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"The seismic shocks of the Covid-19 pandemic have shattered the lives of millions of women and girls and destroyed many of our gains."
UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTONIO GUTERRES



"I'm going to reflect on the recurring feeling I have of impending doom ... I'm scared."
US CDC DIRECTOR ROCHELLE WALENSKY WARNS OF A COMING SPIKE IN COVID CASE COUNTS

I don't think I have been involved in a game before where batters go out and don't know what the DLS target is.
BANGLADESH COACH RUSSELL DOMINGO AFTER LOSING THE SECOND T20I AGAINST NEW ZEALAND



Hardly any Hefajat hand in mayhem!

Only one of the 27 police cases names Hefajat men

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In spite of there being an abundance of video and photo documentation of the mayhem perpetrated by Hefajat-e-Islam, almost none of the police cases filed across the country mentions the name of any Hefajat man.

The Daily Star collected copies of many of the cases' statements, and spoke with officers-in-charge of the police stations concerned, but failed to find the name of a single Hefajat leader or member being made accused in almost all the cases.

The only exception was a case filed by the Paltan Police Station where 32 Hefajat men, including top leaders of the Dhaka unit of the Qawmi-madrasa based organisation, were accused.

As Hefajat protested countrywide against the arrival of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the demonstrations turned violent in several districts.

On Sunday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal had issued a statement, asking the Islamist organisation and its supporters to stop all forms of violence. He warned that they would face stern action if they did not comply.

Hefajat, on the other hand, issued a 6-point demand, one of which was that no police cases can be filed against them

to harass them. While over 27 cases were filed across the country, accusing over 15,000 people, only one held the top brass accountable.

For example, even though Brahmanbaria had borne the brunt of the violence during the hartal on Friday and then on Saturday, the police cases failed to name a single person.

Over the course of the hartal, four police outposts were attacked, eight major public establishments, including the municipality building, were incinerated, a Kali temple was vandalised while a prayer service was going on, the Bhasha Chattar was torched, legendary musical-maestro Allauddin Kha's music academy was decimated. In addition, seven private residences of AL men were destroyed. A total of seven cases were filed with police but none of them contains any names.

The officer-in-charge of Brahmanbaria Sadar Model police station Md Abdur Rahim said three cases were filed with the police station for vandalism and arson of the police superintendent's office and the town police range, accusing a total of 6,500 unnamed people. OC Rahim also said that two more cases were filed for the vandalism of the district Ansar and VDP office, accusing 500 unnamed people. Fourteen

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Four female volunteers of Quantum Foundation taking the body of Mazeda Begum, 55, out of the capital's Mugda General Hospital. Mazeda, a housewife from Narsingdi, died of Covid-19 yesterday after undergoing treatment at the hospital for two days. The volunteers washed the body and wrapped it in a shroud following health guidelines to get it ready for burial.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

COMMENTARY

HEFAJAT'S MAYHEM A wake-up call for AL, for us all

MAHFUZ ANAM

The ostensible reason for the recent protests was Indian PM Narendra Modi's latest visit. The real reason was to signal that Hefajat-e-Islam (HI) under its new leadership was not the same party as it was under its former chief Shah Ahmad Shafi and his immediate followers and to announce that HI was ready to emerge as a new political force under the guise of protecting the majority faith. It is also a signal that the government's policy of appeasement has totally failed and the compromises and concessions so generously and unthinkingly given have only helped make them stronger and more determined to challenge the fundamental character of the country. The situation stands as a testimony to the follies of a politics of power and arrogance that has led the ruling party to cripple all its political allies representing secular and democratic forces.

To politically obliterate Jamaat, Sheikh Hasina wanted to create an alternative Islamic force. The choice was Qawmi-Madrasa based Hefajat-e-Islam (HI). The logic was as simple as it was attractive. The AL needed an "Islamic party" that did not have the unacceptable features of opposing the birth of Bangladesh and being involved in anti-liberation activities and whose leaders were not among the war criminals of 1971. By having such a force aligned with it, AL could easily obliterate the Jamaat.

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Govt moves to raise number of hospital beds

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The government has taken steps to increase the number of beds in public hospitals and open temporary healthcare facilities in Dhaka in a bid to accommodate the rising number of Covid-19 patients.

As part of the move, Dhaka North City Corporation kitchen market in Mohakhali will be turned into a makeshift hospital dedicated for novel coronavirus patients.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said, "The makeshift hospital will be able to accommodate around 1,200 patients at a time. It will have 51 ICU beds."

