



# The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION



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## Half the country at high risk

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The recent spike in Covid-19 infections has turned more than half the country's 64 districts into high-risk zones.

While Dhaka district still accounts for over half the Covid-19 cases in the country, data revealed yesterday by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) shows that the virus has already spread alarmingly to other parts.

The number of high-risk areas has increased from 10 districts to 38 in just two weeks, according to IEDCR, which defines high-risk zones as those areas with infection rates over 10 percent.

It said 10 districts were defined as high-risk zones between March 2 and 16.

From March 17-30, however, the number of high-risk zones districts jumped to 38, indicating that the virus is fast spreading across the country, the IEDCR data said.

"The Covid-19 virus is spreading like wildfire across the country," Mushtaq Hossain, an adviser to the IEDCR, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He also said the daily positivity rate is on a sharp rise across the country.

The noted virologist said the UK and South African variants may be key factors behind the surge.

"But reckless behaviour of the people and their disregard for healthcare guidelines is the most important reason behind the

"The way the coronavirus infection rate is increasing, it won't be enough even if you turn the entire Dhaka city into a hospital.

HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE MINISTER  
**ZAHID MALEQUE**

surge," Mushtaq said.

The country witnessed a second wave of Covid-19 infection and deaths since the second week of March. The daily infection rate, which was between 3 and 3.5 percent in February, crossed the safe 5 percent barrier in early March.

Since then, the infection rate and deaths have continued to surge and in the process the country witnessed one grim milestone after another in terms of infections and deaths.

It forced the government to enforce countrywide restrictions on movement for seven days from April 5 to curb the transmission.

Yesterday, on the second day of the restrictions, the country registered record single-day numbers of 7,213 new Covid-19 cases and 66 more deaths. The daily positivity rate is currently 21.02 percent.

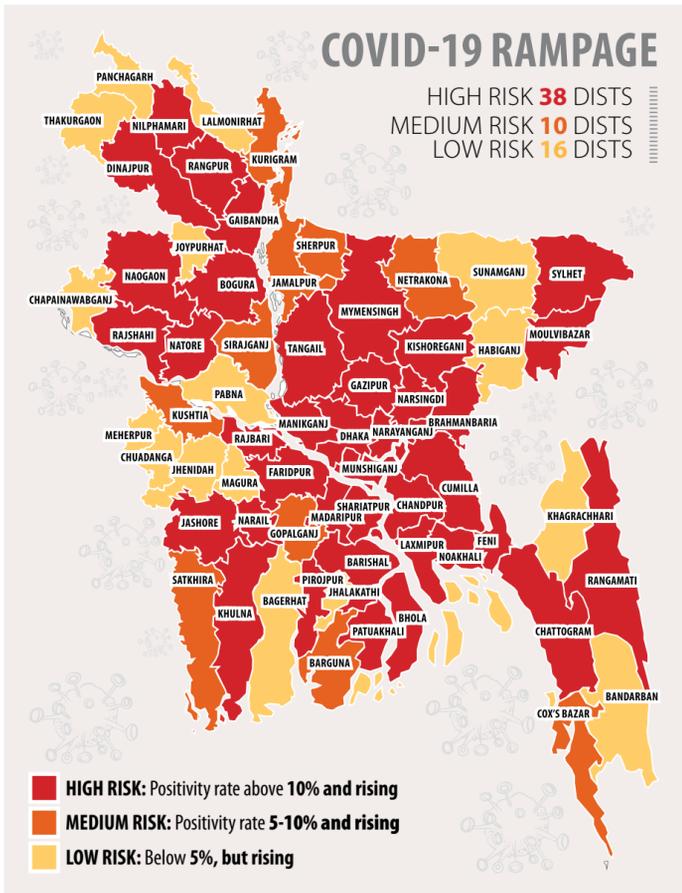
Hospitals are already overburdened with

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



Vehicles caught in a long tailback on Airport Road near Dhaka Cantonment Railway Station around noon yesterday, the second day of the weeklong Covid-19 "lockdown". Although buses were off the roads, many city areas witnessed traffic jams as people commuted using other modes of transport.

PHOTO:  
SK ENAMUL HAQ



## Buses to ply in 11 cities from today

Govt caves in to pressure from transport leaders

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government yesterday decided to resume public transport services in all 11 cities in the country from today, barely a couple of days after it imposed the weeklong restrictions to curb the spread of Covid-19.

The services will be available in the cities from 6:00am to 6:00pm every day until further directives, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said at a virtual press conference.

The cities are Dhaka, Chattogram, Narayanganj, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal, Sylhet, Rangpur, Gazipur, Cumilla and Mymensingh, according to a circular issued by Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

Though Quader said they took the decision, considering people's sufferings, sources in the transport sector said the move was made following demands from transport leaders.

The government may also resume intercity bus services in a day or two, mentioned the sources.

Yesterday's development came at a time when the country witnessed the highest number of daily deaths and also infections since the first Covid case was detected in March last year.

Moreover, many city residents continued to disregard the health safety rules even in this critical situation. They did not wear masks, let alone follow social distancing. The weeklong restrictions, imposed on Monday to rein in the surge in Covid cases and deaths, were not enforced strictly in the first two days.

"The latest decision is very frustrating, very unfortunate. We are heading towards a very bad situation," infectious diseases specialist Prof Ridwanur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## COVID SURGE Madrasas to close until further notice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided that all residential and non-residential Qawmi and other madrasas will remain closed until further notice due to the alarming increase in Covid-19 cases in the country.

The education ministry in a gazette notification yesterday said that only orphanages would remain open.

It also said that some of the residential and non-residential madrasas were still open even after a lockdown was imposed in the country on Monday morning.

The week-long restriction was announced by the government to contain further spread of the coronavirus.

The ongoing closure of all educational institutions has been extended till May 22 due to the current spike in the infection rate that began in the last week of this March.

The government on March 17 last year closed

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## DELUGE OF COVID PATIENTS Mugda crippled by manpower crunch

ZYMA ISLAM

How long does it take to get a CT-scan report? A day? Perhaps two?

A Covid-19 patient in the capital's Mugda Medical College and Hospital has been waiting for more than five days for her report.

"My mother was admitted here three days ago. She had the CT-scan done that very day and we've been waiting for the report since then," her son told this correspondent yesterday.

"The doctors told us that we would get the report on Thursday," he said, preferring anonymity.

The report delivery date is five days from when the test was done, which means the doctors can't understand the condition and decide the next course of treatment before that.

"My mother is a dialysis patient. Her condition is really bad. She has been delirious since last night. She has not slept and has been talking non-stop since evening. Every time a doctor comes to check on her, they want to see the test results first," he said.

Asked why the radiology department would require five days to deliver a CT-scan report, Dr Nurul Islam, assistant director of the hospital, took this correspondent on a tour of the department.

He said the department currently has three professors and four to five medical officials. "We have created a duty roster ensuring that at least half our staffers are always on duty, while the others can stay in quarantine. Currently, two people are on duty."

One was a radiologist, while the other was a medical officer. Together, they had worked on 22 CT scans and a similar number of X-rays and ultrasonogram films since morning, Nurul said.

For each film, the radiologist needs to translate the fuzzy clouds on a black background into a medical diagnosis.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

## CASES UNDER DSA Govt sets up cyber tribunals in 8 divisions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has recently set up a cyber tribunal in each of the all eight divisions of the country to hold trials of cybercrimes-related cases, including those filed under the controversial Digital Security Act.

Cases are filed under this law mainly for spreading rumour, creating confusion, tarnishing image, and defaming, and deteriorating law and order through using online platforms.

Earlier, there was one cyber tribunal in Dhaka for holding trial of cases filed under the Information and Communication Technology Act.

The law ministry issued a gazette notification on April 4 to this effect saying that the cyber tribunals have been formed under the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



People carry drinking water to their home in Rajshahi's Tanone upazila. With the groundwater level dropping and rainfall decreasing alarmingly over the years, residents of the country's Barind region have to toil hard to fetch water from deep tube wells as far as kilometres away from their homes. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO:  
COLLECTED

## Groundwater abuse takes toll on Barind

Region suffers from acute water crisis; country's first water governance project begins from 3 dists

ANWAR ALI

When Matiur Rahman first ventured into fruit farming in Chapainawabganj's Jhilim union in 2011, the major obstacle he had to meet head on was the ongoing water crisis in the northwest.

"The nearest water source was two and a half kilometres away," he said.

He started lifting water from the distant source -- a deep tubewell installed by Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA) but it dried up in six years.

"I felt helpless," Matiur, a Roads and Highways Department driver, said.

Experts have observed people in the region are struggling to get drinking water while many paddy farmers are either diversifying to less water-intensive crops or converting their croplands to ponds and brick kilns.

The region is characterised by decreasing rainfall and depleting groundwater levels, mostly extracted for paddy farming, rice mill operations, and other industrial purposes. "The situation is worsening as some people are withdrawing everyone's share of the groundwater," said a prominent hydrologist, Prof Chowdhury Sarwar Jahan of Rajshahi University.

Apart from paddy fields, at least 35 auto rice mills in Jhilim union, which covers 23.45 square kilometres of area, use groundwater round the clock, heavily affecting the aquifer, he said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**

**7,213**  
New cases in 24hrs

**6,51,652**  
Total cases

**9,384**  
Deaths

**5,58,383**  
Recoveries

**GLOBAL UPDATE**

**2,877,604**  
Deaths

**132,635,347**  
Total cases

## FARIDPUR VIOLENCE

# Vested quarter behind it

*Claim police, administration*

STAR REPORT

Police and local administration officials yesterday said a vested quarter spread a rumour to agitate people with an aim to unleash mayhem in Faridpur's Saltha upazila on Monday night.

The rumour was that Akram Ali, principal of Bahirdia Madrasa, was picked up and two people were killed by police.

Agitated people ransacked some government offices, the Muktijoddha complex and set fire to two government vehicles. Police used rubber bullets, tear gas and sound grenades to bring the situation under control.

The violence left one dead and at least 10 people, including seven cops, injured. The dead, Jobayr Ali, 22, was from Ramkantapur village in Saltha.

Five of the injured were undergoing treatment at different hospitals in Faridpur yesterday.

Witnesses said Assistant Commissioner (land) Marufa Sultana went to Fukra Bazar in Saltha around 6:30pm on Monday to enforce lockdown rules. At that time, some people were taking tea at a tea stall without following health safety rules.

Seeing this, some Ansar members, who were accompanying Marufa, beat up four people, leaving them injured.

"Angered by this, some locals staged a protest. Sensing trouble, the assistant commissioner left the area. Within a few minutes, some policemen went there, but they left the area in face of a protest," said Zahid Munshi, a 35-year-old farmer who witnessed the incident.

Ashikur Jaman, officer in-charge of Saltha Police Station, said several thousand people gathered in front of the office of the upazila nirbahi officer and Saltha Police Station after hearing the rumour that two people were

killed and madrasa Principal Akram Ali was picked up by police.

"They started a fire on the road in front of the upazila parishad complex. A section of the mob entered some government offices in the area and set fire to government vehicles," he added.

In Patuakhali, locals on Monday night staged demonstrations and confined the Kalapara UNO to Kuakata intersection area for around an hour over beating up a man on charges of violating lockdown rules.

Witnesses said one Elias Sheikh was travelling on a motorbike, with a sticker of local portal "Talash" pasted on it, in that area around 8:00pm.

UNO Abu Hasnat Mohammad Shahidul Haque, who was making people aware of lockdown rules, intercepted Elias. Elias introduced himself as a local journalist.

At one stage, police and Ansar members beat up Elias, leaving him injured. Seeing this, locals became agitated and kept the UNO confined for about an hour.

On information, additional policemen rushed to the spot and rescued the UNO, said Moniruzzaman, OC of Mahipur Police Station.

Elias was undergoing treatment at Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital yesterday.

Md Alimujjaman, superintendent of police in Faridpur, said they launched an investigation into the Monday night's incident to identify the masterminds.

Faridpur Deputy Commissioner Atul Sarkar said two probe committees were formed to investigate the incident and they were asked to submit reports in three working days.

[Our correspondents in Faridpur and Patuakhali contributed to this report.]

## Madrasas to close

FROM PAGE 1

All educational institutions to curb the spread of the virus. The closure led to cancellation of exams and left academic calendars in disarray.

But under a special consideration, and following the request from Qawmi madrasa authorities, the government allowed the reopening of Qawmi madrasas on August 24 last year.

The decision of the closure, which was taken by the government yesterday, came when Qawmi madrasa board authorities have been conducting Dawra-e-Hadith, a masters-equivalent

exam, from April 3.

The exam, taken by about 30,000 students across the country, is expected to be completed by Thursday.

Maulana Nurul Islam, vice president of the Befaqul Madrasil Arabia Bangladesh, told The Daily Star they were yet to see a circular from the ministry regarding keeping all madrasas closed. "We will sit and think about it after receiving the order."

He added that only Dawra-e-Hadith exams are taking place. "All other academic activities have been halted in Qawmi madrasas."

## Buses to ply in 11 cities

FROM PAGE 1

If the "lockdown" could be enforced properly, it could have helped bring down the infection rate and deaths, but most of the government-imposed restrictions have not been enforced, he noted.

Moreover, the government decided to relax the restrictions on public transport, he added.

"Given the existing situation, the infection rate and deaths would not come down unless something miraculous happens."

The government is giving a "mixed signal" by relaxing the restrictions, and that's why people should not be solely blamed for ignoring the so-called "lockdown", he pointed out.

On Sunday, the Cabinet Division issued an 11-point directive to be followed from 6:00am yesterday to 12:00am on April 11 to contain the spread of the virus in the country. Punitive actions will be taken against violators of the directives.

However, the restrictions are not applicable to offices, employees and transports involved in maintaining law and order, relief distribution, emergency and health services, electricity, water and gas supply, fire service, port activities, and telephone and internet services.

Banks will operate from 10:00am to 12:30pm. Public, private and autonomous offices can facilitate commute of their employees to workplaces, using their own transport on a limited scale. Industrial units and factories can do the same for their workers. Construction works will go on.

Ekushy Boi Mela will also continue from noon to 5:00pm every day.

Amid the restrictions, commuters suffered during the morning rush. Many took rickshaws while others had to fork out extra money to hire auto-rickshaws to go to work. Some had to change vehicles multiple times and even walk to reach their destinations.

**WHAT PROMPTED THE MOVE?** Quader, also general secretary of the Awami League, said the government decided to allow public transport, taking into account that many people working in different public and private organisations suffered immensely due to a lack of transport.

Public transports would be allowed to charge the re-fixed fares but they must keep 50 percent seats vacant and follow the health safety guidelines. However, the restrictions on long-route transports would remain in force, he mentioned.

The decision would be valid until further notice, added the minister.

Contacted, BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder said they already sent the officer order to transport associations and the authorities concerned.

Sources in the transport sector said the relaxation of restrictions on public transport was the outcome of daylong hectic efforts of transport leaders.

They talked to Quader and top officials at his ministry, and also high-ups at the Prime Minister's Office to persuade them to allow operation of public transport, one of the top transport leaders told this newspaper, seeking anonymity.

"Transport workers are suffering immensely due to the lockdown. So, we demanded that public transport be allowed to operate."

"We also demanded relaxation of restrictions on long-haul bus services and hope the services will resume in a day or two," said the transport leader.

Sources in the transport sector also said AL lawmaker Shajahan Khan, the newly elected president of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, also talked to Quader and a top official at the PMO.

The Daily Star tried to contact Shajahan over the phone several times last night but couldn't reach him.

### SLOPPY ENFORCEMENT

As on Monday, private cars, CNG-run auto-rickshaws and rickshaws ruled the city streets yesterday. Most shops in alleys were open throughout the day while some beside the main roads also kept their shutters open.

Even a small number of buses operated in the guise of "staff buses" and charged the passengers extra.

In some places, law enforcers were seen asking people to follow the health guidelines. Mobile courts of Dhaka city corporations conducted drives in Gulshan, Dhanmondi and Science Lab areas.

Meanwhile, shop owners and employees in the capital's New Market and nearby areas demonstrated for the third consecutive day yesterday, protesting the government restrictions on running businesses.

Traders staged demonstrations also in Rajshahi, Tangail, Thakurgaon, Faridpur and Noakhali, demanding shops be allowed to remain open.

Our correspondents from at least a dozen districts reported that most of the government-imposed restrictions were not enforced strictly in their areas.



Staffers take Covid patient Afifa Akhter to Mugda Medical College Hospital yesterday. An expectant mother from the capital's Malibagh, Afifa was admitted to the hospital with breathing problems.

PHOTO: ANSIUR RAHMAN

## Mugda crippled by manpower crunch

FROM PAGE 1

It was already 1:00pm and they had been working all morning and were nearing the end of their shift for the day.

"We will not be able to finish this pile today," said Dr Samapti Chakraborty, the radiologist of the hospital. "I can prepare about a maximum of 15 reports a day."

Having at least two more people would ease the workload, said Jagan Bandhu Halder, in charge of the hospital's lab.

"We do not have any chance to get time off to quarantine ourselves. While the norm is to work for 15 days and then take two weeks off for quarantine and observe for symptoms, I have to come every single day because there are not enough workers," said Halder.

Dr Ashim Kumar Nath, director of the hospital, said that among his staff, some 15 doctors had been down with Covid-19 since last week. He could not confirm the number of nurses and ward staffers infected.

The hospital's nephrology department was struggling too.

