ahead of Eid, he said.

The general secretary of Awami League urged all to follow the health safety guidelines properly.

However, there are signs that the government changed its mind about the matter.

Sources at the road transport ministry said the Cabinet Division on July 13 wrote to ministries concerned asking for steps to suspend operation of public transport for five days prior and three days following the Eid.

The ministry the following day asked the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) to take necessary steps in this regard.

"But, we have now been verbally asked to stop the move," a top BRTA official told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury on Wednesday told a meeting that public transport

would remain suspended for nine days in total, before and after the Eid.

He later said only the movement of goods-carrying vehicles would be suspended.

This has been the norm for quite a few years.

Prof Muzaherul Huq, former Southeast Asia regional director of World Health Organisation, said running public transport does not go with the containment policy of Covid-19 transmission.

"It's wise to stop the operation of public transport until Covid-19 is contained and the number of infections is reduced substantially."

"Public transport should be suspended in the present Covid-19 situation, not just during the Eid rush," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the government had failed to maintain, monitor, and supervise health safety guidelines in public transport on previous occasions.

Ignoring the government advice to stay home, people in droves left Dhaka for their village homes days before Eid-ul-Fitr.

Experts had then said it had increased the risk of virus transmission across the country.

After the enforcement of a countrywide shutdown on March 26, operations of public transport resumed from May 31 on a limited scale. Buses and trains were asked to run at half capacity.

But there are allegations that bus and launch operators violated their guidelines.

CATTLE MARKETS

Citing NTAC's recommendations, the Health Services Division letter to the

Local Government Division suggested not setting up any cattle market in Dhaka, Chattogram, Narayanganj and Gazipur cities.

It recommended not setting up such markets inside other towns as well and choosing open spaces for market sites so that social distancing could be ensured.

The NTAC also suggested not allowing the elderly or the sick into the markets.

It wanted separate entries and exits for the markets and a fixed place for sacrificing the animals.

However, as of Tuesday, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) approved five cattle markets inside the capital. DSCC officials said they had not received any official word about the matter.

Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has issued work orders for three cattle markets while three others are already being made. The markets were, however, on the fringes of the city.

Prof Muzaherul said there should not be any gatherings, especially at cattle markets, inside red zones, or where the transmission rate is high.

"Cattle markets will obviously increase the risk of more transmissions and thus, there should not be any cattle market inside Covid-19 hotspots," he said. He suggested the authorities encourage people to buy online.

Infectious diseases specialist Prof Ridwanur Rahman echoed the views of Prof Muzaherul.

"When the number of infections is increasing in an uncontrolled manner, such a decision [allowing public transport and cattle markets] will surely increase the risk of further transmission. It's like rubbing salt into the wound," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Tk 100 for other administrative charges, and Tk 254 per container for scanning. Electric lock and seal fees will be charged as per rules, according to the letter.

Road fees will not be charged for the trial run, a shipping ministry official said.

INDIAN SHIPS TO GET PRIORITY

According to the deal between Dhaka and Delhi, Indian ships will get priority in terms of goods loading and unloading.

Asked about it, Omar Farooq said this priority does not mean that local ships will be left out of the jetty for giving space to the Indian ships. "The priority will be given provided that there is space at the jetty and yard."

Asked what will happen in a scenario that on the same day two ships -- one owned by Bangladeshi businesses and the other one is an Indian ship -- arrive, he said, "As per the agreement between the two countries, of course the Indian goods-carrying ship will be given priority."