

Help govt contain

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has increased so fast on March 29, 30 and 31 which is unthinkable," she said.

"So, I would like to tell all people that we will have to check coronavirus again like exactly what we did at the first time to control everything," the PM told parliament while taking part in the discussion on a condolence motion.

The motion was placed during the first sitting of the 12th session of the current Jatiya Sangsad at the death of Awami League MP Mahmud Us Samad Chowdhury (Sylhet-3) who died on March 11.

Hasina said the government was trying to bring the pandemic situation under control. She said assistance from the people was necessary in this regard.

The leader of the House said though the novel coronavirus was largely controlled in Bangladesh initially, the country is now witnessing a sudden surge in infection rate as people are ignoring health guidelines since the launch of the vaccination campaign thinking that nothing would happen to them.

"But I had repeatedly asked people to wear masks and follow the health guidelines even after taking jabs against coronavirus. However, maintaining the health protocol has stopped."

Hasina said attending marriage ceremonies and visiting tourist spots mainly contributed to the sudden surge in the infection rate. She urged people to arrange marriage ceremonies on a limited scale following health guidelines.

"After returning home from offices or other places, people should inhale the steam from hot water by covering their head with a piece of cloth. This can work effectively against coronavirus."

She suggested that people should oil their nose with mustard oil before leaving home.

The premier said her government has already issued some directives

to fight the coronavirus outbreak effectively.

She expressed deep shock at the deaths of lawmaker Mahmud Us Samad Chowdhury, and some noted personalities, including her political adviser HT Imam, and conveyed sympathy to the bereaved families.

She described both Samad Chowdhury and HT Imam as politically conscious persons and recalled their contributions to nation building activities.

Talking about late BNP leader Barrister Moudud Ahmed, six-time MP from Noakhali-5 and Bogura-7, Hasina said he was a very talented person.

"But had it [talent] been used properly with patriotism, he could have given a lot to the country."

She said Moudud had never been appointed as a lawyer in the Agartola Conspiracy Case though he had claimed so. "However, he was with Dr Kamal Hossain and Barrister Amirul Islam at that time."

She said the BNP leader was never involved in the politics of Chhatra League and he always stayed with the ruling party.

"When Moudud returned to Bangladesh in 1969 after completing Barrister-at-Law abroad, sympathy was always showed towards him as a son-in-law of poet Jasimuddin."

Moudud was arrested in 1973 for leaking secret information on Bangladesh to others, the PM said, adding that he was released after poet Jasimuddin requested Bangabandhu in this regard.

After the discussion, the House unanimously adopted the condolence motion, moved by Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan, Opposition Chief Whip Mashiur Rahman Ranga, Awami League MPs Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Muhammad Faruk Khan, Jatiya Party's Pir Fazlur Rahman, and BNP's Harunur Rashid, among others, also took part in the discussion.

USSR urges Yahya to stop bloodshed

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Soviet Union by the arrests and persecution of [Bangabandhu Sheikh] Mujibur Rahman and other politicians who had received such convincing support by the overwhelming majority of the population of East Pakistan at the recent general elections."

Podgorny urged for adoption of "the most urgent measures" to stop the bloodshed and repressions against the population in East Pakistan and for turning to methods of a peaceful political settlement.

PAKISTAN WARNS INDIA

Pakistan today warned India that "serious consequences" could result from Indian actions that Pakistan regarded as grave interference in her internal affairs.

The warning was delivered by the Pakistan foreign office in Islamabad through the Indian high commission there to New Delhi. It protested Indian sympathy and support for an East Pakistan "secessionist movement" that the Pakistan government is trying

to suppress. This was Pakistan's third formal protest in a week to India over the East Pakistan situation.

Today's communication was a formal protest against the adoption of a resolution by the Indian parliament expressing solidarity with and support for the Bangladesh independence movement. New charges of Indian assistance to the resistance forces were also made today in Islamabad.

JINJIRA MASSACRE

To flee the massacre in Dhaka, a large number of people flocked to Keraniganj, on the other side of the Buriganga river. The Pakistan army, now in control of Dhaka city after the crackdown of March 25, marked Keraniganj and surrounding areas as a target for military operation.

The areas were also inhabited by a large number of Hindu families. The Pakistan army started to amass forces around Keraniganj from midnight of April 1. At around 5:00am, they signalled the attack by throwing flares from the roof of the mosque adjacent

to the Mitford Hospital.

The army moved into Jinjira, Kalindi and Shubhadya of Keraniganj and opened fire on people. The massacre continued for nearly nine hours. About 1,000 people were killed in the operation. On the night of April 2, Pakistan Television broadcast news about strong military action against "separatist miscreants" taking shelter at Jinjira of Keraniganj on the other side of Buriganga.

