

## 'Exempt us from the lockdown'

Small traders rally in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, RAJSHAHI

Small traders in Rajshahi staged a demonstration in the city yesterday, demanding exclusion of their businesses from the lockdown.

They began demonstrating at 10am, blocking the road in front of RDA market and chanting slogans for allowing them to keep their shops open during the lockdown.

Two hours later, police and district administration officials went to the scene and talked to them. At 12pm, demonstrators withdrew, as the administrative officials agreed to sit with them in the afternoon.

The traders announced that they would occupy the street again today, if their demands remain unfulfilled.

They threatened to defy the prohibition on opening shops and markets.

Abu Aslam, additional deputy commissioner of Rajshahi, said the district administration heard the traders, and they would convey their demands to the government high-ups. "Everyone should have to abide by the rules of the lockdown

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People were seen queued up in front of a Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) truck at Abdul Gani Road in the capital, buying groceries at a fair price amid a week of shutdown. But many had their masks below their noses, and social distancing was a forgone concept.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

FIRST DAY OF LOCKDOWN IN CTG

## Commuters bear the brunt of it

ARUN BIKASH DEY, CTG

On the first day of the countrywide seven-day lockdown, port city commuters suffered immensely due to acute shortage of public transport.

For office-goers, the situation remained the same as the previous few days, as they were subjected to the demand of reaching their workplaces, which remained open even though there weren't nearly enough transportation available.

While visiting different areas including Bahaddarhat, Muradpur, Chawkbazar, Panchlaish, Rahattarpool, Katalganj, Baduratala, Kapasgola, and Chandpura, this correspondent found clusters of office goers waiting for a bus or a human haulier in every intersection throughout the day.

However, very few public transports were plying the roads, and they had to maintain the government mandated 50 percent seat capacity limit. As a result, rickshaws and motorbikes were seen dominating the roads.

Many bikers were seen carrying contracted passengers, but even that couldn't balance out the overwhelming imbalance between passengers and their demand for a ride.

"Lockdown or no lockdown, my office is still open," said a frustrated Minhaz Uddin Mahmud, who works at a private firm in Agrabad. "I have managed to come to Chawkbazar bus stand on a rickshaw half-an-hour ago. I've been waiting for some kind of a motorised vehicle ever since."

Asked whether he knew public transports would be limited during the lockdown, he said, "Does it matter to me? I have to get to my office anyway. If the government didn't want people to get out, why couldn't it

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## Same crisis, a year later

Experts urge action to curb Covid-19 in Sylhet, before things go out of hand

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

On April 5 last year, Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital Assistant Professor Dr Md Moyeen Uddin tested positive for Covid-19. He was the very first of such patients in Sylhet, and was the first doctor of the country to have succumbed to the virus on April 15.

A year later, Sylhet is among the districts with the highest Covid-19 cases, with 11,043 cases and 225 deaths till yesterday, according to the Divisional Health Office in Sylhet.

According to a list prepared by Sylhet Health Department based on multiple factors, the district is at fifth-highest risk of Covid-19. Sylhet has been under high risk for many reasons, including inbound UK returnees carrying new strain of Covid-19, failed institutional quarantine system for returnees and lax vigilance of

administration when imposing health rules.

As a result of such negligence of authorities and citizens, Covid-19 dedicated hospitals in Sylhet were overwhelmed with 161 patients yesterday.

Dr Chayan Roy, acting resident medical officer of Sylhet Shaheed Shamsuddin Ahmed Hospital, said, "We're maxed out every day, and there is no bed available at the ICU [intensive care unit], although many infected patients in the regular ward need ICU support."

The 100-bed hospital, dedicated for treating Covid-19 patients, has only 16 ICU beds.

"Unlike the very first months of the pandemic, patients are now coming in worse conditions, and are demanding more oxygen. We're struggling to manage more inbound patients," the doctor explained.

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## Covid cases keep rising in Barishal

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

With coronavirus infection rate increasing in Barishal every day, the district administration has instructed people to strictly follow health guidelines.