"We have 35 dialysis machines but 17 are out of order," said the department in-charge, who was running around the administrative block trying to get essentials required to run the machines.

She said the hospital was among the city's few healthcare facilities where Covid-19 patients could also be provided with dialyses.

Meanwhile, the patient load of the hospital was palpable.

The hospital has 329 beds for Covid-19 patients and 19 intensive care unit beds.

At 9:00am, the number of admitted patients was 316. By noon the number rose to 335 -- way beyond the hospital's capacity.

"We had already been at full capacity and had to arrange a few extra oxygen cylinders and stretchers to increase the number of beds," said Dr Nurul Islam.

But even that had a limit.

From afternoon onwards, patients coming into the emergency ward seeking admission were being asked to sign a bond stating that they would not seek oxygen and that they would only want a "normal" bed.

Shima Moni was one of them.

She had come to get tested for Covid-19 but fainted while in queue. At that time, her serial number was 85.

Her husband made her sit on the wooden benches in the reception area and rushed to admit her into emergency. One hospital staffer then told him to sign the bond.

Around that time, two ambulances carrying patients arrived and one was from Sir Salimullah Medical College, also known as Mitford Hospital, in Old Dhaka.

The patient's family, who requested anonymity, signed the bond. "I will get oxygen on my own, my mother needs hospitalisation," said her son.

Meanwhile, all 19 ICU beds were occupied throughout the day. Two ambulances came from Badda, saw the sign saying that there are no ICU

beds empty and drove away.

"How can I allow ICU patients from outside when there are 4-5 inpatients on the waitlist today? They should get priority," said Nurul Islam.

To accommodate the waitlist yesterday, 25 percent of the ICU beds would need to be emptied by the end of today (yesterday), he said.

And as the number of people seeking Covid-19 tests has gone up once again, people are having to queue for tests in the dead of the night. The RT-PCR machine in the Mugda medical can carry out 180 tests per day, and that quota is met even before the sun sets.

At 9:00am, Ifi Khan Raihan had already been standing in line for four and a half hours.

"I was Covid-19 positive and I am here to see if I have recovered. I chose this hospital because the cost of tests in private hospitals are too much for me," he said.

Fifty-year-old Morjina, who had been in line since after Fajr prayers with a raging fever, fainted and laid down on the dirty tarmac of the road in front of the hospital. She regained consciousness after a while but was too weak to move.

Others in queue stepped over her to get ahead but she was too delirious to realise anything. She had come alone.

"I have had a fever for a week. My doctor recommended a Covid-19 test, but I cannot even stand any longer," she gasped when approached by this reporter.

## Groundwater abuse takes toll on Barind

FROM PAGE 1

On a recent visit to union, this correspondent observed rice mills on both sides of the Amnura-Chapainawabganj road.

Mansur Rahman, general secretary of Chapainawabganj Rice Mill Owners Association, said each of the 35 rice mills of the union has at least three deep tubewells.

Mansur's Sagar Auto Rice Mills has six. "We have no other water options for running our businesses," he said.

Md Mostafa, a farmer of Collegepara village in Jhilmil, shifted from paddy to lentil cultivation.

"Many cultivable fields, where we cropped three times a year before, are now uncultivable because of a dearth of water," he said.

Matiur's venture, for instance, would have been nipped in the bud, without water.

In 2016, the NGO Development Association for Self-reliance, Communication and Health (DASCOH) gave him a water-pump and introduced him to drip irrigation, a water-saving method that allows water to drip slowly to the roots of plants, either above the soil surface or buried below it.

He has now grown into one of the country's most successful fruit farmers receiving multiple government awards in five years.

However, not all farmers in the Barind region have been as lucky as Matiur and abuse of water resources is rampant.

Unchecked industrial and agricultural use of water has depleted groundwater in a region which also saw lower than average rainfall in recent years.

On a visit to Rajshahi's Godagari upazila on March 22, this correspondent observed the Sormongola canal, which is supposed to supply water from the Padma river to nearby agricultural fields, running dry while private deep tubewells have been installed on both sides of the canal.

Farmers The Daily Star spoke to said they were angry about having to pay high prices for water for their crops from these tubewells, while the canal ran dry.

**GROUNDWATER LEVEL LOWER THAN EVER**

According to Prof Chowdhury, the region's annual rainfall has never exceeded 1,400mm in seven years till 2018, which is 45 percent less than the national average of 2,550mm.

Last year, however, the region witnessed 1,800mm of annual rainfall.

The areas of Nachol and Gomostapur in Chapainawabganj; Tanore and Godagari in Rajshahi; and Porsha, Sapahar, and Niamatpur upazilas in Naogaon are over 47m higher than sea

level.

Whereas, there are areas in the same districts which are only around 10m higher than sea level, he noted.

"Paddy farming using only groundwater can have a toll on the availability of drinking water in these high and arid areas," he said.

Groundwater provides 75 percent of water needed for rice irrigation in Bangladesh, the world's fourth largest rice-producing country.

Bangladesh Rice Research Institute estimates around 3,000 litres of water are required to produce one kilogramme of Boro rice.

"This estimate does not even count the water use in rice mills," Prof Chowdhury said.

Wheat and maize require around 400-600 litres of water per kilogramme production, he said.

So, grain production in the region should use surface water for irrigation, he recommended, adding a focus on less water-consuming fruit and vegetable farming can help preserve groundwater in the region.

The region's groundwater level was only 30 feet below in the '70s when farmers used surface and rain water for irrigation and hand tubewells for drinking water, said BMDA's Superintending Engineer Abdur Rashid.

With BMDA installing deep tubewells in the '90s, farmers began cultivating three crops a year turning the northwest into one of the country's major grain-producing regions, he said.

Following BMDA's lead, solvent farmers and businesspeople installed their own deep tubewells.

In 2012, when BMDA stopped installing fresh deep tubewells and moved to focusing on surface water, private tubewells continued to flourish for agricultural and industrial use.

Around 70 percent of the Barind region's annual groundwater extraction of 13,710 million cubic metres is done by unregulated private deep tubewells, according to a rough estimate by BMDA recently. This amount of water would fill up around 18 lakh ponds -- each 2m deep and covering one bigha.

In February 2018, the lowest groundwater level was recorded in Nachol upazila at 107 feet below the surface, a fall of over 28 feet since 2005 when the level was at 78.8 feet.

"The fall is still on," Rashid said, adding that the levels go as low as 130 feet below the surface at the end of irrigation season.

**COUNTRY'S FIRST WATER GOVERNANCE PROJECT**  
"Everyone has equal rights to water and an optimum use of water can ensure it," said Md Delwar Hossain, director general of the Water Resources Planning

## Half the country

FROM PAGE 1

patients. There is an acute crisis of ICU beds and even healthcare professionals are struggling to manage the influx of patients.

To accommodate the growing patients the government has been scaling up the general beds and ICU beds.

Contacted, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said yesterday that the number of general and ICU beds have already been doubled, but people are still struggling to get beds as the number of infections is on the rise.

"The rate of infection and death is on the rise and it will continue for a few days. The virus has already spread across the country. The infection rate will start declining soon, [but] only if we follow healthcare guidelines," he said.

The minister, however, warned against reckless behaviour.

"If the coronavirus rate keeps increasing the way it has been, it would not be possible to treat people even after turning the whole Dhaka city into a hospital," the minister told journalists after visiting a DNCC Covid-19 dedicated hospital.

"How can we manage [increased amounts of] doctors, nurses and provide facilities?"

Maleque said he has already instructed to provide oxygen concentrators to all the upazila health complexes so that those establishments could provide treatment.

Yesterday's new cases took the total Covid-19 cases in the country to 6,51,652 with an overall infection rate of 13.44 percent.

Meanwhile, the death tally reached 9,384 with an overall fatality rate of 1.44 percent.

Among the total deaths, around 58 percent have been recorded in Dhaka, followed by Chattogram with around 19 percent.

**MOULVIBAZAR, MUNSHIGANJ AND DHAKA RISKIEST**

Among the high-risk districts, those with the highest infection rates are Moulvibazar, Munshiganj and Dhaka where infection rates are 50 percent, 33 percent and 31 percent respectively.

In Moulvibazar, one in every two people tested was found to be positive for Covid-19. Currently, there are 142 positive patients in the district.

Daily positivity rates are between 21 and 30 percent in Sylhet, Khulna, Chattogram, Feni, Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Rajbari and Chandpur districts, according to the IEDCR data.

Chowdhury Jalal Uddin Murshed, civil surgeon of Moulvibazar, told The Daily Star that the main reason for such a high infection rate is that almost all positive cases have a history of coming into close contact with expatriates.

The second reason, he said, is that many have a history of travel within the country and the third reason is that there have been large crowds in Moulvibazar recently as it is a tourism district.

## Govt sets up

FROM PAGE 1

The names of the eight tribunals are Cyber Tribunal, Dhaka; Cyber Tribunal, Chattogram; Cyber Tribunal, Rajshahi; Cyber Tribunal, Khulna; Cyber Tribunal, Barisal; Cyber Tribunal, Sylhet; Cyber Tribunal, Rangpur, and Cyber Tribunal, Mymensingh.

The notification has determined the local jurisdiction of Cyber Tribunal, Dhaka, which are the districts of Dhaka, Narsingdi, Gazipur, Shariatpur, Narayanganj, Tangail, Kishoreganj, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Rajbari, Madaripur, Faridpur, and Gopalganj.

The cases filed in districts other than the above-mentioned 13 will be transferred from the Cyber Tribunal, Dhaka to other cyber tribunals concerned in 30 days, according to the gazette notification.

Contacted, Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star that his ministry enhanced the number of cyber tribunals to help reduce backlogs of cybercrimes-related cases. He also said the government is working to make sure that nobody is arrested in the cases filed under the Digital Security Act without prior inquiry.

"We have made much progress to this effect," he said, without elaborating.

Asked whether the government would amend the Digital Security Act or incorporate any rule in it to stop its abuse, Anisul said, "Wait and see what we do."

Supreme Court lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir, who challenged two sections of the Digital Security Act through moving a writ petition before the High Court, said the cyber tribunals will hold trials of the cases filed under the Digital Security Act, 2018.

Previously, these offences were included in controversial Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act, 2006.

This section has been repealed from the ICT act and included in the DSA, he added.

Law ministry sources said the government has already appointed competent judges for conducting the cyber tribunals in eight divisions.

## 2000 ATTEMPT TO KILL HASINA Death reference of 14 convicts at HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The death reference of the case, in which 14 militants were sentenced to death for attempting to kill Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2000, has reached the High Court for the examination of the trial court verdict.

Officials of the Dhaka tribunal concerned brought the documents of the case, including the judgment, to the HC on Monday afternoon, its special officer Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star.

He said the officials concerned of the HC received the documents. The HC authorities will now prepare paper books for hearing on the death reference, Saifur added.

If a lower court sentences any person to death in a case, its judgment is examined by the HC through hearing arguments for confirmation of the death sentence. The case documents and judgment reach as death reference to the HC from the lower court as per the relevant provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

A Dhaka tribunal on March 23 sentenced 14 members of banned militant outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji) to

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



**Sayed, a hawker who usually sells children's clothes and bed-sheets on the roadsides of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, sits next to the row of closed makeshift shops in the area because he could not bear to sit alone at his tiny rented room in the capital. His shop, like countless others, is closed due to the lockdown and he does not have the money to go back to his village home in Munshiganj. He told this newspaper around 3pm yesterday that he had no food since morning, and his family back home was also going hungry because he could not send any money to them.**

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## 'He made a fortune through extortion'

*Murder accused Hannan's reign of terror in Dakshinkhan comes to light*

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Once a driver by profession, Aminul Islam Hannan of the capital's Dakshinkhan area, who was recently arrested on charge of shooting a man dead in broad daylight, made a fortune in the last one decade through widespread extortion, said locals.

Hannan, also known as Japani Hannan, through his criminal gang spread terror at Ainusbagh of Dakshinkhan, but no one dared to challenge him, as he used to identify himself as a ruling party leader, they added.

They said he used to take photographs with leaders of the ruling party or influential persons and display those in banners and posters at the gate of his house and on the walls.

His posters are still hanging at Ainusbagh that show him as the joint general secretary of Bangabandhu Sainik League. Some influential AL leader also visited his Ainusbagh residence, said locals.

They alleged that law enforcers were always reluctant to take any action against Hannan, despite some locals lodging general diaries with police against him.

Any resident of Ainusbagh constructing a building or shop and selling or purchasing flats had to give him extortion money, otherwise they had to face dire consequences, they said.

Hannan also collected Tk 2,500 per month as toll from around 500 battery-run auto-rickshaws that ply from Ashkona Hajj camp

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

## Patients with chronic conditions in a fix

*Ctg BMA re-introduces telemedicine service to ease their worries over seeing doctors amid lockdown*

ARUN BIKASH DEV, Ctg

In his 70s and with a chronic kidney disease, port city resident Rupak Paul has a lot to worry about as it is. But for this week, his worries multiplied after the government declared the countrywide lockdown. Rupak has an appointment with a nephrologist today, but as of yesterday, he wasn't sure if it's going to take place.

"The consultant is really busy. I managed to get the appointment after trying for 10 consecutive days," Rupak told this correspondent. Now he's worried whether the doctor's chamber will be open during the lockdown, or whether he will have to sit for the consultation virtually or over phone, or whether he'll have to contact another doctor altogether.

The same can be said of every other chronic disease patient across the city. For them, every week's a matter of life and death, and whether they get access to their doctors or not may determine everything.

Doctors said they're trying their best to

come up with alternate solutions during such dire times. While talking to The Daily Star, they have assured that they will either attend patients at their private chambers for limited hours, or resort to telemedicine services for duration of the lockdown.

"I exclusively did telemedicine during last year's lockdown, but have decided to keep my chamber open for limited hours this time around. We understand the importance of in-person consultations," said Farida Yasmin Sumi, assistant professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

But she admitted it'll be a difficult task for patients to get to the chambers during lockdown, due to the government-imposed limitations on public transportation.

Retired-CMCH teacher Dr Mujibul Haque Khan, an ear, nose, and throat specialist, also told The Daily Star that he will be available for telemedicine sessions

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

ASSAULTING NAVY OFFICER

## Erfan Salim seeks cancellation of stay order on bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Erfan Salim, son of Awami League lawmaker Haji Md Salim, yesterday filed a petition with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court to vacate its stay order on his High Court bail in a case filed over attacking a navy officer in October last year.

Erfan, now in a Kashimpur jail, submitted the petition through his lawyers -- Abdul Baset Majumder and Sayed Ahmed Raza -- to the Appellate Division, along with the certified copy of the HC verdict that granted him bail in the case.

Citing the petition, Erfan's lawyer Sayed Ahmed told The Daily Star that his client has been in jail for five months and 11 days although the maximum punishment of the charge, for which he has been arrested, is six months' imprisonment.

Erfan's mother has died in November last year and his father, who has been infected with Covid-19, is receiving treatment at Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka and therefore, the Appellate Division's stay order on his HC bail needs to be vacated for his release from jail, the lawyer said.

After a brief hearing yesterday, chamber judge of the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

SHER-E-BANGLA MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL

## Neither handwashing, nor social distancing

*Hygiene, safety concerns remain as authorities struggle to cope with patient influx*



**Patients and their attendants crowd the corridor of the outpatient department of the hospital. The photo was taken recently.**

PHOTO: TITU DAS

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) in Barishal -- one of the major healthcare centres in the country's southern region -- lacks handwashing facilities for visitors at outpatient departments that have seen a swelling crowd in recent times, increasing the risk of rapid transmission of coronavirus from there amid the second wave.

Moreover, other health directives, including social distancing, are also being violated blatantly at the hospital.

The SBMCH authorities, however, blamed lack of infrastructural facilities and shortage of manpower for such a situation.

During a recent visit to hospital, this correspondent found hundreds of people gathered at the outpatient department on the ground floor. They were huddling and most of them had no masks on. The handwashing setup that were put in place after the Covid-19 outbreak are all out of order.

A patient said, "The coronavirus ward is not cleaned regularly. Water taps and bathroom fittings have been broken... Even plaster is falling off the stairs at the ward. There is no one to take care of this ward, which is full of garbage."

Sinks and water taps that were set up at around 20-25 points in and outside the hospital last year could not be seen.

Hospital staff said some of those got damaged and some were stolen.

Dr Moniruzaman Shaheen, in-charge of the ward, said SBMCH was established in

1968. At that time, there were 136 doctors against the approval of 224 physicians for 360 beds, he said.

At present, new wards have been included including the one for Covid-19, said Shaheen. The number of seats at the Covid ward has increased from 1,000 to 1,150, but the manpower has remained the same, he added.

As a result, health services and cleaning activities are being hampered, said Dr Shaheen.

He said the number of Covid-19 patients at the hospital on March 12 was only 19. On April 5, the figure was as many as 106, he added. On average, 20 to 25 patients were admitted to the hospital every day. "If this situation continues, it will not be possible to admit patients within two to three days," he told this correspondent yesterday.

Dr Abdur Razzak, acting director of the hospital, told The Daily Star, "We have informed the Department of Public Works to set up sinks again. Due to manpower shortage, we cannot ensure hygiene for around 3,000-4,000 outdoor and 1,500 indoor patients who are receiving services every day."

Last year, visitors without masks were barred from entering the hospital, and after entry service seekers had to maintain physical distance. This year, those health directives are completely absent there. When asked about it, the acting director said they are looking into the matter.