On April 3, The Morning News came up with the headline, "Actions taken against miscreants at Jinjira."

RED CROSS AID BARRED

The International Committee of the Red Cross had been refused authorisation by the Pakistani government to send a relief team with eight tonnes of medical and other supplies to Bangladesh, a spokesman said today.

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All local body polls postponed

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parishad and sixth phase of municipality elections due to the coronavirus situation, EC Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar Debnath told reporters after the meeting was held at the EC office in the capital.

All the elections were slated for April 11.

The polls will be held after the situation improves, he added.

On March 3, the EC announced the schedule of by-elections to the Laxmipur-2 constituency as the parliamentary seat of independent lawmaker Mohammad Shahid Islam alias Kazi Papul got vacated on the grounds of moral turpitude after his conviction in Kuwait in criminal offence.

On the same day, it was also announced that polls will be held in 371 union parishads in the first phase and 11 municipalities in the sixth phase.

In first phase of the UP polls, 73

chairman candidates have been elected uncontested, while 1,429 candidates are vying for the chairman posts of the rest UPs.

Amid the pandemic, the EC already held Chattogram City Corporation polls, several by-election to parliamentary seats, and fives phases of municipality elections.

DUAL VOTERS

Additional Secretary Ashok said the commission meeting decided to form committees at upazila level to settle the matter of dual voters. He said the committee will scrutinise whether a person has become a dual voter intentionally or it is their mistake or they have done it in good faith.

"Cases will be filed if we find anybody became a dual voter with ill intention during the scrutiny," he said.

EC officials said the EC has identified 5,29,607 dual voters from 2008 to February this year. In other words, these people have become voters twice and they have two national identity

cards.

They said in most cases the EC has locked their ID cards. Many became voters in two places without knowing. Again, many have given different names, addresses, dates of birth in two places to become dual voters.

In the meeting copy, EC has instructed to file cases against 1,058 people who have been identified that they have taken dual identity cards and so far cases were filed against 556 people.

In another development, the commission meeting also decided that it would send letters to all the registered political parties, asking them about the progress in achieving the target of 33 percent women's political representation by 2020, said Ashok.

This move was made following an amendment to incorporate this provision into the RPO in 2008, and failure to meet this means the EC can cancel registration of a political party, according to EC officials.

Entry ban on passengers

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CAAB made the decision after reviewing the spread of coronavirus in Bangladesh and elsewhere, the circular said.

Airlines operating scheduled flights from the aforesaid countries will be allowed to bring only transit passengers to Bangladesh, given the passengers remain inside the terminal building during their transit.

Special flights to and from Dhaka have been suspended, and depending on the situation, regular flights might also get suspended, CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman told reporters at his office.

The number of passengers on flights within Bangladesh might not be reduced since the airlines are ensuring proper health safety measures, he added.

"The airlines have assured us about maintaining health guidelines," Mafidur said.

Thanks to the precautions, air travel is much safer than traveling by other means, he added.

"We asked the airlines not to carry any more than 260 passengers in wide-bodied [with two or more aisles] planes.

"In an airplane with three seats in a row, the person sitting in the middle must wear a face shield. If that

passenger feels uncomfortable, the airlines will have to provide him or her with PPE."

The circular said everyone coming to Bangladesh must have a certificate vouching that they tested negative for coronavirus in a PCR machine before leaving for Bangladesh, CAAB said in the circular.

The test must be done no earlier than 72 hours of the flight.

Everyone arriving in the country will have to be in quarantine at home for 14 days while those detected with Covid-19 symptoms on arrival must be in quarantine at a government facility or a government approved hotel at their own expenses, CAAB also said.

Anyone who had been in the aforesaid countries in transit and had left the terminal buildings there would need a new PCR test done in that country. The test should be done no earlier than 72 hours of the flight to Bangladesh.

Besides, they would have to be in quarantine at a government facility or a government approved hotel for four days.

Swabs will be collected for another PCR test, and if they test negative for coronavirus, they will be asked to be in home quarantine for an additional 14-day period.

Nine veteran HK activists

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and Margaret Ng, a 73-year-old barrister and former opposition lawmaker.

Media tycoon Jimmy Lai, currently in custody after his arrest under Beijing's new national security law, was among those convicted.

Leung Kwok-hung, an opposition politician known by his sobriquet "Long Hair" who has also been detained on national security charges, was also sent down.

Others are leading members of the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), the coalition that organised a series of huge rallies throughout 2019.

Some struck a defiant tone outside court yesterday morning ahead of the verdict, holding banners that read "protest political suppression".

"We are very proud even if we have to go to jail for it," Lee Cheuk-yan, a former legislator and labour leader told reporters. "We will still march on no matter what lies in the future."