However, people seem to be oblivious to the risk, said officials.

Dr Basudeb Kumar Das, Barishal divisional health director of Directorate General of Health Services, said now 35-40 people are being infected every day. From the end of February to the first week of March, the infection rate was 2 to 3 percent in the division and currently it's 22 percent. The total number of patients on March 31 was 1,1267. Now the figure is 11,554.

A total of 204 people died of Covid-19 in the division till Sunday.

According to DGHS in Barishal, 77 people were infected in six districts of the division from March 13 to 19 while 226 were infected in seven days from March 20 to 26. On Saturday, 77 tested positive.

Meanwhile, doctors at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital said they do not have any empty ICU bed left at this major hospital.

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## 'Work with honesty for country's advancement'

Speakers at discussion urge youth

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent citizens yesterday urged the young generation to be imbued with patriotism and work with devotion and honesty aiming to contribute to the country's advancement.

Speakers at the award-giving ceremony of second essay competition of Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Foundation also said students should have relentless effort to know the country and work for betterment of society and gaining knowledge.

Razzaq Foundation awarded six winners of essay competition through a virtual programme yesterday evening.

For school and college-level students (first to 12th grade), the topic for the essay competition was "Bangabandhu's dream and the achievements of Bangladesh" and for university level students, the topic was

"The role of students and teachers in the emergence of Bangladesh".

Presiding over the ceremony, Chairman of Bengal Foundation and founding trustee member of the foundation Abul Khair said if one does not have patriotism, they cannot progress in anything.

"If you have patriotism, you will have interest in learning your language, knowing your country and practicing your culture. If anyone has these virtues, they can become a humanitarian. If someone is humane, they try to do something for the country", he said.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said patriotism has a deeper meaning. "Wherever we are, whatever we are doing -- an engineer, a doctor, a writer, a journalist -- we can express our patriotism

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## PM's speech unmasked 'exploiters of religion'

Obaidul Quader urges all to 'resist the evil forces'

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's speech has uncovered the faces of "those who exploit religion".

"Her remark on the moral degradation of a Hefajat leader is factual and true," he told a press conference on contemporary issues at his official residence in the capital.

Quader, also road transport and bridges minister, said people thought that the so-called leaders would apologise in public after this "shameful incident", but they did not do so. He said people of the country will not allow them to turn religion "into a tool".

The AL general secretary said after an immoral incident at a resort in Sonargaon, the phone conversation of a Hefajat leader also went viral on social media.

He said the vandalism and arson attacks are being carried out at different parts of the country supporting such an immoral incident revealed the nature of extremists and communal forces.

These communal forces are a threat to the country's independence and sovereignty and they want to take revenge for their past defeats by

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LOANS FOR COVID-HIT RETURNEE MIGRANTS

## Tk 146cr of 700cr fund disbursed so far: minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About Tk 146 crore has been disbursed so far from the government's Tk 700-crore special reintegration loan fund for pandemic-affected returnee migrants, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad said yesterday.

"[From] July to December, we had the disbursement... of only Tk 12 crore," he said, adding the loan disbursement got pace since January this year.

He was addressing the inaugural session of a two-day international conference -- held virtually -- on reintegration of returnee migrants.

The minister said they are expecting loan disbursement to reach over Tk 200 crore by the end of June.

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) in collaboration with Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) and British Council's project Promoting

Knowledge for Accountable Systems (Prokas) organised the two-day conference on "Reintegration of Returnee Migrants Affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic".

Speakers during the inaugural session stressed for multi-dimensional approach from the government for ensuring social and economic reintegration of returnee migrants.

About 4.28 lakh Bangladeshi migrant workers have returned home in about a year amid the pandemic, said Imran Ahmad, addressing the event as chief guest.

He said they have taken various initiatives for the returnees, including the special loan support, and providing them with recognition of prior learning (RPL) certificates.