## CTTC arrests Ansar Al Islam's IT wing expert

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Counterterrorism unit claimed to have arrested the militant outfit Ansar Al Islam's IT wing expert, who was planning to regroup and restart the outfit's operational activities, including targeted killing, along with sacked army major Syed Ziaul Haq.

For the purpose, the IT chief -- Baki Billah alias Abu Samir alias Zafar alias Faisal (34) -- was scheduled to meet Zia near Tongi railway station on March 26 last year.

In an encrypted message, Zia told Billah that a person will meet him once he reached the station. The meeting, however, did not take place, due to law enforcers' vigilance, and since then Zia again went into hiding.

Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit claimed to have learned about the latest strategy of the militant outfit following arrest of Baki Billah and his associate.

The other arrestee was identified as Ariful Islam Jahed alias Ayman alias Arahan alias Rehan (30), they said.

Based on information, a special action group of CTTC unit arrested the two from the capital's Paltan area around 6:35pm on Monday night, Abdul Mannan, deputy commissioner of the unit, told The Daily Star yesterday.

A case was filed with Paltan Police Station

against the two under anti-terrorism act.

DC Mannan said the outfit may seem to be neutralised but their online recruitment and fund collection in name of different welfare tasks are going on in full swing.

"We have got some details of the outfit's financiers and are conducting drive to arrest them," he added.

According to officials, Ariful is the founding member of the outfit and he is the head of its Dhaka north unit and working for recruiting new members.

Ariful got involved with militant activities through a platform called Jama'atul Muslimin in 2008. Later, he got admitted to a private university in Dhaka.

While working for the outfit, he met sacked Maj Zia. He was responsible for recruiting private university students for the outfit.

In recent times, he has been recruiting members for the outfit through a Facebook group, said CTTC officials, involved with investigation.

Billah is the head of Ansar Al Islam's Information Technology (IT) and Anti-Surveillance Department. He started working for the outfit in 2014 through Zia.

Billah is the creator Ansar al-Islam's main media forum. He has also created encrypted media to

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

## Small traders in Rajshahi open shops defying 'lockdown'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Owners of small businesses in Rajshahi defied the government-imposed restrictions and opened their shops yesterday.

Many traders and their employees opened shops at the RDA Market, in the heart of the city, on the second day of the seven-day "lockdown".

Maksudur Rahman, organising secretary of Rajshahi Babosayi Oikya Parishad, an alliance of 110 local business bodies, said they were demanding an exclusion of small businesses from the restrictions since a day before the lockdown.

On the first day of lockdown on Monday, they demonstrated on the street for two hours and later withdrew as local administrative officials called them for a discussion.

"But the meeting ended without a decision," he said.

"Also, we have not decided to open our shops. But some businessmen opened their shops on their own as they felt helpless in the face of losses that is to occur for keeping their shops closed," he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## Create funds, launch financial instruments

*Suggest parliamentarians for reintegration of migrant workers affected by Covid-19*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parliamentarians of different Asian countries yesterday suggested for creating funds and launching financial instruments to ensure sustainable reintegration of migrant workers affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

Pointing on migrant workers' immense contribution for the development of both the countries of origin and destination, they called for forming regional forums to address issues related to returnee reintegration.

They came up with the suggestions during the concluding session of the two-day "International Conference on Reintegration of Returnee Migrants Affected by Covid-19 Pandemic".

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 conference virtually.

Addressing the concluding session, Anisul Islam Mahmud, chairman of the parliamentary committee on expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry, proposed that Bangladesh government should give a one percent incentive alongside the existing two-percent incentive against remittance sent by migrant workers.

The money of one-percent incentive could be allocated for creating a fund for returnees' reintegration, he said.

Anisul stressed that migrants' reintegration has to be inclusive from all aspects -- from social to psychological -- as well as at the family level.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



**On the second day of the countrywide lockdown, police put up barricades at entrance points to the capital, like this one in Gabtoli. The checkers stopped non-sanctioned incoming vehicles and interrogated passengers about their business in the city.**

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## Two killed in road accidents

STAR REPORT

Two people were killed three injured in road accidents in two districts on Monday night, according to reports from our local correspondents.

In Patuakhali, an SSC examinee was killed and another injured in a road accident in Baufal upazila of the district.

The deceased -- Jihad Sharif (16), was an SSC examinee of a local secondary school, said Suryamani Union Parishad member Serajul Islam.

According to locals, Jihad and his cousin Abdur Rahman left home with two motorcycles. The accident took place when they collided head-on with another motorcycle coming from the opposite direction at Chaurasta Bazar in Tanterkathi village.

Jihad died on the spot and Abdur Rahman was admitted to Baufal Upazila Health Complex with serious injuries, said Baufal Police Station Officer-in-Charge (Investigation) Al Mamun.

In Madaripur, a teenager was killed and two were injured as their motorbike hit a pickup on Madaripur-Shariatpur road in new bus stand area under Sadar upazila.

## RU STUDENT RAPE CASE

## SC stays bail of prime accused

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday stayed for eight weeks a High Court order that granted ad-interim bail to Mahfuzur Rahman Sharod, the main accused in a case filed for raping and blackmailing a student of Rajshahi University in January last year.

Chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the SC Justice Hasan Foez Siddique passed the stay order following a petition filed by the state seeking a stay on the HC bail order.

The apex court judge also asked the state to move a leave to appeal petition before this court in eight weeks challenging the HC order.

Additional Attorney General Sheikh Md Morshed told The Daily Star that Mahfuzur Rahman cannot be released from jail following the apex court chamber judge's stay order.

The chamber judge stayed the HC order since there is a specific allegation against Mahfuzur Rahman of raping and blackmailing the victim according to the first information report of the case and as per the confessional statements of other accused of the case.

On March 25, the HC bench of Justice Md Rezaul Haque and Justice Md Atoar Rahman granted ad-interim bail to Mahfuzur Rahman after hearing an appeal filed by the accused seeking bail.

On January 27 last year, the RU student filed the case against six people for raping and blackmailing her.

According to the case statement, on January 24 last year Mahfuzur Rahman, a second-year student of economics at the university, took her to a hostel and raped her while his associates filmed it. They then tried to use the video clip to extort Tk 50,000 from her.



As the streets of Dhaka University's residential area have been cordoned off due to the lockdown, this rickshaw chose the alternate way of running on the footpath, eating up pedestrians' walking space. This photo was taken yesterday from Fuller Road.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Dhaka-Doha Biman flights rescheduled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a bid to curb Covid-19 infections, Biman Bangladesh Airlines has decided to cancel flights on April 5, 9, 14, and 19 on the Dhaka-Doha route. The flights have been rescheduled for April 7, 12, 16, and 21, respectively.

In an urgent announcement, the flag carrier yesterday said the government has imposed a ban on passenger transport from Qatar to Bangladesh due to recent increase in Covid-19 cases in the country.

Biman announced this decision through a press release issued regarding the flights and hotel bookings for passengers on the Dhaka-Doha route.

Passengers on canceled flights are re-booked to subsequent flights, the document detailed.

Meanwhile, re-booked passengers of canceled flights are being specially requested to travel by air after updating their hotel bookings. No one will be able to travel by air unless hotel bookings are updated, the carrier said.

## Create funds

FROM PAGE 3

Charles Santiago, a member of parliament of Malaysia, said a saving instrument for migrant workers could be initiated once they reach the host countries so that they can take back the savings when they return home.

Santiago said roles of the governments in both receiving and destination countries are important to ensure reintegration of returnee migrants.

Stressing the need for "classification" of returnee migrants, Shameem Haider Patwary, chairperson of Bangladesh Parliamentarians' Caucus on Migration and Development (BPCMD), said a parliamentary sub-committee could be formed to address the issue of returnee reintegration.

He also said returnee migrants who are skilled in foreign languages could be employed as language instructor at different training institutions.

Financial institutions in Bangladesh including Bangladesh Bank can launch separate financial instruments only for the returnee migrants, said BPCMD member Tanveer Shakil Joy.

BPCMD Secretary General and former parliamentarian Mahjabeen Khaled suggested for forming regional caucuses of South Asian and Southeast Asian countries to ensure wellbeing of migrant workers.

BPCMD member Rana Mohammad Sohail and parliamentarian Dila Sangraula of Nepal also addressed the session.

## He made

FROM PAGE 3

to Ainsubagh, they alleged. He also controlled household garbage collection in the locality, which involves a huge amount of money.

Hannan used to threaten residents with his firearms frequently and even shot at people, said Tofazzal Hossain, former chairman of Dakshinkhan union and currently the Liberation War affairs secretary of Dhaka city (north) Awami League.

Tofazzal, however, claimed that Hannan never held any party position.

Contacted, lawmaker Shirin Ahmed, acting president of Bangabandhu Sainik League, said Hannan is not involved with the organisation.

On March 24, Hannan shot dead trader Abdur Rashid over extortion at Ainsubagh, police said.

Following this, police arrested Hannan and seven of his family members and associates. Hannan is now being interrogated by police in remand. Police also seized a licensed and another illegal firearm from him.

Hannan was placed on a two-day remand for the second time on Tuesday, after completion of a four-day remand, said Azizul Haque, inspector (investigation) of Dakshinkhan Police Station. He is also the case's investigation officer.

Mozammel Patwari, a neighbour of Hannan, alleged that Hannan had cut off utility connection of one of his buildings, as he refused to pay Hannan Tk 2 lakh as extortion in June last year.

He also alleged that Hannan forcibly erected a wall, blocking entry to his home,

and grabbed some of his land. As he protested, Hannan beat him in public.

He then filed a case with a Dhaka court over the incident.

Mozammel also alleged that over the last 10 months he went to Dakshinkhan Police Station at least 10 times, but police told him to settle the issue with Hannan.

Asked why police did not take any action against Hannan despite locals' complaints against him, Shikder Mohammad Shamim, officer-in-charge of Dakshinkhan Police Station, claimed that no one ever lodged any complaint against Hannan.

However, documents, which this newspaper obtained, suggest Mozammel lodged a GD against Hannan. Contacted on Monday, Mozammel said he finally got his land back.

Another resident, Mokbul, said Hannan had demanded Tk 5 lakh from him, as he started constructing a building in Ainsubagh.

Locals also alleged that Hannan had forcibly renamed Ainsubagh "Chandnagar", as he hailed from Chandpur. They said around 20 years back, Hannan went to Japan. After his return, he purchased some land in the area at a low price. After Awami League came to power, he started making his fortune through illegal activities, they alleged.

Now, he owns at least five buildings in the area, said his neighbour Mozammel.

Contacted, Md Shahidullah, deputy commissioner of Uttara Division Police, said they were not aware of all the complaints against Hannan. "Now that they have come to light, we will look into the complaints."

Keeping devotees safe from Covid-19  
Rajshahi mosque gets automatic sanitiser dispenser from India

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Assistant High Commissioner of India in Rajshahi yesterday installed an automatic hand sanitiser dispenser at the city's main mosque -- Shaheb Bazar Boro Masjid -- to help mosque-goers follow Covid-19 protocols.

Sanjeev Kumar Bhati, the assistant high commissioner, described it as a "gift from the Indian people" while inaugurating use of the touchless sanitiser dispenser in a brief programme.

Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner Abu Kalam Siddique and the mosque governing body president Tozammel Haque Chowdhury attended the inaugural ceremony.

An official said, the assistant high commission is due to install another automatic hand sanitising machine at Varendra Research Museum in the city soon.

## Erfan

FROM PAGE 3

apex court Justice Hasan Foez Siddique fixed tomorrow for holding hearing on the petition.

Following a stay petition filed by the state, the apex court chamber judge on March 28 stayed for four weeks the HC verdict that granted bail to Erfan in the case.

Lt Wasif Ahmed Khan of Bangladesh Navy filed the case with Dhanmondi Police Station on October 25, against Erfan (37), and three others -- AB Siddique Dipu (45), Md Zahid (35) and Md Mizanur Rahman (30) -- for attacking him.

A team of Rab conducted a drive at Erfan's house in Old Dhaka and arrested him the same day.

## Two killed

FROM PAGE 3

The deceased -- Rifat Hawladar (16), son of Delowar Hawladar -- hailed from Kukrail area in Madaripur town.

Quoting locals, Kamrul Islam Mia, officer-in-charge of Madaripur Sadar Police Station said the accident took place around 11pm when the bike rider lost control over the vehicle.

Locals rushed victims to Madaripur General Hospital from where one injured was taken to Faridpur Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Medical College Hospital, said the OC.

They seized the pickup but the driver fled the scene, he added.

## Small traders

FROM PAGE 3

During a visit to RDA market yesterday morning, this correspondent saw most shops open. However, the number of buyers were low.

Md Sujon, owner of a shoe store -- Sheikh Shoes, kept the shutter of his store half open. "I opened the shop to put price tag on the shoes," he said, adding that he purchased some Tk 11 lakh worth of shoes, which reached his shop the day before the lockdown.

"Shoe traders are the worst sufferers... Shoes cannot be stored for a long time," he said.

He said he suffered a loss of Tk 20 lakh due to last year's "lockdown", "If I cannot do business this year too, I will have to close my shop for good," he added.

## Death

FROM PAGE 3

death and ordered that they be "publicly" executed by a firing squad for attempting to kill the prime minister.

The sedition case was filed against them for trying to kill Hasina by planting a 76kg bomb in Kotalipara, Gopalganj.

## Car Sales

Allion Metallic Silver Colour. Self driven. Sparingly used. Octane driven. Model 2010. 1800cc. Contact 01713046419

## Patients with

FROM PAGE 3

during the lockdown so that no patient has to suffer without treatment.

The leaders of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), Chattogram chapter, echoed the same. They said they have provided a list of doctors and their contact numbers in the organisation's webpage and verified Facebook page, so that patients get access to emergency telemedicine service during the lockdown.

"We did the same in the last year during the lockdown. Patients appreciated the initiative a lot," said Dr Faisal Iqbal Chowdhury, general secretary of BMA

Chattogram. "I would like to assure patients that the doctors' community is always by their side in their time of need."

Praising the initiative, Nazrul Islam, a resident of Patiya upazila in Chattogram, who has been suffering from irritable bowel syndrome, a chronic disease of stomach, said he hopes contacts of gastroenterologist will be included in the list, which will benefit many patients like him.

"As public transport will not ply, we will not be able to go to the city during lockdown. Telemedicine service could be the saving grace for us," he said.

## CTTC

FROM PAGE 3

secure communications of its members, said the CTTC officials.

Recently, Billah customised a portable operating system to evade law enforcers, they added.

Both the arrestees were produced before a Dhaka court yesterday, which placed them on a four-day police remand.

Ahamedul Islam, additional deputy commissioner CTTC, said the arrestees used to collect funds from their supporters and financiers using mobile financing account.

"We have got some details about their sabotage plans and financial details. We would interrogate the arrestees in remand to glean out more information," added ADC Islam.

It should be mentioned that Xulhaz Mannan, an LGBT rights activist, and his friend Khandoker Mahbub Rabby Tonoy, were the victims of Ansar al Islam's last targeted killing in Dhaka in 2016.

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

**Expression of Interest (EOI)**

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations invites proposals **Comprehensive Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability Assessment** and the proposals should be submitted in the format indicated in the ITP. ITP document can be downloaded from the organization's Website: <https://www.ungm.org/>

**Tender # 2021/FABGD/FABGD/109452**

Closing date and Time for submission of Bids is **25 April 2021, 17:00 Hrs.**

**VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT**

**e-Zone**  
Servicing Change Managers

E-Zone HRM Limited is a management consulting group providing one-stop HR solutions. E-Zone HRM Limited has a formal agreement with one of the United Nations agency to provide outsourcing services under a third party contract.

E-Zone HRM Limited is now seeking applications for a UN Organization from Bangladeshi Nationals for the following vacancies under third party outsourcing contract modality. For detailed Job Description, please visit the following website link to apply for the post.