He said they have instructed the capital's three specialised public hospitals - National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases and National Institute of Kidney Diseases and Urology -- to open units dedicated for coronavirus patients with 100 beds each soon.

"We are trying our best to improve the facilities at hospitals. We have already given instructions in this regard."

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Response delayed, and it lacks clarity

Experts say about govt's 18-point directive on containing Covid surge

MOUJUD AHMED SUJAN

Experts say the 18-point directive that the government issued on Monday to curb the rapid surge in Covid cases is not only a delayed response but it also lacks clarity.

With daily cases crossing the 5,000 mark for the last couple of days, experts have strongly suggested imposing a lockdown in the Covid hotspots in Dhaka and Chattogram.

"I would say it is too late to issue such notifications. The daily infection positivity rate has risen from 2.30 percent to 18.94 percent. Now it is high time to enforce curfew in big cities. The hotspots where the infection positivity rate is high should be isolated from the rest of the country," Md Sayedur Rahman, chairman of the pharmacology department, BSMMU, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The country recorded 5,042 cases and 45 deaths in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday. On Monday, 5,181 cases were recorded, the

highest in a day since the pandemic hit the country in March last year.

Taking the sharp rise in Covid cases into consideration, the government on Monday issued fresh directives, including restrictions on social gatherings and extension of closure of educational institutions with immediate effect.

Those will remain in force for at least two weeks, read a gazette notification signed by prime minister's Principle Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus.

As per the directives, the number of participants at all public meetings have to be kept at a limited scale and no gatherings will be allowed in areas that are seeing high transmission of the virus.

The government is yet to publish the list of high transmission areas.

A source in the health directorate, however, said the government has classified Dhaka, Narayanganj and Chattogram as "high risk" zone. Four districts - Rangamati,

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ARRIVALS FROM EU, UK Institutional quarantine for 14 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All passengers arriving from the UK and other European countries will have to be in institutional quarantine for 14 days at government facilities or government-approved hotels at their own costs.

This will take effect on March 31 and continue until further notice, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh announced yesterday.

Caab came up with the announcement taking into consideration the deterioration of Covid-19 situation in the country and elsewhere, it said in a statement.

After the 14-day quarantine period, passengers will have to take Covid-19 tests and

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Only 2 oxygen cylinders at emergency

Mugda struggles to deal with deluge of Covid patients

ANISUR RAHMAN

With only two oxygen cylinders, the emergency unit of Mugda Medical College Hospital in the capital is struggling to cope with the influx of coronavirus patients.

Apart from treating follow-up patients, attending doctors and nurses in the emergency unit of the Covid-19-dedicated hospital were seen trying to serve the critical patients with severe respiratory problems.

Watching from a distance, this correspondent saw at least six such patients arrive at the hospital between 12:00pm and 2:30pm. But the emergency unit could only provide oxygen support to three of them with the available cylinders, which had to be switched from one patient to the other.

Since there were no beds
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Two staffers take Monir Hossain, 50, out of Mugda General Hospital in the capital yesterday after doctors referred him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Monir, an employee of Titas Gas, has been suffering from cold, throat pain and breathing problems for the last 10 days. After being denied admission to two hospitals and a health complex due to unavailability of seats, he finally got admitted to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Buses, trains to ply at half capacity

Bus fare to rise 60pc from today; train, launch fare to remain same

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the country witnessing a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases and deaths, the authorities concerned has imposed restrictions on carrying passengers in buses, trains and launches.

Bus and minibus are going to charge 60 percent more than the existing fare from today on condition that they would carry 50 percent passengers of their capacities and maintain necessary health safety guidelines.

Bangladesh Railway yesterday started selling 50 percent tickets of a train capacity. However, it may take a few days to start operation with 50 percent passengers as many advance tickets up to April 4 have already been sold.

Launch owners have also been directed to carry 50 percent passengers on the deck from yesterday. However, launch and train fares would remain the same.

The government on Monday issued the new directives to curb the fresh and sharp rise of Covid-19 cases in the country.

As per the directives, issued by the Prime Minister's Office, public transport cannot carry passengers over 50 percent of the capacity.

Inter-district transport has to be limited to areas with higher infections, has to be suspended entirely if necessary, the directives said.

The new bus fare would be applicable for next two
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