



The Daily Star



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"The government should handle them with an iron hand. If necessary, a tribunal should be formed to try them."
AL PRESIDUM MEMBER SHEIKH FAZLUL KARIM SELIM ABOUT HEFAJAT

"BJP wants to divide Bengal ... These people want to end Bengal, its language, its culture."
MAMATA BANERJEE AS POLLS CAMPAIGN HEATS UP IN WEST BENGAL

"This madness must stop. Sanctions and an arms embargo must be imposed to cut their [the junta's] access to revenue and weapons."
UN RIGHTS RAPporteur TOM ANDREWS AS DEADLY CRACKDOWN CONTINUES IN MYANMAR

'Lockdown' looms

Proposals sent to PM for approval as pandemic takes deadly turn



PROPOSED CURBS

- Restriction on public movement between 8:00pm to 6:00am countrywide
- No travel from one district to another
- Maximum 5 people allowed for daily prayers at every mosque, 10 for Juma
- Tourist spots closed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to impose a countrywide "lockdown" for a week from tomorrow in a desperate bid to contain the rising number of new cases of Covid-19 and deaths from it.

"Coronavirus is spreading rapidly. Infection and death are jumping up. In the given situation, Sheikh Hasina's government has decided to impose a one-week countrywide lockdown from Monday," Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said yesterday.

Production facilities might be allowed to

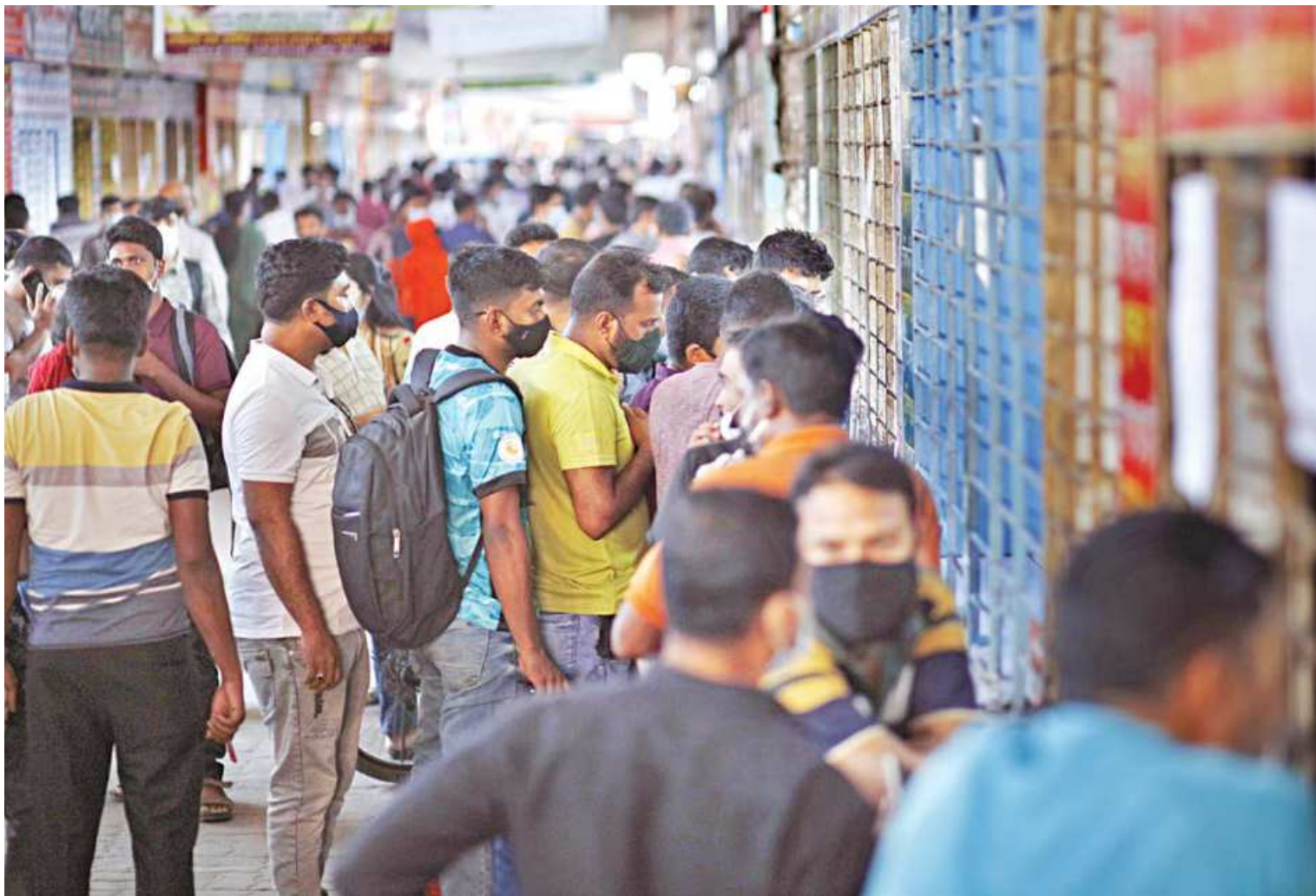
remain operational on certain conditions, he told a briefing from his official residence.

According to Quader, also the Awami League general secretary, the public administration ministry was to issue a circular detailing the new restrictions by yesterday evening. But it wasn't issued until late last night.