**Title: Divisional Nutrition Consultant (DNC)**  
Duty Station: Rangpur. Contract Duration: 12 Months.  
Number of Vacancies: 1 (One), Contract Type: Contract with E-Zone.  
Last Date of Application: **April 13, 2021**  
<https://hotjobs.bdjobs.com/jobs/ezone/un46.html>

**Bangladesh Milk Producer's Co-Operative Union Ltd.**

Head Office: Dugdha Bhaban  
139-140, Tejgaon Industrial Area, Dhaka-1208

**Invitation for International Tender**

Procuring entity name	Project Director, "Establishment of Diversified milk product plant and cattle development in greater Faridpur Chars and adjacent areas".					
Procurement method	Open Tendering Method.					
Source of funds	GoB.					
Invitation for Tenders No.	MU/PDPR/Faridpur-304/vehicle/2015-2018/552 Date: 06.04.2021					
<b>Tenders Name &amp; Brief Description</b>						
Sl. No.	Tender Package No.	Description	Unit	Quantity (Nos.)	Cost of schedule (non-refundable)	Tender security (BDT/US\$/EURO/GBP)
1.	MU/PDPR/Faridpur-304/vehicle/2015-2018/552	Milk Tanker	10,000Ltr	02(Two)	Tk 2,000.00	BDT 20,63,000.00 (twenty lac sixty-three thousand only) or equivalent foreign currency.
			5000Ltr	02(Two)		
		Ice Cream Freezing Van	3000Ltr	01(One)		
		Insulated Milk Covered Van	2000Ltr	01(One)		
			10000Ltr	01(One)		
			5000Ltr	01(One)		
			7000Ltr	01(One)		
	5000Ltr	01(One)				
		3000Ltr	01(One)			
		2000Ltr	01(One)			
Validity of tender offer	120 days from the date of submission of tender.					
Validity of tender security	148 days from the date of submission of tender.					
Name & address of the office for selling the tender documents	Project Office, Head Office, 139-140, Tejgaon I/A, Dhaka.					
Name & address of the office for receiving of the tender documents	Project Office, Head Office, 139-140, Tejgaon I/A, Dhaka.					
Starting date for selling tender documents	07.04.2021 during office hour.					
Date & time of pre-tender meeting	Date: 22.04.2021, Time: 11.00am at Conference Room, Head Office, 139-140, Tejgaon I/A, Dhaka-1208.					
Tender last selling date	19.04.2021 during office hour.					
Tender closing place, date & time	Project Office, 139-140, Tejgaon I/A, Dhaka-1208.		20.05.2021 at 12.30pm			
Tender opening place, date and time	Conference Room, Head Office, 139-140, Tejgaon I/A, Dhaka-1208.		20.05.2021 at 2.30pm			
Other instruction	All other terms & conditions are mentioned in the tender schedule.					
<b>PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS</b>						
Name of the official inviting tender	Dr. Mohammad Nannu Molla.					
Designation of the official inviting tender	Project Director, "Establishment of Diversified milk product plant and cattle development in greater Faridpur Chars and adjacent areas".					
Address of the official inviting tender	Project Office, Bangladesh Milk Producers' Co-Operative Union Limited, Dugdha Bhaban, 139-140, Tejgaon Industrial Area, Dhaka-1208.					
Contact details of the official inviting tender	Tel: +88 02 8878263 (B), +88 02 8870444-5 Ex-116, Mobile: 01715017738 Fax: +88-02-8870433, E-mail: faridpurproject18@gmail.com Web: www.milkvita.org.bd					
<b>OTHER INFORMATION</b>						
Special conditions	The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.					
This tender will be conducted as per the Public Procurement Rules-2008 of Bangladesh.						
<b>Dr. Mohammad Nannu Molla</b> Project Director (Joint Secretary) Establishment of Diversified milk product plant and cattle development in greater Faridpur Chars and adjacent areas E-mail: faridpurproject18@gmail.com						



The old telephone office building in Pabna town where first resistance fight of the mass people occurred on March 28, 1971.

PHOTO: STAR

## Unrecognised war of mass people

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

It was March 28 in 1971, after three days of the countrywide crackdown by the Pakistan occupation army, people of Pabna from every corner of the district regrouped and launched an attack on the trained Pakistan army at the old telephone office (now abandoned) with lethal weapons.

The troops fired back and continued firing ceaselessly till their bullets ended, but the people did not leave the battle field.

When the firing became less intense, the mass people entered into the camp and killed almost all of the occupation troops while few of them could flee.

Pabna was freed from the occupation army on March, 29 for 10 days all because of the heroic role of the people of Pabna who took part in the first resistance fight.

Even before the formation 'Mukti Bahini', without any training, people of Pabna dared to fight against the Pakistani

Pabna was freed, for 10 days, from the occupation army on March 29 because of the heroic role of the people who took part in the first resistance fight.

occupation army.

However, despite being one of the brightest memories of our glorious liberation war, it is yet to be recognized after 50 years of independence.

The historic old telephone office building, located at Gopalpur area in Pabna town, lies abandoned, decaying with the passage of time.

"Thousands of people from different corners cordoned the telephone exchange office where the occupation troops took shelter. Few of us managed fire arms from

Pabna police line. When they started firing, we also retaliated. Besides firing, we also hurled 'acid bulb' on them," said freedom fighter Babi Islam, who was one of the commanders of the fight.

"The occupation troops continuously showered bullets to disperse the people but we were united and nobody left the battle field," he said.

"When the firing became less intense, the mass people entered the camp risking their own lives with lethal weapons and killed 40 to 43 trained troops in the camp," he also said.

When the occupation troops reached the district headquarter early on March 25, people became united to resist the force.

Nurul Kader Khan, the then Pabna Deputy Commissioner (DC), organised the young people and provided access to the arsenal of the Pabna Police line to fight the trained troops, Babi added.

Surprisingly, the first battle field of liberation war in Pabna has turned into

a haven for the junkies and a trash dump causing woes to the freedom fighters who led the resistance fight.

"The people of Pabna set an example fighting the trained troops. Unfortunately, the heroic fight of the people of Pabna could not be recognised in the last 50 years of independence," freedom fighter Habibur Rahman Habib said demanding recognition of country's first resistance fight against the Pakistani troops.

On March 29, in a desperate move, Pakistani force launched an air attack to save rest of their troops but failed, Rabiul Islam Rabi said.

Around five to six people were martyred in the air strike, he said.

"The historic battle field has been lying abandoned for years after years. The sorry state of historic site hurts us. We urge the government to preserve the historic battle field for keeping memory of liberation afresh for the next generation," Robi added.

## US asks for peaceful

FROM PAGE 12

State Department spokesman said. "And we will continue to do so."

The Pakistani embassy declined immediate comment on the United States statement.

The American spokesperson also informed that the airlift of approximately 500 private American citizens, official dependents and United States employees from Dhaka was completed yesterday.

In an editorial titled "Bloodbath in Bengal" the New York Times wrote today: "The United States would have a humanitarian duty to speak out against the bloodbath in Bengal, as the Soviet Union already has done. Washington, as Pakistan's chief arms supplier, has a double obligation: to declare its disapproval of the tactics employed and to make clear that no additional American arms—including spare parts—will be sent to Pakistan until this savage repression in the East is stopped."

It further commented that America's own interests called for it to do everything possible to help bring a speedy end to a civil conflict that could touch off a chain reaction of communal strife throughout the Indian subcontinent, with grave international implications.

INDIA IS MEDDLING: CHINA

The Chinese Chargé d'Affaires in New Delhi today accused India of interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan. This is the first time that such remarks had been made officially by a Chinese mission though, till now, there was no reaction from Peking regarding the development in Bangladesh.

REPLY TO 'DISSENT CABLE'

In response to the "dissent cable" sent by the US officials in Dhaka, William Rogers, the Secretary of State, sent a telegram today to the American consul general in Dhaka. Addressing the complaint that the US had failed to denounce the suppression of democracy and the atrocities committed by the Pakistan Martial Law Authority, the secretary of state wrote: "We view this as primarily an internal matter of the Pakistan government and most other governments have the same view. Reports have been conflicting. Media in the US has been carrying stories of atrocities on both sides although we do not, of course, equate the two."

Shamsuddoza Sajen is a journalist and researcher. He can be contacted at sajen1986@gmail.com

## Mamunul, 16 others

FROM PAGE 12

north gate of the national mosque after Juma prayers, protesting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh.

Leaders and activists of Chhatra League, along with other ruling party men, who had taken position in nearby areas, threw brick chunks at the protesters, witnesses said.

Protesters, however, regrouped and attacked the ruling party men, leading to the clash.

Police tried to bring the situation under control by firing tear gas and rubber bullets. The clash continued for around two hours, said witnesses.

The tension eased after 5:00pm when the ruling party men left the area. Hefajat men left too.

The Daily Star correspondents saw seven burnt motorbikes near the north and south gates of the national mosque. City corporation employees were seen cleaning up the street.

More than 50 people were injured in the clash, according to witnesses and journalists.

## Shop owners continue protests

FROM PAGE 12

decision to keep business establishments closed to curb the infection rate of Covid-19.

Businessmen from Rajshahi, Barishal, Chattogram, Tangail, Faridpur and Patuakhali yesterday said they suffered huge losses due to the restrictions.

Asked, Anwar Hossain, general secretary of shop owners association at Gaucha market of Dhaka city, said they want to keep their stores open following the health guidelines.

"We have a lot of debt. How would we be able to repay unless we can sell our products during the main sales season ahead of Eid?"

"What kind of lockdown is it when the book fair, industries and garment factories are open while a handful of sectors are closed?" he asked.

Rizwan Rahman, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said if businesses are allowed to be open, then shops should be included in them as they are also businesses.

"However, if lockdown is mentioned then total lockdown minus emergency & essential services should be enforced," he said.

He said the government decides to keep shops shut, given the drastic situation, these small entrepreneurs will need enhanced stimulus package with blanket coverage with ease of access to finance through NGOs and other organisations.

"If we shut them down, then they must get access to finance for survival. Any hard lockdown will require the government to provide them support monetarily," he said.

Sheikh Fazle Fahim, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said the apex chamber has been in discussions with businessmen from different districts, including Dhaka, and government officials to find a solution to the problem.

"Hopefully, the problem will be solved in a day or two. But the way factories can be run, shops cannot be run the same way.

Traders need to understand this too," he said.

Dewan Aminul Islam, president of Dhaka New Market Business Owners' Association, said sales were recovering slowly.

"In this situation, if the market and our shops are closed ahead of Eid, we will be bankrupt."

The government enforced the restrictions from April 5 to 11. According to the restrictions, all shops and shopping malls will remain closed. But shops can continue wholesale and online services. In that case, they have to maintain health guidelines.

Buying and selling kitchen items and daily essentials will be done only in open spaces. In that case, the authorities concerned/local administration will ensure the services.

In Rajshahi, owners of small businesses opened their establishments yesterday, defying the restrictions.

Many traders and their employees opened shops at the RDA Market in the heart of the city on the second day of the seven-day "lockdown".

Maksudur Rahman, organising secretary of Rajshahi Babasai Oikya Parishad, an alliance of 110 local business bodies, said they were demanding that their businesses be kept outside the purview of the restrictions.

Our Rajshahi staff correspondent reports after visiting the RDA market in the morning, he saw most shops there were open. However, the number of buyers were low.

Md Sujon, owner of a shoe store, Sheikh Shoes, kept half of his store shuttered and the other half open.

"I opened the shop for price tagging the new shoes," he said, adding that he purchased the shoes worth around Tk 11 lakh and those reached his store the day before the "lockdown" began.

Many traders in Tangail kept their shops open on the second day, reports our correspondent there.

## India's 2nd surge overtakes first

FROM PAGE 12

am curfew a day after the country surpassed the grim milestone of 100,000 new daily infections for the first time. The curfew echoes tough restrictions in Maharashtra, the country's hardest-hit state where the financial capital Mumbai is also located.

Rising Covid-19 fatalities in the states of Punjab and Chhattisgarh are also cause for "extreme concern", India's top-ranked health official Rajesh Bhushan told reporters yesterday.

Leaders in several states including Delhi and Maharashtra have appealed to the federal government for a faster and wider roll-out of vaccines, with some like Odisha repeatedly citing shortages even for prioritised groups such as the elderly.

"If a larger number of young and working population is vaccinated, the intensity of

the cases would be much lower than the threat that they need today," Uddhav Thackeray, chief minister of Maharashtra, wrote in a letter to Modi late on Monday.

The federal government has said it will widen the vaccination campaign in the "near future" to include more people, and that vaccine supplies are being stepped up.

Coronavirus cases jumped by nearly 97,000 yesterday, data from the health ministry showed. There were 446 new deaths, taking the total to 165,547. With 12.7 million cases, India is the worst affected country after the United States and Brazil.

Daily infections have risen many fold since hitting a multi-month low in early February, when authorities eased most restrictions and people largely stopped wearing masks and observing social distancing.

## Death toll

FROM PAGE 12

Al Hasan left Narayanganj Launch Terminal for Munshiganj with nearly 50 passengers around 5:56pm on Sunday. Around 15 minutes later, it sank near the third Shitalakkhya Bridge at Koylaghat of Syedpur area when it was hit and dragged by a tanker.

Immediately after the accident, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), Fire Service and Civil Defence, Coast Guard, and Police joined the rescue operation.

The technology is in its early stages, but researchers believe it could eventually be used to build advanced "plant-based robots" that can pick up a host of fragile objects which are too delicate for rigid, robotic arms.

## The rise

FROM PAGE 12

wire half a millimetre thick, and catch a small falling object.

The technology is in its early stages, but researchers believe it could eventually be used to build advanced "plant-based robots" that can pick up a host of fragile objects which are too delicate for rigid, robotic arms.

## 78pc turnout

FROM PAGE 12

BJP of attempting to import divisive sectarian politics into the state, which has a large Muslim minority.

The third phase of West Bengal assembly elections was held across three districts—Howrah, Hooghly and South 24 Parganas.

The Election Commission said in a statement the turnout in the third phase was 77.68% till 5:00 pm.

The commission suspended a sector officer after three EVMs and four VVPAT machines were found at TMC leader Goutam Ghosh's residence.

Voters were being intimidated into staying away from polling stations "in hundreds of villages", Dilip Ghosh, a senior local BJP member, told AFP.

Samiran Mitra, BJP candidate from Hooghly alleged that three BJP workers were beaten up by TMC workers at Sipaigachi in Haripal of Hooghly.

## Missing Jubo Dal leader found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A local Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal leader, missing for the last five days, was found dead in Atghoria upazila of the district on Monday yesterday.

The victim, Shajahan Ali, 40, son Tofazzal Hossain of Shalgaria village in Sadar upazila, was join secretary of Pabna district unit Jubo Dal.

Police recovered Shajahan's decomposed body from Gongarampur village yesterday afternoon.

Deceased's brother Faridul Islam said Shajahan, a shopkeeper, went out of his shop on March 31 evening and remained missing since then.

Later, failing to trace his whereabouts, Faridul lodged a general diary (GD) with Pabna Sadar Police Station the following day.

Officer in Charge (OC) of Atghoria Police Station Hafizur Rahman said sensing bad odour coming from behind the house of one Kashem Ali of Gongarampur village on Monday evening, local people informed the matter to police, who went to the spot and recovered Shajahan's decomposed body from an abandoned toilet.

Criminals might have dumped the body there after killing him somewhere else, the OC said, adding that they sent the body to Pabna General Hospital for autopsy yesterday.

## Grieving family

FROM PAGE 12

bodies be brought back to their ancestral home. They said they did not want to believe that the family met their demise in such a way as they were happy and never suffered any crisis.

Early on Monday morning in Dallas, Texas, police recovered the six bodies from a suburban home. The deceased are Altafun Nessa, 77, her daughter Iren Islam, 56, son-in-law Towhidul Islam, 54, granddaughter Farbin Towhid, 19, and grandsons Tanvir Towhid, 21 and Farhan Towhid, 19.

Dallas Morning News quoted police as saying they believe the brothers -- Tanvir and Farhan -- killed their family members, then died by suicide.

The newspaper also reported, "A social-media account that belonged Farhan Towhid contained a link to a lengthy letter that presaged the killings."

The report added that police believed the incident took place sometime Saturday, and that one of the brothers recently bought a gun.

When this correspondent visited the family's ancestral home in Doharpara, Altafun Nessa's son Abul Kalam Azad Heron said, "We talked with my mother [Altafun Nessa], sister [Iren], brother-in-law [Towhidul], nephews [Tanvir and Farhan] and niece [Farbin] regularly."

"We talked to them last Friday night, but we could not reach them since then. They never said anything about any family crisis; they were happy with each other."

He said his mother was supposed to come back to Bangladesh on April 1 and the ticket was also confirmed.

However, her travel companion -- who would have travelled with her to help her during the flight -- delayed the return because of fears surrounding the recent Covid-19 spike in the country, Heron said.

"My niece Farbin, who is studying in New York University, came [to Dallas] last week to see off her grandmother and to spend the last two days with her. We cannot accept the sudden shock," Heron added.

Talking to The Daily Star, Md Arifur Rahman, another of Altafun Nessa's sons, said his sister has been living in the US with her family since the 1990s and that their mother travelled there every year since 2007.

"They went to the USA for a better future and were living happily; there was no trouble. We lost six of our family members including my mother, the lone sister of five brothers, nephews and niece who are the dearest members of our family. We want proper investigation into the incident," Arifur said, and demanded that the bodies be brought back for burial in the ancestral home.

When visiting the ancestral home yesterday morning, this correspondent found relatives and locals had come to the house to console the grieving family members, but no consolation was enough.

"We have lost six members of our family -- how will we carry the pain? There is no word sufficient to console this family," said Nahida Yeasmin, a relative of the family who was visiting the house.

## Policy support needed

FROM PAGE 12

Bangladesh. The PM hoped it would help expand economic partnership between the two countries.

Mentioning that the government was developing 100 special economic zones across Bangladesh, Hasina offered a dedicated Special Economic Zone to American companies to establish manufacturing facilities.

Talking about the ICT sector, she said Bangladesh exports more than \$1 billion worth ICT products to over 60 countries, the US being the top export destination. "Bangladesh is now developing 28 Hi-tech parks for ICT industries with local and foreign investment. We are offering one Hi-Tech Park for ICT investment by US companies."

Nisha Biswal, president of US-Bangladesh Business Council, said being in a strategic location, Bangladesh is an important partner of the US both for import and investment.

The US is the single largest export destination for Bangladesh and at the same time Bangladesh is one of the important import destinations for the American people, said Biswal, also the senior vice-president (South Asia) of the US Chamber of Commerce.

Marcia Bernicat, a senior official for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment of the US Department of State, said Bangladesh has an enormous potential in digital technology.

Bernicat, a former US ambassador to Bangladesh, praised Bangladeshi companies who exported Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for the American people during the pandemic in a short time.