Seven were found guilty of organising and knowingly participating in an unauthorised assembly. Two others had previously pleaded guilty.

They face up to five years in jail.

The group was prosecuted for organising an unauthorised assembly on August 18, 2019 -- one of the biggest in Hong Kong that year as people took to the streets calling for democracy and greater police accountability.

Organisers claimed 1.7 million people turned out -- almost one in four Hong Kong residents -- though that number was difficult to independently verify.

It was easily one of the biggest rallies that year, with dense crowds marching peacefully for hours under a sea of umbrellas and thundery skies.

Protests in Hong Kong can only go ahead with the permission of

authorities and rights groups have long criticised the use of unauthorised assembly prosecutions.

Prosecutors accused the group of defying police instructions that day and encouraging crowds to march across Hong Kong's main island, bringing traffic disruption.

In her verdict, district Judge AJ Woodcock indicated that she was inclined to go for a maximum jail sentence and said the fact the march was peaceful was no defence.

The group will be sentenced on 16 April and those not already detained on separate charges were granted bail on condition they surrender their passports and remain in Hong Kong.

Since 2019, protests have been all but outlawed with authorities either refusing permission on security grounds or because of the pandemic.

The rallies often descended into clashes between riot police and a knot of hardcore participants, and posed the most concerted challenge to China's rule since the former British colony's 1997 handover.

The movement eventually fizzled out under the combined weight of exhaustion, some 10,000 arrests and the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic.

Authorities have since unleashed a broad crackdown and Beijing has imposed a new security law which criminalises much dissent.

Earlier this week Chinese leaders also passed a new law governing Hong Kong's already limited local elections.

The number of directly elected seats for the 90-seat legislature was slashed to less than a quarter while anyone wanting to stand for public office will have to be vetted by national security police and officials for their "patriotism".

Integration has a long way to go

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working as an intern office assistant at a local office of the directorate of social services.

"I used to be treated as a burden for my community. Now, I am earning and supporting my parents. My community gets to know that disorder like autism does not make a person invalid. We can work, we can earn if we are included in society," he said.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Sanzid considers himself lucky to have gotten access to these specialised learning facilities as children with autism in this society face indescribable discrimination and challenges in integrating at mainstream schools and society.

Although legislation in the country provides for equal access to quality education, children with disabilities are rejected by most schools, ultimately reducing their chances of employment.

A disability identification survey by the Ministry of Social Welfare, updated on its website as of yesterday, counts 60,983 children and adults living with autism in Bangladesh.

However, a 2017 survey conducted by the Institute of Paediatric Neuro-disorder and Autism (IPNA) of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), indicates the number of persons with autism is much higher.

Its survey revealed that 17 out of every 1,000 children aged between 17-30 months in urban areas, and 14 per every 1,000 children in rural areas in the same age group had this condition.

Salma Begum, consultant of Autistic Children's Welfare Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation run by parents of children with disabilities, said, "Inclusive education for children with autism still has a long way to go in our country."

"Most schools do not agree to enrol children with autism. They say that if

they enrol these children, their non-disabled students might be affected. Parents of non-disabled children also create obstacles when we go to enrol our children."

As a result, in most cases, parents like her have to go to special schools where their children study alongside others with various types of neuro-developmental disorders, she added.

Autism is recognised as a neuro-developmental disorder (NDD) in Bangladesh and is treated along with three other types of NDDs -- cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and intellectual disability.

More than six years on from the formation of the Neurodevelopmental Disability Protection (NDDP) Trust, a government organisation under the social welfare ministry tasked with ensuring inclusion of children with NDD, its activities are hardly visible and restricted to arranging some workshops and seminars.

NDDP Trust Chairman Prof Dr Md Golam Rabbani said, "We don't have any permanent staff yet. We are in the process of recruiting officers to become fully operational."

"I know many people with autism and other NDDs who have been employed and are doing fairly well in their workplace. They are extremely honest, diligent, and punctual; if they are taught to do a particular task, they will do it with extreme perfection."

Prof Dr Gopen Kumar Kundu, deputy director of BSMMU's IPNA and a deputy director of the autism cell at the health ministry, said, "One of the main characteristics of children with autism is they face difficulties in communication and in social interaction. Sometimes they become very angry and show repetitive behaviour."

"However, if autism can be detected within the age of three and speech and occupational therapy can be ensured timely, most of these difficulties can be overcome. In this way, a person with

autism can become fully employable if we can provide some support and vocational training."

However, like inclusive education, regular employment of people with autism and other NDDs is not widespread.

"Most people cannot fathom that people with autism or other NDDs can be employed," said Karishma Ahmed, director of SEID (Society for Education and Inclusion of the Disabled), which has been working to ensure education, training and employment of children with disabilities. SEID is the organisation which helped Sanzid enrol in school and provided him vocational training.