State Minister for Public Administration Forhad Hossain also commented about the possibility of a "lockdown" in a couple of days.

Organisations providing emergency services will not be restricted, he told

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Bus ticket sales at Gabtoli terminal spiked hours after the news spread that the government might enforce a week-long lockdown across the country amid a surge of Covid-19 cases. Transport associations said many people were buying tickets so that they can be in their hometown during the lockdown.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

People rush to get out of the capital

Panic buying at the kitchen markets

STAR REPORT

A sudden rush of people in kitchen markets and a growing number of passengers at inter-district bus terminals in Dhaka was seen after the news of a possible lockdown from Monday onward was announced in the media yesterday.

The Karwan Bazaar kitchen market in the city saw an influx of customers from around 12 noon, which continued till evening. Traders said people were focused on buying sanitizers and daily essential commodities like lintel, sugar, wheat, potato and onion.

"The flow of customers started to increase around one hour after the lockdown was announced. Normally, we don't see such an influx of customers even before Eid," said Gorfan, owner of a grocery store in one of the biggest kitchen markets in the city.

He said that he had not even seen such an influx of buyers during the first lockdown in March last year, adding that the rush yesterday was probably a combined effect of three factors -- the beginning of a month, the holy Ramadan just over a week away and the

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The poor brace for bleaker days

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

One thing from the lockdown last year still etched raw in the collective memory of the city is hordes of starving people coming out onto the streets.

The scenes were straight out of a Dickensian nightmare -- hungry people standing beneath the tall unyielding buildings of the city, imploring food, hungry people stampeding each other while running after relief trucks that held far too less rice for far too many people. Those who could not bring themselves to beg on the streets, went to bed hungry night after night.

Now, the government's announcement of imposing social restrictions beginning tomorrow sends a strong message to the general public -- the situation is going from bad to worse and it is time to go back inside. This time last year, the Covid-19 positivity rate was 2 percent, yesterday it was 23.1 percent.

It is those people who are once again looking at the skyrocketing positivity rates with a dread that is far removed from dying of Covid-19. They are more worried about surviving.

Mohammed Alam, a rickshaw puller from the capital's Abuler Bostli slum has been a resident of the city for the past 23 years, but he never experienced a year like the one which has gone by. Now he faces the weeks ahead of him with the fear of starvation. Alam lives with his nine-year-old daughter and elderly mother.

"I had to take loans of Tk 25,000 last year just to survive. Things were so bad that I was eating rice and dried chili, which gave me ulcer. Even potatoes were too expensive. Now, we are finally able to afford potatoes and onions.

"If people go back inside, which one do we cut back on? How much less can we eat than what we are eating right now?" asked Alam.

Rubina Begum is a domestic helper employed at two houses in Benarasi Polli, gigs that she only going towards the end of the last year after the pandemic restrictions eased. Now with the restrictions coming down hard again, she is fearing unemployment.

"I used to work six days a week at a house, but just this week my

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MAYHEM IN B'BARIA Blame game at full throttle Intelligence blames it all on Hefajat

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MASUK HRIDYO

A week after the Brahmanbaria mayhem, Hefajat-e-Islam, the ruling Awami League and the BNP are trading blame for the widespread violence and damages in the town.

There are signs of destruction in many areas of the town. At least two dozen government and non-government installations, including temples, music academy, land office, district council office, municipality office, police outpost and houses of Awami League leaders, were destroyed during the March 26-28 mayhem.

Hefajat-e-Islam, who had called the protest programme and enforced a hartal on March 27 over police actions on demonstrations and death of their supporters, now claims that a "third party" carried out the violence to take advantage of the situation.

The AL, however, is pointing finger at its rival group in Brahmanbaria district and also at the BNP-Jamaat while the BNP says the violence took place due to the "rivalry between two groups of the ruling party".

However, a team of an intelligence agency, which visited the district after the

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HEFAJAT, LIKE-MINDED GROUPS BFIU seeks bank info of 24 leaders

Also wants details of 30 madrasas' accounts over terror financing suspicion

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) of the government has sought the bank account details of 24 leaders of different organisations, including Hefajat-e-Islam and 30 madrasas.

The BFIU issued the notice on March 31, asking the banks to send the information within five working days.

The move came right after the recent mayhem by activists of Hefajat-e-Islam that killed 13 people since March 26.

Hefajat had been protesting the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi upon the invitation of the Bangladesh government to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the country's independence.

Officials said the BFIU, the central financial intelligence agency, has taken the initiative to look into the sources of funds of the Islamist organisations.

"Banks have been asked to give details of all accounts belonging to the [specified] persons and madrasas as part of a BFIU investigation to detect whether they have been involved in money laundering and terrorist financing," an official told The Daily Star yesterday.

Those named in BFIU report includes Hefajat-e-Islam Ameer Junayed Babunagari, Secretary General Nur Hossain Kasemi, Vice President Mahfuzul Haque, Finance Secretary Monir Hossain Kasemi, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Ameer Moulana Islami Nurpori and Secretary General Mamunul Haque.

Mamunul is also the joint secretary general of Hefajat-e-Islam while Nur Hossain Kasemi had passed away in December last year.

The BFIU also asked the banks to submit account details of Islami Andolan Bangladesh Ameer Syed Mohammad Rezaul Karim, Secretary General Syed Faizul Karim and Bangladesh Imam and Musolli Oikya Parishad Secretary General at Demra Mahmudul Hasan Siraji.

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