She conveyed her good wishes to Bangladeshis on the occasion of the golden jubilee of independence.

Sajeed Wazed, ICT adviser to the prime minister of Bangladesh, said a digitally developed Bangladesh is gearing up to launch 5G by the end of this year. Almost 90 percent population of the country would be brought under cashless transaction in next three years, he said.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi sought US investment in Bangladesh's different potential sectors through the new council.

Earl R Miller, US ambassador to Bangladesh, said the US wants to see real economic recovery in Bangladesh and increase of bilateral trade.

He said there were some challenges in Bangladesh and the country needed to work more on those.

Dara Khosroshahi, CEO of Uber, John McCallion, executive vice president and chief financial officer, MetLife, Judith McKenna, president and CEO of Walmart International, Afeef Zubaer Zaman, co-founder and CEO of ShopUp, Mahesh Palashikar, president, GE South Asia, and Sheikh Fazle Fahim, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, delivered their messages praising Bangladesh's achievements over the years.

Kamal Quadir, founder and CEO of bKash, Steven Kobos, president and CEO of Excelerate Energy, Elena Butarova, senior vice president of Strategic Growth Markets - Asia, MetLife, and M Shahidul Islam, Bangladesh ambassador to the US, also spoke.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Global death toll tops 3 million

REUTERS

Coronavirus-related deaths worldwide crossed 3 million yesterday, according to a Reuters tally, as the latest global resurgence of Covid-19 infections is challenging vaccination efforts across the globe.

Worldwide Covid-19 deaths are rising once again, especially in Brazil and India. Health officials blame more infectious variants that were first detected in the United Kingdom and South Africa, along with public fatigue with lockdowns and other restrictions.

According to a Reuters tally, it took more than a year for the global coronavirus death toll to reach 2 million. The next 1 million deaths were added in about three months.

Brazil is leading the world in the daily average number of new deaths reported and accounts for one in every four deaths worldwide each day, according to a Reuters analysis.

India reported a record rise in Covid-19 infections on Monday, becoming the second nation after the United States to post more than 100,000 new cases in a day.

The European region, which includes 51 countries, has the highest total number of deaths at nearly 1.1 million. Five European countries including the United Kingdom, Russia, France, Italy and Germany constitute about 60% of Europe's total coronavirus-related deaths.

The US has the highest number of deaths of any country at the world at 555,000 and accounts for about 19% of all deaths. Cases have risen for the last three weeks but health officials believe the nation's rapid vaccination campaign may prevent a rise in deaths. A third of the population has received at least one dose of a vaccine.

At least 370.3 million people or nearly 4.75% of the global population have received a single dose of Covid-19 vaccine by Sunday, according sources.



This handout photo taken yesterday shows protesters holding up the three finger salute in front of red paint splashed on the road, representing blood spilled during protests against the military coup, in Hpa-an township in Myanmar's Karen state.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Jordan bans media coverage of royal rift

Jordan yesterday banned all news outlets and social media users from publishing any content related to King Abdullah's half-brother Prince Hamza after the latter was accused of plotting to destabilise the country. Prince Hamza pledged allegiance to King Abdullah late on Monday after mediation by the royal family, two days after the military warned him over actions it said were undermining "security and stability" in Jordan and placed him under house arrest. In unprecedented public criticism, Hamza, who was crown prince until King Abdullah removed him from the post in 2004, accused Jordan's leaders of corruption and serving only their own interests. The government says he liaised with people linked to foreign parties in a plot to destabilise Jordan and that he had been under investigation for some time.

Kerry presses India ahead of Biden climate summit

US climate envoy John Kerry yesterday pressed India, the world's third-biggest carbon emitter, to set more ambitious green goals ahead of UN talks in late 2021 and Joe Biden's upcoming climate summit. Bloomberg News reported last month that top Indian government officials were debating whether to follow dozens of other countries in setting a goal of net zero emissions by mid-century. India may however balk at setting a zero-emissions target, because that would require a major overhaul of its heavily coal-dependent economy -- and because it has already set ambitious renewable energy goals. India wants to expand renewable power to 450 gigawatts by 2030, almost five times existing capacity, and to cut emissions intensity by at least a third from 2005 levels by the end of the decade, according to Bloomberg News.

Nepal hit by worst wildfires in almost a decade



Nepal is experiencing its worst fire season in almost a decade, officials said yesterday, as huge blazes rage across the country's forests, engulfing the Himalayan nation in a shroud of brownish haze. Air quality in the capital Kathmandu was yesterday ranked as the worst in the world, according to monitoring site IQAir, with some international flights delayed as thick smoke blanketed the city. Firefighters were working to bring the flames under control, officials said. More than 2,700 wildfires have been reported in Nepal since November, 14 times higher than in the same period last year, the government said. Rijal said the winter season between November and February was drier than usual, increasing the risk. The wildfire season starts in November and lasts until the onset of the monsoon in June.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

LANDSLIDES, FLASH FLOODS IN INDONESIA

Rescuers hunt for dozens missing

Death toll rises to 120

AFP, Lembata

Rescuers were searching for dozens of people still missing yesterday after floods and landslides swept away villages in Indonesia and East Timor, killing at least 120 people and leaving thousands more homeless.

Torrential rains from Tropical Cyclone Seroja, one of the most destructive storms to hit the region in years, turned small communities into wastelands of mud, uprooted trees and sent around 10,000 people fleeing to shelters across the neighbouring Southeast Asian nations.

Indonesia's disaster management agency said it had recorded 86 deaths in a cluster of remote islands. In East Timor another 34 have been officially listed as dead since the disaster struck on Sunday.

Authorities revised down an initial higher death toll for Indonesia, citing miscommunication with local agencies.

But search and rescue teams there were racing to find more than 100 people still missing and were using diggers to clear mountains of debris. The storm swept buildings in some villages down a mountainside and to the shore of the ocean on Lembata island, where several small communities have been wiped off the map.

Fatal landslides and flash floods are common across the Indonesian archipelago during the rainy season. The disaster agency has estimated that 125 million Indonesians -- nearly half of the country's population -- live in areas at risk of landslides.

'The blood has not dried'

Myanmar activists splash red paint to protest junta bloodshed

AGENCIES

Myanmar's pro-democracy protesters sprayed red paint on roads in Yangon yesterday in a reminder to the junta that it had blood on its hands as the crisis created by a military coup in the Southeast Asian nation dragged on with no end in sight.

Several groups called for a boycott of next week's Thingyan Water Festival, which marks the Buddhist new year. Leaflets calling for the ban, distributed in Yangon, said it would be a sign of compassion for the families of those killed. About 570 people have been killed during two months of unrest since the Feb. 1 coup, and security forces have arrested close to 3,500 people, with about four-fifths of them still in detention, advocacy group the Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) said yesterday.

Demonstrators woke early in Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city, to spray and splash pavements, roads and bus shelters with red paint in protest at a sweeping crackdown by security forces that has caused weeks of international outrage. "The blood has not dried," said one message in red. Another protest scheduled for today has called

for the burning of Chinese-made goods. Many protesters are opposed to China because it is seen as supporting the junta.

The coup and crackdown have drawn outrage and sanctions from world powers, as well as prompting several international companies to suspend business in Myanmar.

But the pressure has yet to tell on the generals, who have shown little sign of stepping back from their efforts to suppress protests.

And yesterday, Russia, which has sought to build ties with the junta, joined China in publicly rejecting sanctions against Myanmar.

News agency Interfax quoted a Russian foreign ministry spokesperson as warning "threats and pressure" could push Myanmar closer to "full-blown civil conflict".

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian restated Beijing's opposition to "inappropriate interference" in Myanmar.

But he said China backed a summit of regional bloc ASEAN to discuss the crisis -- mooted by Malaysia and Brunei's leaders after talks on Monday.

The Myanmar military has defended seizing power, pointing to fraud allegations around last November's general election, won by the NLD.



Combat 'false narratives' on CAA, farm laws

Modi tells BJP workers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said "false narratives" are being built around with Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and that "there is a big conspiracy behind it."

"Today false narratives are made around sometimes with CAA, sometimes on the farm laws and sometimes with labour laws. Every BJP worker has to understand that there is a well-calculated politics behind it and there is a big conspiracy behind it. Their purpose is to create political instability in the country," he said in a video message on the occasion of the Bharatiya Janata Party's 41st foundation day.

"Various rumours are spread in the country, confusion is created. They say that constitution will be changed, that reservation (for backward castes and tribes) will be quashed and sometimes they say that the farmers' land will be snatched. These are all lies," Modi said.

"These lies were spread" by those "who could not accept their defeat, some for political gains and there are others who are against BJP," he said.

The PM asked BJP workers to be alert against such "fake narratives" by being in the midst of the people and by constantly being in touch with them.



The daughter of Palestinian Osama Mansour is comforted as she mourns during her father's funeral in Biddu village, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday. A Palestinian motorist was killed and his wife wounded by Israeli fire early yesterday, the Palestinian health ministry said, in what the Israeli army described as an "attempted car-ramming attack".

PHOTO: REUTERS

IRAN NUKE ACCORD Hope rises as powers meet to salvage deal

AFP, Vienna

The United States is set to start talks with EU negotiators yesterday in Austria's capital Vienna aimed at salvaging an international agreement on Iran's nuclear programme, which Washington withdrew from in 2018.

US President Joe Biden has said he is ready to reverse the decision of his predecessor Donald Trump and return to the 2015 agreement, which was supposed to ensure that Iran never developed a military nuclear programme.

But Iran is demanding an end to crippling sanctions imposed by Trump and has refused to meet US negotiators at the latest talks, meaning European players will act as intermediaries.

Ahead of the talks, US special envoy Rob Malley suggested that the United States could be open to lifting sanctions and returning to the 2015 deal, comments Iran government spokesman Ali Rabiee called "promising".

"We find this position realistic and promising. It could be the start of correcting the bad process that had taken diplomacy to a dead end," he told reporters in Tehran yesterday.

Iran confirmed in January it was enriching uranium to 20 percent purity, well beyond the threshold set by the deal.

The European Union will preside over talks between current members of the 2015 pact -- Iran, China, France, Germany, Russia and Britain.

Advertisement for Eastern Refinery Limited (ER) regarding the suspension of tender closing date for Tender Package No.: ER/G&E/Two Spare Motor/2020-2021. Includes details on procurement of two spare motors and contact information.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Government regarding the suspension of tender closing date for various projects. Includes a table with project details, dates, and contact information.

Advertisement for Dewbn (Dhaka Engineering College and University) regarding recruitment for various positions. Includes details on the recruitment process, eligibility criteria, and contact information.

## GRAPE VINE

### FARIA LATELY



PHOTO: COLLECTED

For the first time, Faria Shahrin will appear in an Eid comedy drama, which will be called *Jamai vs Shashuri*. The drama is written by Rafsan and directed by Ziauddin Alam. Niloy Alamgir will be seen acting alongside Faria on this. Faria said, "It was really fun to act on this project. This was the first time I worked alongside Niloy, and it was a very good experience. I hope that people will enjoy watching this drama." The drama is being produced by *Laser Vision*.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Puja Cherry is preparing for the release of her film *Shaan* this coming Eid. Siam Ahmed acts opposite her in the film, and the movie also features Taskin and Misha Sawdagor, among several others. It has been directed by M Rahim. Puja said, "I don't think I had to work this hard for any film before this. I have so many good memories of working on this film. I had to even risk my life while shooting some scenes for this movie."

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub



PHOTO: COLLECTED

### BUSY ROSHAN

Currently, actor Roshan is passing a very busy period. Recently his project, the Anonno Mamun directed film *Makeup* was released to an OTT platform. Roshan's acting on it was praised by the audiences. Roshan also started shooting for *Chokh*, in which he will act alongside Bubly. He is also shooting for the Masud Mohiuddin and Mahmud Hasan Sikder directed web film *Anandi*. Roshan said, "I have been able to work on quite a lot of good projects this year. I got to do some different roles and hopefully, the audience will enjoy seeing me in so many different ways." Aside from these, Roshan is also awaiting the release of the films *Ostad* and *Operation Sundarban*.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub

## COVER STORY

# Welcoming Spring

Sharing bond and passion, the melodious singers, Nobonita Chowdhury and Nirupoma Rahman hold harmony and depth in their voices. The sisters recently joined for a special discussion with Rafi Hossain where they welcomed spring by singing beautiful Rabindra Sangeet and Thumri's and talked about their childhood and sisterhood.

**Rafi Hossain:** Today we have with us, Nobonita Chowdhury and Nirupoma Rahman. A lot of people are recently getting to know that Nirupoma is also heavily involved with music.

**Nobonita Chowdhury:** It's quite understandable because she has spent 20 years or basically half of her life abroad. Initially, she left to pursue her studies, after which she went on to teach, and then finally settled there. While COVID has brought a lot of negativity into our lives, one thing that I'm grateful for is the new opportunities to create and reach out with music. Because of this, we are finally getting the opportunity to listen to her music and it is reaching and is being appreciated in high places. It's a very happy moment for our family as that's something we always envisioned for her. Living abroad, she doesn't get the chance to sing as much. I also want to add that the amount of dedication she has is very inspiring for me. Even if she doesn't perform frequently, she makes sure to practise every day.

**Nirupoma Rahman:** One thing I must say is that Nobonita and I both grew up with music; we began learning music even before we started school. Because of this, music has become a part of my soul. We sing to express our emotions, our happiness, and our sorrows.

**Rafi Hossain:** Many people often inquire about your work Nobonita and even say that you sometimes seem like a know-it-all. What do you have to say to that?

**Nobonita Chowdhury:** I began working at a newspaper as a teenager and then started working full-time when I was 18. I've been involved with the media for 20 to 25 years now, be it for the radio, newspapers, or news channels like BBC and Ekattor TV. So, being a journalist, it is our job to be aware of everything that is happening. Otherwise, how can we hope to inform the people? I see it as a compliment in a way.

**Rafi Hossain:** Are you focusing more on music now?

**Nobonita Chowdhury:** I am trying to work on music more now. Balancing my job with this passion was really difficult, as music would get pushed aside constantly. However, I believe that music will stay with me forever and so I decided to focus on it more. I sing more nowadays and perform in front of an audience when I can. But there's definitely a lack of space to do so frequently in Bangladesh. There aren't many places for people to gather to listen to music or concerts taking place regularly. Even on television, the opportunity to sing Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul Sangeet is limited. But I am trying my best to do so and I'm receiving a lot of encouragement and appreciation. I even got together with Shilpakala Academy to celebrate Sheikh Mujib's centennial. We brought 100 singers from all over Bangladesh to create a sort of folk medley.

**Rafi Hossain:** Can you tell us more about your journey throughout your career?

**Nobonita Chowdhury:** I started off as a field journalist and worked at the most remote and underdeveloped places in Bangladesh. From there I got the opportunity to go abroad and work for BBC. After coming back, I was part of a talk show which I quit to finally join BRAC recently as the director of their gender program, which I'm truly enjoying. Now I can look back at my previous jobs to compare and see how much Bangladesh has changed in the past decade. It also really inspires me and reminds me that there is a lot to do for my country as well.

**Rafi Hossain:** Nirupoma, can you tell us about the songs you sang today?

**Nirupoma Rahman:** The songs we sang at the beginning were picked very carefully. Nobonita and I will be welcoming spring today by singing both Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul Sangeet. Spring is not just a season, but a concept too, and it is a concept that was introduced to Bengalis by Rabindranath Thakur. He made spring so celebratory and close to our hearts. An interesting thing, however, is that Rabindranath dedicated his book, *Bashanta*, to Nazrul, saying "Nazrul has brought spring into the life of the nation". This book came out when Nazrul was in jail, and Rabindranath made sure he received it. Since Rabindranath was such an inspirational figure for Nazrul, it really touched him.

**Nobonita Chowdhury:** I want to add something to this as well. Rabindranath wrote this to admire Nazrul's rebellion. During that period of time, many people were saying that the new era of music was destroying the sweetness that Rabindranath had previously introduced. This book was therefore his

way of saying that if he was young, he would join Nazrul in his rebellion through this kind of music as well.

**Rafi Hossain:** Nirupoma, do you want to add anything else?

**Nirupoma Rahman:** Yes, I want to elaborate a little about the songs. The ones we sang are of very different melodies but have quite a similar *raag*. Many gurus have even said that these songs are like twin sisters who went their own way after birth. This is surprising because they were written almost twenty years apart. In fact, people also told Nazrul that his song has some similarities with Rabindra sangeet. In reality, Nazrul was focusing on this sort of *raag* during that period. Since this is the first time we're performing together, I thought they would be ideal for today.

**Rafi Hossain:** Nobonita, why don't you tell us a little bit about the song you will sing.

**Nobonita Chowdhury:** I will be singing a song by Rabindranath Thakur written for spring. Like Nirupoma mentioned, the celebration of spring and welcoming spring is a tradition that he began in Shantiniketan. Many of Rabindranath's songs about seasons focus on spring.