The minister said about 1.44 lakh migrant workers have gone overseas in the first three months of this year through official channels.

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## 21 police personnel hurt in B'baria road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

At least 21 policemen, including two police inspectors and two drivers of vehicles carrying police were injured when a passenger bus collided with two pickup vans in Brahmanbaria yesterday morning.

The accident took place around 8am on the Cumilla-Sylhet highway in West Medda Markazpara area of the district town when the Econo Paribahan bus coming from Dhaka collided with pick-up vans, confirmed Additional Superintendent of Police Md Roish Uddin.

Police arrested the bus driver and helper from the spot. All the injured policemen came from Kishoreganj district. They were deployed to carry out special duties to maintain law and order situation after the Hefajat-e-Islam mayhem in Brahmanbaria from March 26-28.

Md Roish Uddin told The Daily Star that six of the injured, including a driver, were in critical condition.

They were sent to National Orthopaedic Institute and Hospital in Dhaka.

Arifuzzaman Himel, on-duty doctor at the emergency department of Brahmanbaria General Hospital, said six of the injured had been referred to Dhaka as their condition was critical. Five other injured were admitted to a hospital and 12 were given first aid.

The ASP said, "Members of police got out of the district police lines in two pickup vans for their duty. Later, the Econo Paribahan bus coming from Dhaka collided with pick-up vans carrying the policemen, leaving them injured. Both the bus and police vehicles were damaged in the crash."

## Fewer than half of smokeless tobacco makers pay taxes

Finds study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A significant number of smokeless tobacco (SLT) manufacturers in Bangladesh have managed to slip away from the government's tax net, anti-tobacco platform Knowledge for Progress said yesterday, referring to a recent study.

The platform said informal nature of SLT production was the main impediment in ensuring tax compliance in the sector, according to a press release.

Findings of the study "Factors Inhibiting Smokeless Tobacco Tax Payments by Smokeless Tobacco Manufacturers Operating Outside the Tax Net in Bangladesh" was disclosed during a webinar jointly organised by National Heart Foundation, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Ubining, and Voice and Knowledge for Progress -- also known as Progga.

Conducted with assistance from Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, the study revealed that of 483 SLT manufacturers, 435 zarda and 48 gul producers, only 218 pay taxes.

Also, 33 percent of 88 SLT manufacturers in 29 districts do not have valid trade licence.

It said 91 percent manufacturers produce SLT products manually, with an estimated monthly gross turnover of Tk 2.7 crore.

The study recommends a reform of the SLT tax structure, with a view to safeguard public health and increase revenue collection.

National Board of Revenue Member Zakia Sultana said SLT use should be reined, not only for the sake of revenue but also for public health.

In the 2019-20 fiscal, SLT sector contributed Tk 30.6 crore as revenue, Progga said.

SLTs are severely detrimental to health and responsible for causing oral, oropharyngeal and other types of cancers, it said.



Despite all the government health directions, attendants of a stall at the book fair, who regularly come into close proximity with customers, can be seen without face-masks. Even the official instructing visitors to maintain health guidelines is wearing his mask incorrectly, inset. The photos were taken yesterday as the fair remained open despite the lockdown.

## Youth 'behind vandalism of Bangabandhu mural' arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab-14) yesterday claimed to have arrested a youth, who was involved in vandalising the mural of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Brahmanbaria, on the day of the strike enforced by Hefajat-e-Islam on March 28.

The arrestee was identified as Md Arman Alif Malik (22), of Nasirnagar.

Identifying him from video footage, a team of Rab-14 arrested Malik from the district highway area around 9pm on Sunday, Lt Col Abu Nayeem Mohammad Talat, commander of Rab-14, said while addressing reporters at Brahmanbaria press club auditorium yesterday.

Later, the Rab-14 team conducted drive at the district's Kazipara Mahalla, where Malik used to live in a rented house, and recovered a weapon, two magazines of ammunition, four rounds of bullets and a shovel from there, he said.

The Rab official said during preliminary interrogation, Arman

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