After consulting hundreds of employers for months, she said, they are able to convince only two or three -- mostly small and medium-sized enterprises.

On March 29, SEID and the Down Syndrome Society of Bangladesh, in association with Inclusion International, organised a workshop for potential employers to sensitise them about the employability of persons with NDDs.

The workshop was facilitated by two young professionals with NDDs -- Mosammam Shila Moni, a young woman with cerebral palsy currently working as a salesperson at a cosmetics shop, and Shahadat Akbar Anan, a person with Down Syndrome currently working as an office assistant at an NGO.

"It is very hopeful that we have started getting responses from potential and current employers and we are getting extremely encouraging feedback about the performance of these employees," said Karishma.

"At present, people with NDDs work mostly in the informal sector in low pay positions. Now, our goal is to ensure employment of NDD persons in the formal sector where they will enjoy full employment rights and benefits."

80pc turnout

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an unidentified group of people attacked Ghosh's vehicle with bricks and bamboo sticks, and also vandalised cars of media personnel, a police officer said.

Mamata, who is camping in Nandigram, visited several booths across the constituency and slammed the Election Commission for "inaction" despite her party lodging several polls-related complaints and threatened to move the law courts over it.

The Election Commission sought a detailed report from the administration in connection with an incident of violence in Boyal area in Nandigram where Mamata paid a visit to oversee the polling process.

As soon as Mamata reached Boyal, BJP supporters started chanting "Jai Shri Ram".

Supporters of Trinamool Congress and BJP then got embroiled in skirmishes and TMC leaders demanded re-polling in booth number 7, police said.

"We have lodged 63 complaints since morning. But no action has been taken. We will move the court over it. This is unacceptable," Mamata said while sitting in a wheelchair outside a booth in Boyal.

"The EC is working on the instructions of [Indian Home Minister] Amit Shah," she alleged.

From a booth in Nandigram, Mamata spoke to West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar over phone at a polling booth in Nandigram. "... They didn't allow the local people to cast their vote. From morning, I am campaigning... Now I am appealing to you, please see," she could be heard saying in a video footage.

Mamata is looking to return for the third successive term as chief minister in the face of stiff challenge from BJP which is trying to wrest power in West Bengal for the first time.

West Bengal has a total of 294 assembly seats, out of which polling for 30 seats was held in the first phase on March 27.

Six more phases of polling will be held for the remaining seats in April before vote count is taken up on May 2.

Over a lakh lose

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country went into a lockdown. Since then he turned to his bike to provide him with the means to feed his family.

"This decision is not just bad for me, it can literally mean that my family has to starve to death," said the former RMG worker.

"I live with my wife and two kids, and I have to support my younger brother who is a college student. It is the beginning of the month, my house rent is Tk 8,000, and it is due in ten days but if I spend whatever money I have on rent, I will not have anything left to feed my family with," said Al-Amin.

His former colleague Abdul Kuddus is at a similar quandary. After losing his RMG job to the pandemic, Kuddus had taken his bike to the road.

"It feeds me, my two children and my old mother. It helps me put a roof over their heads. If I cannot ride my bike, how can I still afford that roof?" he asked.

Kuddus used to be able to earn around Tk 1,000 for 12 hours of being on the road, but has nothing in savings to tide him over this period.

According to 2019 data that different ride sharing companies submitted to the BRTA, there were some 1.23 lakh cars and motorcycles associated with different ride-hailing companies. Of them, 1.04 lakh were motorcycles.

In addition, BRTA sources said that 23,493 vehicles were enlisted with the BRTA to operate under the ride-sharing services, of which 80 percent are motorcycles.

"We are ready to adopt any and every safety measure needed to make sure our passengers are safe. We can tie rocks to our stomachs and tide this through, but will our families starve to death?" asked the secretary of the Dhaka Ride-Sharing Union Belal Ahmed, while protesting in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

"We implore the policy-makers to come up with a decision that allows us to maintain safety guidelines while earning a livelihood. If they do not want us to be on the road, they have to arrange for relief for all of us," he said.

UP panel

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blocked his father's road by a motorbike and shot him. The criminal then swiftly fled the scene.

Hearing the gunshot, locals rushed to the spot and sent him to Goalanda Upazila Health Complex. He was then shifted to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical College Hospital in Faridpur, he added.

As his condition deteriorated, he was referred to Enam Medical College in Savar where he breathed last around 11:30am yesterday, he further said.

"A bullet was removed from his lower abdomen but he did not survive," he said.

Mohammad Abdullah Al Taybir, officer-in-charge of Goalanda Ghat Police Station, said they visited the spot on information and were trying to detain the miscreant.

No case was filed in this connection till 5:30pm yesterday when this report was filed.