**Rafi Hossain:** I think it's equally important to expose children to such music. Would you agree?

**Nobonita Chowdhury:** That's an excellent point and I completely agree with you. If we don't play Rabindra sangeet or Nazrul sangeet in our homes, our children will never have the opportunity to know if they enjoy it. This reminds me of an incident that happened with my daughter. We took her to the rooftop to show her what a full moon is, and she suddenly began singing a Rabindra Sangeet about one and she learned it in her dance class recently. That truly filled my heart with happiness because even though she was only five

human beings. Today we talk about being global citizens, but these ideas were not prevalent when we were young. However, our parents would constantly preach such values to us and teach us about how there is no difference between what a man and a woman can do. She mentioned that growing up people would highlight some of our differences, but in the end, we're like the two songs that I mentioned: born with the same values and separated by our different lives. Perhaps one of us is more restless while the other is calmer. Nobonita has always taken up challenges throughout her life and in her career, while I never dared to do so. Even for my job, I've always wanted to pursue teaching which is a safe career path. I respect her a lot for this.

**Rafi:** What are your thoughts on Nazrul and Rabindra sangeet based around spring?

**Nirupoma:** As a student of literature, I think both Nazrul and Rabindra Sangeet, the songs about spring have a recurring theme of "wishing for togetherness". Some of Nazrul's work of the same theme actually comes from a place of grief or sadness. He also incorporates Persian elements into his works that make them stand out further.

**Nobonita:** I also think Rabindra focuses more on the celebratory aspects of spring in his works and the fact that Nazrul often diverges into the melancholy themes, much like how he does in his other works, is quite unique.

**Rafi:** Could you tell me a bit more about your life growing up?

**Nobonita:** We are very grateful for our upbringing. I am very thankful to both my parents and our mentors that we had growing up. We also have an endless amount of love and respect for our country and its literature.

**Nirupoma:** Growing up, our parents have always



PHOTO: COLLECTED

back then, she could connect her experience with the song, she could look at the full moon as though from Rabindranath's perspective. I find this an incredibly important lesson because if we expose our children to Hindi songs only, they will never connect to it as it's not their mother tongue.

**Rafi Hossain:** Nobonita, share things about your sister that you love and ones that you hate.

**Nobonita Chowdhury:** I would say that we are quite alike in terms of our interests. I believe other people also notice this because, on many occasions, people figured out we were siblings even without us mentioning it just by our personality and mannerisms. However, one thing that I had to hear growing up was how beautiful Nirupoma is, perhaps because of the slight difference in our complexions. Now that we are older, I find our faces to be very similar to one another. We were, and are, always very close to each other. Even if we are busy with our lives and can't communicate often, I know that she'll understand how I'm feeling with just one simple text. Nirupoma is also great at cooking, which is something I did not enjoy much as she spent most of her life abroad. I would say that's where we differ as I enjoy eating much more than I do cooking. However, I love and appreciate how close and in sync we are, even though we chose different lives and careers. It's a true gift for me.

**Nirupoma Rahman:** Nobonita and I also have a very similar outlook on life as well as similar values. I would say a big part of that is how we were brought up. We were lucky to have unique parents like ours who brought us up, not as women, but as good

taught us to value what we have and learn to be happy with it. Like Nobonita said, we are very grateful for having been taught these values.

**Rafi:** What do you think is the meaning of life?

**Nobonita:** Again, I think I have been greatly influenced by my parents and my mentors. They have always told me to dream and think big. I believe it is the most fulfilling to contribute to the country and the society in some way so that it does not feel like our life has been in vain. My siblings and I are all very hard workers who constantly try to get better at what we do. Some people might think that mysiblings may not contribute as much to the country since they live abroad but, for example, my sister has raised a wonderful daughter who, despite growing up abroad, can read and write in Bangla. Even at the age of 11, she has extensive knowledge of the history of Bangladesh and is familiar with many of the greatest Bengali icons, such as Bangabandhu, Rabindranath, Satyajit Rai, and greatly appreciates their contributions to the heritage of Bangladesh. I believe raising such a child itself is a great contribution to our country.

**Nirupoma:** Like Nobonita said, we wish to live an honest life with respect and peace. Since Nobonita and I are both singers, I think I speak for the both of us when I say that I hope and wish that we can always speak our minds and express our emotions, whether they are happy or sad through the tunes that we sing till our very last breath.

**Rafi Hossain:** Thank you both for being with us today and for this amazing discussion.

Shreya Shomoyeeta

## POPCORN HIGHLIGHTS

Here are some binge worthy movie and TV series you can spend your time watching while you stay at home social distancing, keeping yourself, as well as others, safe.



### Pagglait

*Pagglait* is an Indian dark comedy-drama film on Netflix. It has been directed by Umesh Bist, produced by Shobha Kapoor, alongside others under the banners *Balaji Motion Pictures* and *Sikhya Entertainment*, and stars Sanya Malhotra, Shruti Sharma, and Ashutosh Rana, among others. The story follows the life of a young widow dealing with the new changes in her life while facing her family, discovering herself, and learning more about her departed husband. It was released on March 26, 2021.

### VINCENZO

*Vincenzo* is a South Korean black comedy television series. It has been directed by Kim Hee-won, produced under the banner of *Logos Film*, and stars Song Joong-ki, Jeon Yeo-been, and Ok Taec-yeon, among others. The series follows a Korean-Italian man, who, after losing his position at the mafia, tries to find a vault full of gold he helped hide. It was originally released on February 20, 2021.



### THE BOLD TYPE

*The Bold Type* is an American comedy-drama television series on Netflix. It has been created by Sarah Watson, produced under the banner of *Universal Television*, and stars Katie Stevens, Aisha Dee, and Meghann Fahy in the lead. The series has been inspired by the life and career of Joanna Coles, the former editor-in-chief of *Cosmopolitan magazine*, who is also the executive producer. It follows the life of three millennial women as they navigate their work, life, romance, and new teachings every day. It was initially released on June 20, 2017 with the last episode being aired on July 16, 2020.

Shreya Shomoyeeta

## Government's decision to increase the number of ICU beds

*A positive step, but a little late for comfort*

IT should come as good news that the government has decided to double the number of ICU beds in Dhaka to cope with the surge of Covid-19 patients. And it is expected to be done in the next ten days. We, however, feel that the decision should have come sooner. It is another instance of the administration taking the right action—but much delayed. We do not doubt that many lessons had been learnt during the last one year from the experiences of combating the pandemic, and one had hoped that the planning elites would have acted timely on their experiences to remove the lacunae in various areas. The prevailing conditions suggest that they did not.

The most acute of all was the critical shortage of ICUs in both public and private hospitals. It was felt back then, and even after 13 months the problem exists. Regrettably, the number of cases is increasing every day and critical patients are being turned away because of lack of space in Covid wards and ICUs. For the already affected, the decision to increase the number of ICU beds after ten days can be of little comfort, especially those requiring immediate and urgent care.

It is not that the indicators were not present. We witnessed the emergence of newer strains in Europe and the US early this year. Our biggest neighbour, India, has had the misfortune to be struck most severely by the second strain. Yet we did not react till very recently.

But it is not the matter of ICUs only—even oxygen has been in short supply, and as a result, uninterrupted supply to critical Covid patients is not being ensured. The situation has not improved over the last one year, unfortunately, even though we recall this point being highlighted in the media as well as in the deliberations of the Committee to combat the pandemic last year.

Doubling the ICU and normal beds is a tall order, but we hope the government will meet its aim. Facilities outside Dhaka should also be increased—we have seen how severe the shortage of facilities to treat Covid-19 patients is in other districts. It would be well for the authorities to keep in mind that the pandemic is not likely to be a one-off event. Experts fear that it will be with us for some time. We should therefore take timely actions, which was not the case this time, and plan for tomorrow rather than yesterday.

## Two child patients per bed!

*Authorities need to increase Patuakhali hospital's capacity*

A stream of child patients with typhoid and cold-related diseases, including pneumonia, has been causing serious overcrowding at the paediatric ward of the Patuakhali General Hospital for the last one month. And the authorities, in order to provide treatment to the maximum number of patients at the 48-bed ward, have been allocating each bed for two patients, along with their attendants. This, of course, means that the Covid-19 safety guidelines are impossible to follow at the ward, putting the parents of these children, as well as the hospital staff, at great risk of contracting the disease. Moreover, given that the virus is constantly mutating and is not yet fully understood by us, what guarantee is there that the children will not be affected at all by it in some way?

Over the past month, 681 patients had to be treated at the ward, which clearly does not have the capacity to deal with such an influx. While we appreciate the hospital's attempt to provide treatment to all the patients coming in, cramming so many people in together at a time like this has its own dangers.

Since the overcrowding has been going on for a month, the authorities should have taken some steps to increase the hospital's capacity to provide paediatric treatment, once it realised that the influx was not a one-time event. Why wasn't such action taken? Was it due to a lack of resources? Or was it due to a lack of initiative taken by the hospital authorities? Either way, a situation like this cannot be allowed to continue. At a time when the authorities should be doing everything to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus, cramming so many children and their parents into one ward cannot be the final solution.

The authorities must immediately do what is necessary to increase the hospital's capacity to treat the child patients. Moreover, the hospital should strictly follow the relevant Covid-19 safety guidelines to ensure that it does not turn into a Covid-19 hotspot, which would be completely counterproductive.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Help Covid patients

For want of due support, people infected by Covid-19 are suffering. The public hospitals in our country are poorly equipped even more than a year after the outbreak. Almost every one of these hospitals lack proper oxygen support, something that can make the difference between life and death for a coronavirus patient. As a conscientious citizen, I insist the concerned authority take effective measures immediately.

MD Rasel Sheikh, Uttara.

## WORLD HEALTH DAY 2021

# Together, towards a fairer and healthier post-Covid-19 world

*Why we must seize the moment to advance health equity and achieve universal health coverage*



POONAM KHETRAPAL SINGH

THIS World Health Day, the World Health Organization (WHO) is highlighting the opportunity we have to build a fairer and healthier post-Covid-19 world. For well

over a year now, marginalised and disenfranchised communities across the world and in the South-East Asia Region have borne the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic. In countries rich and poor, socioeconomic, political, educational and geographic factors, among others, have facilitated the spread of the SARS-CoV2 virus, impacting health outcomes and compounding inequalities. In our unequal world, preventable social and economic inequities continue to impede the right of everyone, everywhere, to achieve the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health—an injustice that we must not accept.

Covid-19 is just the latest disease to expose, exploit and exacerbate inequalities that negatively impact health and socioeconomic outcomes between and among vulnerable groups. In countries at all levels of income and development, health and illness follow a social gradient: the lower the socio-economic position, the worse the health and the poorer the access to health services of adequate quality. This is why the burden of communicable diseases in the Region such as TB, hepatitis and HIV is most acute among poor and disadvantaged populations, which has the tragic effect of entrenching these communities' poverty and marginalisation. And it is why noncommunicable diseases such as stroke and heart disease can be more commonly found among populations that are exposed to socially determined risk factors such as unplanned urbanisation

and inadequate housing, which can contribute to household air pollution, food insecurity and malnutrition.

To remedy these and other health inequities, and to create a fairer and healthier post-pandemic world, WHO is calling on leaders in the health sector and beyond to make concerted efforts throughout the Covid-19 response and recovery to ensure that all people have living and working conditions that are

the health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. And we have made real progress. Trend data from the Region's 2020 monitoring report show that health service coverage is now, on average, above 63 percent, as compared with 49 percent a decade ago. The density of health workers—around 70 percent of whom are women—continues to increase, with nine countries now above the first WHO

they have been throughout the Covid-19 response. Community outreach and empowerment, including through women-led organisations, can help identify the root causes of inequities and find localised solutions, and also enhance coordination between health and social services and target communities. The whole-of-government, whole-of-society approaches that countries have mobilised to respond to the pandemic provide a compelling model by which they can accelerate progress towards UHC, and with it, Sustainable Development Goal 3 and the wider Sustainable Development Agenda.

On the Region's onward journey, countries must continue to prioritise the collection of high-quality, timely and reliable health data. To adequately uncover inequities and enable policies that tackle them, health data should be collected on a disaggregated basis and analysed by key stratifiers for inequities, such as by sex, geography, income, education, or other pertinent metrics. The findings should then be fed into health policy-making and implementation. The Region's WHO-supported Health Information Platform, which provides an integrated database of country progress across a range of indicators, must continue to be leveraged to close gaps and eliminate disparities.

We can—and must—prevail. The emergence and spread of Covid-19 have laid bare the inequities that influence health outcomes between and among groups in the Region and across the world, and which make us all more health-insecure. We must reduce and ultimately end those inequities and accelerate towards UHC. All people have the right to achieve the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. A fairer and healthier Region and world is possible. We must dare to be bold and achieve our vision.

Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh is WHO South-East Asia Regional Director.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

conducive to lifelong health and well-being. Clean water and air, income and social protection, and food security among other environmental and public policy goods are vital to achieving this goal, and can best be secured through a "health-in-all-policies" approach that is gender-responsive and human rights-focused, and which advances the core principle of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda: Leave no one behind.

Health systems themselves have a critical role to play. Since 2014, the Region has pursued universal health coverage (UHC) as a Flagship Priority, with the aim of ensuring all people have access to

threshold, compared with six in 2014.

But the fiscal constraints imposed by the pandemic threaten to stall or even reverse progress unless budgets are actively reprioritised and health is apportioned additional resources. New sources of revenue should be explored, for example increases in taxation on unhealthy products such as tobacco, alcohol and sugar-sweetened beverages. Value for money must continue to be improved, including through investments in primary healthcare and pro-poor initiatives that help mitigate the social determinants of health.

Crucially, communities must continue to be engaged and listened to—precisely as

# One year into the pandemic: What lessons have we learnt?



NAVEED AHMED

AS I settle down to pen this write-up, the incessant calls and messages on my phone serve as a poignant reminder of how our lives have been reshaped and defaced by

the Covid-19 pandemic. In response, I offer what medical advice I can regarding Covid tests, treatment and follow-up, but can't oblige the requests of help with admissions in hospital beds, especially in the Intensive Care Units (ICUs). There are no vacancies anywhere, it seems. The increasing frequency of the news of deaths of near and dear ones is unnerving and unsettling. A year on, and we're back to square one. It has been a little more than a year since the first coronavirus cases were detected in Bangladesh, but the same, if not deeper, challenges and uncertainties remain.

"Building a fairer, healthier world" is the theme of World Health Day this year, which marks the 73rd founding anniversary of the World Health Organization (WHO). Before I dissect the aptly named theme in the context of the pandemic, I want to touch base first. Since the first coronavirus cases were detected on March 8 last year, Bangladesh's pandemic journey has been a predominantly unpredictable one so far. A total of 651,652 people have been infected and 9,384 people have sadly lost their lives thus far, amounting to a mortality rate of 1.44 percent. The morbid part of this statistic is that these numbers are ever rising. An indicator to that end is the record high, staggering test positivity rate (infection rate) of 23.40 percent recorded two days ago, and the country has been forced into a lockdown once again.

When the first wave of the pandemic hit home last year, it truly was a jolt to an already beleaguered health system grappling with inadequate financial allocation and unequal distribution of manpower and resources, coupled with a weak governance structure and undeniable mismanagement. The sudden surge in Covid-19 cases, Covid-19 related deaths and a dearth of hospital beds and ICUs at that time brutally exposed the gaping cracks of a health sector whose budget allocation for fiscal year 2021 stands at 5.14 percent, which is a meagre 0.9 percent of the country's GDP. A few months into the pandemic, despite a

myriad of challenges and the initial shock to the system, the brave and selfless healthcare professionals of the country—doctors, nurses and other providers—were able to treat and manage patients better with improved outcomes, marked by better recovery rates and reduced mortality.

The wider scale effects of the pandemic, however, was a far reaching issue, adversely affecting people's lives

taken to prevent this second wave?

Well, the answer is not a clear cut one. Compared to the time of the first wave, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare have established guidelines on an overall management system with lessons learnt in preparation for the second wave, and there has also been a sharp rise in the testing facilities and daily testing capacity. In addition, Covid-19 dedicated hospitals, dedicated beds and ICU beds have also

information on the importance of getting vaccinated, as well as addressing any myths and safety concerns around vaccination.

The global vaccine race has also once again highlighted the glaring disparity in healthcare globally, which is a deterrent in achieving a "fairer, healthier world" as envisioned in this year's World Health Day theme. In a world of vaccine inequity, a handful of rich nations like the US, Canada, UK, countries in the EU, China and the UAE, among a few others, have hoarded almost 65-70 percent of the world's doses, despite having only 16 percent of the global population. It is estimated that these rich nations are vaccinating one person every second while the majority of the poorest nations are yet to administer a single dose. These high income nations have stockpiled one million doses more than is needed for their populations and is an embodiment of "vaccine nationalism".

It is with keen interest that I keep tabs on the vaccination programme in the country since this is the only sustainable way of reducing the infection load. We have a commendable history of successful vaccination programmes, including the Expanded Programme on Immunisation and other drives. Keeping in line with that track record, the vaccination drive is going well so far. The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine has been administered to approximately five million people since the first dose was given on January 27 as a "dry/test run" and since the official vaccination programme began on February 7. This means that around 3.5 percent of the total population will be fully vaccinated (two doses) within June of this year. This is a good achievement on the balance of things.

However, uncertainties around the ability of Serum Institute of India (SII) supplying doses on time, according to the agreement, means that we will now have to scramble to find other sources of safe and effective vaccines. The single dose, easy-to-preserve Johnson & Johnson vaccine, with an estimated efficacy of 90 percent, would be a good choice, but Chinese and Russian alternatives should also be explored. As we fight through the second wave of this pandemic, it is imperative that we vaccinate a majority of the population in the quickest feasible time, and sourcing different types of vaccines is crucial to that end.

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Another glaring deficiency is the lack of adequate high flow oxygen delivery systems across hospitals in the country.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

and livelihoods throughout the country—culminating in severe ramifications on an economy which had otherwise seen robust growth over the past decade. In the midst of this gloom, further evidence of the stoic resilience of the Bangladeshi people came to the fore. As infection rates kept dropping and relative normalcy was restored, with resumption in activities of business and commerce, the economy gained some momentum towards the end of last year. As a result, projections made in a study in early 2021 by Standard Chartered Bank Bangladesh stated that Bangladesh was likely to recover faster than its Asian peers from the Covid-19 fallout thanks to improving exports, growth in domestic consumption and remittance inflow.

After a welcome drop in cases between August and September last year, health experts had predicted that the second wave would hit the country during winter. However, that second wave has now hit us in March this year with renewed vigour, once again exposing a fragile health system. Were adequate measures

been increased a few fold. Unfortunately, however, these increments have not proven to be enough to counter the ruthless second wave thus far, as is evident by a shortage of available hospital beds and ICU beds. Also, the plan undertaken last year of setting up temporary Covid hospitals with high bed capacities to counter peaks of infection did not come to fruition.

Another glaring deficiency is the lack of adequate high flow oxygen delivery systems across hospitals in the country, a good one year into the pandemic. High flow oxygen therapy is a vital component in managing very sick Covid patients. There could certainly be a better, more widespread allocation in this regard. Moreover, there has been a shortage of some essential drugs such as remdesivir and tocilizumab in the management of this infection, and adequate stockpiles will need to be ensured for the coming weeks and possibly months. It is also of utmost importance to step up and sustain the public health awareness campaigns and messages of health directives and



WORLD HEALTH DAY 2021

# Government must have a clear vision to ensure better healthcare

Professor Muzaherul Huq, former adviser, South-East Asia region, World Health Organization (WHO), and founder, Public Health Foundation of Bangladesh, talks to Eresh Omar Jamal of The Daily Star about improving Bangladesh's healthcare services and overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic

For this year's World Health Day, the World Health Organization wanted to highlight the importance of building a fairer and healthier world. In terms of fairness, how do you rate our healthcare system? And when it comes to ensuring a healthy population, how would you rate its performance?

What is important for Bangladesh's healthcare sector is to ensure that everyone has access to quality healthcare. That has to be the ultimate goal. If we look at our healthcare infrastructure, we can say that it is quite good in terms of how the system is designed—at the national level we have tertiary specialised hospitals, at district level there are district hospitals, at upazila level there are upazila hospitals and below upazila level there are union health centres and union sub-centres, and so on. The problem is that we are not using this infrastructure correctly, which is why patient satisfaction in most cases is very low.

Our healthcare sector currently has very centralised control. That means that even the clinics at the union level are controlled from the national level and they have no autonomy of their own. Because of that, hospitals starting from the union level all the way down are not being properly monitored or supervised. The staff working in these hospitals are not given the proper training and so the people are reluctant to receive treatment there. Even at the upazila level, people are reluctant to get treatment because there is a shortage of doctors, equipment and support staff who are trained to use the equipment properly, which is causing the upazila hospitals to provide healthcare that is unsatisfactory.

The shortage of personnel and equipment often occur because of trivial reasons. For

example, we might see an ambulance not being in service because its tyre is punctured. This could easily be fixed. But the problem is that even small decisions like this oftentimes cannot be taken by the authorities at the lower levels. That is why our healthcare system has to be decentralised. This will give the healthcare authorities at different stages some form of decision-making control. At the same time, there has to be some monitoring and supervisory mechanisms in place to ensure that they are taking appropriate and timely decisions.

Then comes the issue of budget. Bangladesh's healthcare budget is the lowest in the region, and even there we have corruption and pilferage reducing it further. And the health ministry doesn't seem to have the capacity to properly utilise whatever little funds are available. The allocation for the healthcare sector has to be increased and the utilisation of the funds has to get better.

In Bangladesh, we have seen private healthcare grow alongside public healthcare. But there has to be some parity between the two. That is absent. Out-of-pocket expenditure for healthcare is one of the highest in the world. That has to be reduced—and the WHO has been asking the government to bring it down to 30 percent for almost a decade now, without much success. The state has to make healthcare affordable for all, that is its constitutional obligation.

Finally, we don't have an effective reference system. If someone goes to a community clinic and then has to go to a union sub centre, there is no way of referring them from one to the other. If we want to ensure universal healthcare, the first thing we have to do is establish an effective reference system, so that an ordinary villager can be referred to institutions at the tertiary or other levels,



Professor Muzaherul Huq. PHOTO: STAR

should they require that kind of medical attention, and then get referred back for followups at their original location.

A lot of criticisms were directed towards the health sector and related policymakers during the initial days of the Covid-19 outbreak. Do you believe that the authorities and the hospitals have done enough to address those problems and are now better positioned to face what seems like a much stronger-than-expected new wave of the virus?

When the virus first came to Bangladesh, we weren't prepared at all. Our way of addressing it was to react to the virus, so we were always a step behind. One thing we have going for us now is that the number of RT-PCR machines in the country has increased.

When the virus first started spreading, the

WHO warned everyone about it and many countries took precautionary measures. Bangladesh, on the other hand, didn't take the WHO's warning very seriously, which is why we had only one RT-PCR machine to begin with. Still, our casualty number wasn't as high as other countries that were better prepared.

Now that a new wave of the virus has arrived, I must say again that we did not really prepare for it, even though we had seen how a second and even a third wave had hit other countries. That is why the death toll and the number of newly infected are increasing daily. Why didn't we prepare for this new wave? That is a political matter and is for the state to answer.

Another factor in addressing the virus is to create awareness. The government has done a brilliant job of making the people aware of many things. Everyone knows that you should wash your hands regularly, wear masks and maintain social distancing to avoid catching the virus. But the problem is, the government never really involved the people when it came to enforcing the health guidelines, and is still not trying. This too was a matter of preparation. How can you defeat this virus without involving the people? You can't! It's not possible for any country, and Bangladesh is no exception.

Where must our focus be, going forwards, in regards to the healthcare sector—should it be on vaccinating the population, ensuring some form of universal healthcare, or something else?

The government can have many priorities when it comes to the health sector. But there are times when it must prioritise some of its priorities more than others. Right now, no matter how many things the government has

to focus on, its number one priority must be to reduce the spread of the virus. If we cannot reduce the spread soon, many lives will be lost. And I think it should be the government's number one priority, and also the only priority for now.

So how do we contain the virus? There are some ways that it can be done, and others have done it.

First, the health guidelines have to be followed by everyone. And for that the government must involve the people so that they can automatically do what is required of them. Second, we have to vaccinate 12 crore people, there is no alternative to that, because we have to reach herd immunity. So, the government must encourage the people to get themselves vaccinated as soon as possible.

Now the question can be asked, is the government going down the right path and guiding the people to go along? I would say no. The government has declared that we will have seven days of lockdown. But lockdowns have certain characteristics. When we are leaving the *Boi Mela* open and allowing private vehicles to operate normally, we are not really in a state of lockdown. Instead, we seem to be in a state of confusion, and what exactly we are trying to do is unclear.

Lockdown means everything should be closed except for emergency services. And people should stay at home no matter what. Most people right now don't even know where they can go and where they should not. The government must have a clear vision of what it wants and also prepare the necessary strategy to achieve that. There is no reason nor room for policymakers to be confused and indecisive about what to do at this stage.

## 'Second wave of the pandemic' woes, etcetera



AFIA JAHIN

THE second April of the pandemic is here, and it seems we are back to square one. Just as most institutions were planning to reopen (all of them intending to exercise proper health guidelines, one hopes) after having lost a year to the

Covid-19 pandemic, daily infection rates and fatalities are rising exponentially, with April 6 seeing 7,213 cases and 66 deaths, the highest for Bangladesh in a day—ever.

Over the course of writing this piece, I have had to revise those figures five times. And, for once, that has little to do with how much I procrastinate on writing and everything to do with how quickly the situation is hitting new lows every day.

The government initially issued 18 directives for the public in order to contain and combat the virus until at least April 12. Of course, now we are near the middle of a weeklong "lockdown" (until noon of April 11), with a new set of 11 directives, just dipping our toes back into the familiar waters of April past.

With that, it seems it is time again for us to brush up on our pandemic manners, as if we are blind to the constant reminders of it that are present in our homes and outside.

There is no denying that the nation is, at present, collectively in its worst state so far in terms of the coronavirus pandemic. It is not just a case of "more people being tested equals more positive cases"—because we all participated in bringing about this second wave of the pandemic. Offices reopened, most not in limited capacities and many in full swing. Weddings consisting of two to four ceremonies took place (amateurishly

choreographed dances and all), coffee and dinner dates happened, and we all indulged in much-needed *adda's* with our friends and family. It would be the height of hypocrisy for any of us, including authorities, to now act shocked and dismayed at the ongoing Covid-19 surge.

Sure, the vaccines got here on time. But were they being properly distributed amongst the public? In order to register for the vaccine, one had to go to the website [surokkha.gov.bd](http://surokkha.gov.bd) and use his/her/their National Identification (NID) card number to complete the registration. This is grossly exclusionary to the majority of the population, for whom accessing a website and filling out details is not a process which only takes a few minutes. Having one's NID card be the only form of verification, too, is problematic, given how many people do not even have their NID cards or have lost them. It is also a bit curious that the registration process for the vaccine was made even remotely complicated, amid a crisis as deadly as the coronavirus pandemic. And why was it so? To establish how forward we are in terms of our technological prowess? Is that our priority at this time, instead of inoculating as much of the population as quickly as possible?

The medium-scale implementation of the vaccine drive and the public's lack of interest towards it should have meant that we would still practice all of the general safety measures—maintaining social distancing, going out only when necessary, etc. After all, no matter how strictly the government enforces its directives, keeping safe from this particular virus is also the responsibility of each individual member of the public. But instead, we let loose gradually, until it seemed life was back to the old normal—only now we wear masks, sometimes. As if the "no mask, no service" signs at every establishment (large, medium, or small) and



Ironically, health and safety guidelines are not being followed even when buying and selling face masks. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

the PSA before the first outgoing call of each new day have already become words which hold no meaning. As if the rising numbers of Covid-19 infections and related deaths are also mere numbers now, instead of each digit representing human lives affected or lost. As if doing the bare minimum of wearing a mask properly in public and maintaining good hygiene, too, are too much to ask for from us. That seems to be how far gone we are in terms of losing empathy for others in our fast-paced and "digital" nation.

Back when things were only beginning to worsen (when was that, a week or a month ago now?), I had planned on writing mightily about how we should be careful and thoughtful when we are raising awareness

about the virus. That we should measure out equal parts sympathy and sternness into our words when asking someone to "please, wear your mask" and "distance socially" and "wash your hands" and "do you really need to go to your friend's cousin's wedding?" In any case, do not stigmatise the virus: that was to be my message. But maybe doing just that is what got us here, now that I think about it.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is evidence that stigma due to the virus leads to people not seeking medical attention for their symptoms and not following public health directives as adamantly. So, of course, when someone coughs near you, it would be inconsiderate of you to give them the stink-eye, as that is not

helpful and might also make them feel like a pariah of some sort. And if that person is someone you know, then your reaction might give them the idea that you are not a safe person for them to reveal their symptoms to or ask for help from if they are in fact ill.

But what about those of us who do not practise safety out of sheer arrogance? Sure, perhaps only a higher power can dictate whether or not you catch the viral infection, no matter how safe you keep yourself. But that's the thing: how can you be sure that such a higher power will *not* "decide" to give you the infection? Is that not arrogance—rather than faith—to knowingly put one's own and others' health at risk (by not following basic Covid-19 health guidelines), when not doing so is very easily avoidable?

Then there are others (like myself), who are neither arrogant, nor ignorant—but simply chose to turn a blind eye to the dangers of socialising during the last few months (when the infection rate had taken a dip). Safety measures were only practised whenever enforced or at one's own whim, as if these measures were optional and not moral obligations of each citizen.

"So, what can we do now?" is a question I can pose here for dramatic effect alone, because we all (those who have the means of reading this) already know what to do. As with anything in our particular society, it seems, only something drastic happening can wake us from our self-imposed stupor of ignorance and make us start acting the way we should have been acting all along. Perhaps this second wave of Covid-19, worse every day than the one before it, will push us to be more vigilant regarding the safety of everyone around us (loved ones and strangers alike) so we can move past it to a better normal—not just a new one.

Afia Jahin is a member of the Editorial Team at The Daily Star.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE**  
German author and philosopher (1749-1832)

*One always has time enough if one will apply it well.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Deck worker
- 5 Bed parts
- 10 Counting everything
- 12 Free of censorship
- 13 "Luck!"
- 14 "Keen!"
- 15 Memorable period
- 16 Canine command
- 18 Join the crew
- 19 Mead subject
- 21 Fast runner
- 22 Alaskan crustaceans
- 24 Evil expression
- 25 Hive heads

**DOWN**

- 1 Highway units
- 2 Hooded jacket
- 3 Japanese mat
- 4 City trains
- 5 Fourth-down play
- 6 Count starter
- 7 Egyptian emblem
- 8 Lesson givers
- 9 Madeleine of movies
- 11 Layered dish
- 17 Fragrant smoke
- 20 Beginning
- 21 Female following
- 23 Moneyback offers
- 25 Friend
- 26 Green, perhaps
- 27 Fancy home
- 28 Classified
- 29 Crow
- 31 Calls for
- 33 lacking tread
- 36 Camel
- 38 Bar topic

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO [dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com).

**MONDAY'S ANSWERS**

B	A	C	K	S	R	A	S	P	S
E	T	H	E	L	I	M	H	I	T
R	H	O	N	E	S	T	O	L	E
L	O	P	P	R	O	S	P	E	R
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N	A	S	O	N					
E	G	Y	P	T	E	G	G	S	
T	U	B	I	A	N	S	E	T	
O	R	L	A	N	D	O	P	R	Y
T	O	O	L	M	O	R	A	L	
E	P	C	O	T	A	D	E	L	E
M	A	K	E	S	D	E	E	S	

**BEETLE BAILEY** BY MORT WALKER

**BABY BLUES** BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

# বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য দিবস

## ৭ এপ্রিল ২০২১

### সকলের জন্য সুন্দর ও স্বাস্থ্যকর বিশ্ব গড়ি

Building a fairer, healthier world

বিশেষ ক্রোড়পত্র, ৭ এপ্রিল ২০২১, বুধবার



মুজিব বর্ষে 'স্বাস্থ্য' বাত এগিয়ে যাবে অনেক ধাপ

স্বাস্থ্য সেবা বিভাগ, স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়



**বাণী**  
২৪ টেম ১৯২৭  
০৭ এপ্রিল ২০২১

বিশ্বের অন্যান্য দেশের ন্যায় বাংলাদেশেও 'বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২১' পালনের উদ্যোগকে আমি 'স্বাস্থ্য জ্ঞানাই। দিবসটির এভাবে প্রতিপাদ্য 'Building a fairer, healthier world' যার বাংলা ভাবার্থ 'সকলের জন্য সুন্দর ও স্বাস্থ্যকর বিশ্ব গড়ি' তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ হয়েছে বলে আমি মনে করি।

জনগণের সচেতনতা, সম্পৃক্ততা ও অংশীদারিত্ব বাড়াবার মাধ্যমে একটি সুন্দর ও স্বাস্থ্যকর বিশ্ব গড়ে তোলারই এই বছরের বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য দিবসের মূল উদ্দেশ্য। স্বাস্থ্য সেবা মানুষের অন্যতম মৌলিক চাহিদা। মানুষের সেরোগোড়ার স্বাস্থ্যসেবা পৌঁছে দিতে সরকার ব্যাপক উন্নয়ন কর্মসূচি বাস্তবায়ন করেছে। স্বাস্থ্য অবকাঠামো উন্নয়ন, দক্ষ জনশক্তি তৈরি ও নিয়োগ, আত্মপ্রাণিক চিকিৎসা সরঞ্জামাদি সরঞ্জাম ও তথ্যপ্রযুক্তি ব্যবহারের ফলে পরিচরিত চিকিৎসা সেবার মান বৃদ্ধি পেয়েছে। ফলশ্রুতিতে মানুষের গড় আয়ু বৃদ্ধি পেয়েছে, কমেছে মৃত্যু ও শিশু মৃত্যু হার। বাংলাদেশ সাফল্যের সাথে স্বাস্থ্য বাতের সহস্রাব্দ উন্নয়ন লক্ষ্যমাত্রা অর্জন করেছে। ২০৩০ সালের মধ্যে টেকসই উন্নয়ন লক্ষ্যমাত্রা অর্জনে মা ও শিশু স্বাস্থ্যের উন্নয়নে আমাদের গুরুত্ব দিতে হবে। স্বাস্থ্য সেবার সকল স্তরে এসব সেবাকে জনগণের জন্য আরো সহজলভ্য ও গ্রহণযোগ্য করতে সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলকে নিষ্ঠা ও আন্তরিকতার সাথে কাজ করে যেতে হবে।

বর্তমানে বিশ্বব্যাপী করোনা মহামারির প্রেক্ষাপটে সকলের জন্য মানসম্মত স্বাস্থ্য সেবা নিশ্চিত করতে সরকার নানামুখী পরিকল্পনা গ্রহণ ও বাস্তবায়ন করছে। করোনা রোগের চিকিৎসা সেবা নির্বিঘ্ন রাখতে বিপুল সংখ্যক চিকিৎসক ও নার্স নিয়োগ দেওয়া হয়েছে। কোভিড-১৯ এর ভ্যাকসিন প্রদানের ও বাস্তব করা হয়েছে। করোনা ভাইরাসের সংক্রমণজনিত চিকিৎসা সেবাকে জনগণের জন্য আরো সহজলভ্য করতে সরকারের পাশাপাশি বিভিন্ন বেসরকারি সংস্থা ও প্রতিষ্ঠানকে এগিয়ে আসতে হবে। একই সাথে সকল ক্ষেত্রে স্বাস্থ্য বিধি মেনে চলা এবং মাস্কসহ প্রয়োজনীয় সুরক্ষা সামগ্রীর ব্যবহার নিশ্চিত করা হবে। জনগণের মধ্যে স্বাস্থ্য বিধি মেনে চলা। সকলের সমিলিত প্রচেষ্টায় দেশে স্বাস্থ্যখাতে সাফল্যের ধারা অক্ষয়িত থাকুক-বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য দিবসে এ প্রত্যাশা করি।

আমি 'বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২১' উপলক্ষে গৃহীত সকল কর্মসূচির সার্বিক সফলতা কামনা করছি।

জয় বাংলা।  
খোদা হাফেজ, বাংলাদেশ চিরজীবী হোক।

মোঃ আবদুল হামিদ



**বাণী**  
২৪ টেম ১৯২৭  
০৭ এপ্রিল ২০২১

বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২১: সকলের জন্য সুন্দর ও স্বাস্থ্যকর বিশ্ব গড়ি

বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য দিবসের মূল উদ্দেশ্য হলো 'Building a fairer, healthier world'। এই বছরের বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য দিবসের মূল উদ্দেশ্য হলো 'Building a fairer, healthier world'।

জয় বাংলা।  
খোদা হাফেজ, বাংলাদেশ চিরজীবী হোক।

মোঃ আবদুল হামিদ



**বাণী**  
২৪ টেম ১৯২৭  
০৭ এপ্রিল ২০২১

৭ এপ্রিল বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য দিবস পালিত হচ্ছে জেমে আমি আনন্দিত। 'Building a fairer, healthier world'।

জয় বাংলা, জয় বঙ্গবন্ধু বাংলাদেশ চিরজীবী হোক।

শেখ হাসিনা

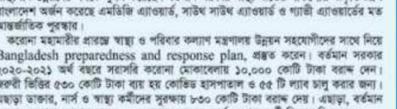


**বাণী**  
২৪ টেম ১৯২৭  
০৭ এপ্রিল ২০২১

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জাহিদ মাসেক, এমপি



**বাণী**  
২৪ টেম ১৯২৭  
০৭ এপ্রিল ২০২১

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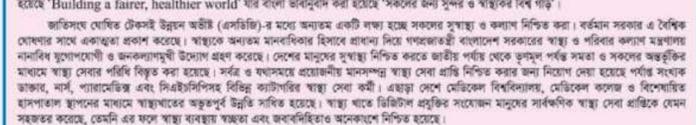


**বাণী**  
২৪ টেম ১৯২৭  
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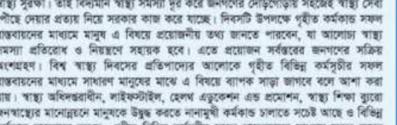


**বাণী**  
২৪ টেম ১৯২৭  
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সৌকাম হোসেন মিয়া

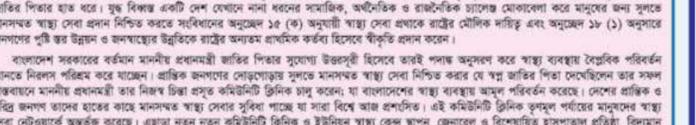


**বাণী**  
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সৌকাম হোসেন মিয়া

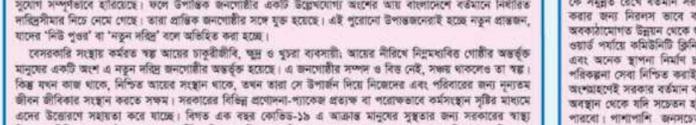


**বাণী**  
২৪ টেম ১৯২৭  
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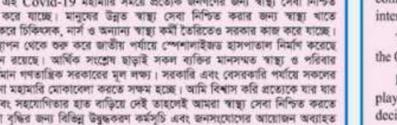
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সৌকাম হোসেন মিয়া



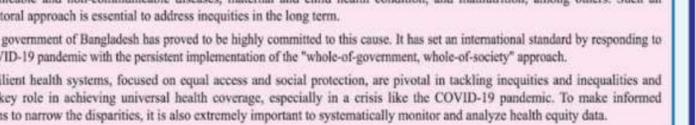
**বাণী**  
২৪ টেম ১৯২৭  
০৭ এপ্রিল ২০২১

৭ এপ্রিল বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য দিবস। সারা বিশ্বের অন্যান্য দেশের সাথে আমরা একতরফে এ দিবস পালন করছি।



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[L] Dipu Chakma of Bangladesh Army won gold in the 32+ age category poomsae event of taekwondo while [R] Ruma Khatun and Nuruddin Hossain of Bangladesh Ansar & VDP secured gold medals in senior women's and men's poomsae (17-24 age group) events of taekwondo in the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games at the National Sports Council gymnasium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Squad for SL tour to be finalised today

SPORTS REPORTER



Members of the national selection committee, including chief selector Minhajul Abedin, had a meeting with the Bangladesh Cricket Board's cricket operations department yesterday before announcing the squad for the upcoming two-match Test series in Sri Lanka.

It was learned that selectors will have a final meeting with BCB president Nazmul Hassan today before officially announcing the squad.

There were rumours that they may recall the experienced Mahmudullah Riyad for the upcoming Sri Lanka series in the absence of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who will miss the tour due to his obligations to Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League.

But Mahmudullah, who was dropped from the Test squad against Zimbabwe in 2020, is unlikely to feature as he is yet to recover from a strained left thigh suffered that ruled him out of the third T20I against New Zealand.

Left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman will also feature in the IPL for Rajasthan Royals and is currently in India. He may also not be considered for the Test series against Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh's Test performances have seen a major dip since a debacle against

newest Test playing nation Afghanistan in 2019, followed by a 2-0 whitewash at home against an inexperienced West Indies side earlier this year.

Many have raised questions about head coach Russell Domingo and his long-term plans, but former captain and current board director Khaled Mahmud -- who will be the team leader for the Tigers on the upcoming Sri Lanka tour -- backed the South African and said the players needed to execute.

"He (Domingo) is obviously a good coach but a team's performance doesn't depend on a coach. It's a collective thing. It's the players who will play on the field, not the coach. A coach can give you a thousand plans, but if the players are unable to execute on the field then there is no point to having such plans," Mahmud said, adding that he was the Tigers would put up a better show in Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, the board will offer central contracts to cricketers based on their performances in the tour of Sri Lanka and the home series against the same opponents in May, informed cricket operations chairman Akram Khan yesterday.

The last national central contract had introduced separate contracts for red and white-ball cricket and had seen 16 cricketers sign. Seven were offered contracts for both red and white-ball cricket while four cricketers were signed for Test cricket only. For white-ball cricket, the BCB had offered contract to five cricketers.

## Krishna steals the spotlight

SPORTS REPORTER

Following the elimination of country's top archer Ruman Sana in pre-quarterfinal stage, the focus was on men's individual recurve event in the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games, and Ram Krishna Saha stole the spotlight by winning gold medal in this event at the Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium in Tongi yesterday.

Krishna, competing for Bangladesh Air Force, staged a strong comeback in the final round to beat Tamimul Islam of Bangladesh Police in shootout after the final was tied at 5-5 set points. The archer from Faridpur hit 10 in the deciding tiebreak while Tamim could only manage nine.

"It was a tough final for me because I trailed by 5-1 set points at one stage before fighting back. I was also under tremendous pressure but I kept my cool and used all my experience to reach the target," said the 2019 national championship winner, who belongs to the same generation of archers as Ruman.

"I got admitted in BKSP in 2009 and was once part of the national team but I was out of competitive archery due to



Ram Krishna Saha

training in Bangladesh Air Force from 2016 to 2018. Now I'm training regularly and dreaming of representing Bangladesh again," Krishna said. "Now I have to secure a place in the national team, which is not an easy thing as there is hardly any difference among the top archers."

Despite being a contemporary, Krishna sees Ruman as an inspiration.

"I am hungry for international medals and want to play in the upcoming World Cup. I think

- Weightlifting produced six more records -- three each in men and women categories -- to take the total records tally eight in the last two days in Mymensingh.
- Swimmer Kajal Mia registered his second record in 200m individual medley event on the final day to take the total records in swimming events to 11. Bangladesh Navy dominated the pool as they won 33 golds out of 42.
- While many internationally successful athletes across disciplines returned home empty-handed, SA Games double-gold medalist swimmer Mahfuza Khatun Shila shone in her pet event of 50m backstroke to win a gold medal yesterday.
- Five more disciplines -- archery, swimming, cycling, table tennis and rugby

-- completed their events in the last two days. Seven disciplines had completed their events in the first four days of Games.

Young Sadia Rahman Mou broke the dominance of Sonom Sultana Soma to emerge champion in women's table tennis singles and helped Bangladesh Ansar top the chart with five golds, two silvers and five bronzes, leaving behind Bangladesh Police who grabbed the remaining two golds.

SA Games gold medalist karateka Humaira Akter Antara had to stay content with a silver medal after losing to gold medalist Nu Me Marma, a student of 2010 SA Games gold medalist karatekas Ushu Pru Marma, in the final of the Kata event in Bandarban.

Ruman drove all other archers in Bangladesh to dream big," said Krishna.

Krishna's effort helped Bangladesh Air Force to a gold medal but Bangladesh Army dominated the medals table with four gold, one silver and three bronze medals as its archers showed improvement in individual scores.

Explaining the reasons behind Bangladesh Army's success, coach Mohammad Sajjad Hossain said, "During the pandemic, our archers availed uninterrupted training

opportunity in cantonment which actually helped them to perform consistently in big stage."

"We also introduced internal weekend competition in a bid to bring competitive attitude among the archers. Besides, we also set individual scoring targets for each archer. Archers such as Tania Rima and Roksana produced their best scores in the Games while Nasrin Akter made her best of 147 out of 150 on way to winning gold medal in compound event," said Sajjad, country's first international gold-winning archer.

## FIFA wants 'more transparent' BFF accounts

SPORTS REPORTER



Whenever there have been allegations of malpractice in maintenance of the financial accounts of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), the allegations were swept aside, but this time the game's local governing body not reject the observations of FIFA, football's world governing body.

FIFA has reportedly stopped providing financial allocations to Bangladesh after auditing the financial documents that BFF submitted in December last year. It has also been reported that FIFA sent a letter to BFF on March 30 asking for documents on various financial aspects. FIFA officials and BFF officials yesterday sat in a virtual meeting to discuss the issue.

"FIFA has requested the BFF to make the activities of the accounts more transparent, neutral and accountable and we also promised them to strengthen the implementation process of the standard procedure in maintaining the accounts," Abdus Salam Mursheedy, senior vice-president and head of BFF's finance committee, told reporters after the meeting.

The BFF also promised FIFA to formulate written policies of purchase, tendering method and payment procedure, if needed with technical assistance from FIFA, in order to implement those issues within May, a timeline given by FIFA.

FIFA provides BFF with US\$500,000 yearly apart from other allocations in technical aspects, national teams and other areas while AFC provides BFF with US\$250,000 per year.



"I think I was just trying not to be on social media as much because a lot of people have opinions on you and how they think you should play."

**COCO GAUFF  
AMERICAN TENNIS  
PRODIGY**

## A decisive turning point?

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI



Was it the strike that might finally see Ousmane Dembele flourish at the Camp Nou? Having inspired confidence and then deceived so many times before, whether sitting on the sidelines through numerous nagging injuries or missing sitters that amounted to null contributions, that goal -- a last-minute effort against Real Valladolid that gave Barca a 1-0 win on Monday night -- may be the first of Dembele's that really matters as the La Liga race was thrown wide open for the final push with just nine games left in what is in evidence a three-horse-race.

It was a nervy night at the Camp Nou and the lure of closing the gap on leaders Atletico Madrid -- who slipped up yet again with a 1-0 defeat at Sevilla the previous night -- had made Barca's execution in possession slightly dim. Disciplined, yet bold, Valladolid's Kenan Kodro headed against the bar early and there were early sighters for Roque Mesa, who bypassed the Barca press in midfield and urged the visitors



forward. In defence, they remained tight, and bar a Pedri effort in the dying minutes of the first half that was palmed away and hit the post and an Antoine Griezemann effort headed wide in the second half, Barca's attacks did not amount to much. Dembele's goal in the Copa semifinal had also mattered, but there was a growing sense, given some careless execution from the Frenchmen throughout the Valladolid game, that he would be taken off. But while Ronald Koeman made changes, he banked on the Frenchman to keep up the surge as Barca pushed forward.

A straight red card to Oscar Plano in the 79th minute after a tackle on Dembele saw Barca with a man

advantage and when the forward's volley cannoned into the back of the net in the 90th minute, the celebration -- with Lionel Messi and others climbing up Dembele -- said it all; Koeman's faith had been repaid; doubts, injuries and the confusion of whether he would amount to anything, put to rest for now.

"He's an important player," Koeman said at post-match press conference. "He's shown that with his performance here and above all with the goal that gave us three points. Ousmane's development this season has been really good."

Real Madrid are on 63 points, Barca on 65, just a point behind leader Atletico on 66. The league is well and truly in their hands now ahead of El Clasico next week. Koeman's side has arrived at the final hurdle with the mental stamina required and Real's Champions League quarterfinal ties with Liverpool offer helpful distractions.

"The team is capable of winning the games we have left but today was also a reminder you always have to be at your very best and you have to be clinical," Koeman told reporters.

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTERFINALS

### 'Everyone needs to be in front of their TVs'

Mbappe hypes Bayern showdown

STAR SPORT DESK



Last year's finalists Bayern Munich and Paris Saint-Germain's will lock horns in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal and tonight's clash in Munich could set the tone for the rest of the tournament before it comes down to the final four.

Bayern Munich, partly because they are victim to the standards they set last year and partly because they will be without Robert Lewandowski, have been painted as the team that will have the tougher time in the tie.

Shining more limelight on the absence of Bayern's record-chasing goal-machine is Kylian Mbappe, who apparently decided to make

the Champions League his stage by scoring a sensational hat-trick against Barcelona in the Round of 16.

PSG's ever-busy social media team has already aired a video with some of the team's players reflecting on the defeat in last year's final, but their tone was tempered with hints of caution. That tone was also reflected in the words of their 22-year-old phenom.

"Bayern are a great team. Now, it's just about being calm and confident in preparation for the first leg in Munich. It's a game that people will be looking forward to watching. It'll be a good game, so everyone needs to be in front of their TVs, and we'll try to put on a good show and hopefully come away with the win."

From the Parisiens' perspective, it

was understandable why they would err on the side of caution. Their form has dipped to the point that they are now staring at a three-point deficit in Ligue 1, trailing Lille with seven games to go.

Their last league outing, a crucial clash against the now league-leaders, was supposed to be a chance for Neymar to get some crucial minutes upon return from injury. It was his first start in two months but while the Brazilian showed glimpses of his genius, in the end all he had to show was a red card in a loss. Marco Verratti and Leon Parades missing out is another worry.

Bayern, meanwhile, are seven points clear at the top of Bundesliga and show no signs of slowing down, and are chasing Manchester United's record of 25 consecutive games unbeaten in Europe's elite competition. They are currently undefeated in 19 straight games.

All Bayern Munich would require is one trademark performance at home. That would be enough to set alarm bells ringing among Europe's elite. But Mbappe, who watched the Bavarians lift a sixth Champions League title on the same night he and PSG lost at their first attempt, welcomed the competition.

"For me, the Champions League holds a very important place. We've lost at different stages, we've suffered. I think that if I win it, there'll be a lot of emotion. Even though the World Cup is the Holy Grail, for me, at club level, the Champions League is the best. The Champions League is, as the song says, for 'les meilleures équipes' (the best teams)."



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## TRADE WITH US Policy support needed for expansion: PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday inaugurated the US-Bangladesh Business Council virtually to boost the bilateral trade and investment between the two countries.

The new trade body, an initiative of the US Chamber of Commerce, will act as a major platform for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) from the American private and public sectors.

Different big industrial and business conglomerates from both the US and Bangladesh are the members of this newly launched trade body. Private sector investors, top diplomats, senior government officials and trade body leaders from both the countries participated in the inauguration.

Speaking at the programme, the prime minister said Bangladesh exports goods worth around \$8 billion to the US, of which 80 percent are garment items.

"Our exporters pay on an average 16 percent tariff. We buy considerable amount of industrial raw materials and consumer items like cotton, soybean, and wheat from the United States."

Hasina said all those items enjoy zero tariffs in Bangladesh. It is important that both the countries provide adequate policy support to further expand bilateral trade, she added.

She said the launching of the US-Bangladesh Business Council reflects the growing interest of the US business community about investment and doing business in

SEE PAGE 5 COL 5



Shop owners and workers protesting the "lockdown" that has been imposed to curb Covid-19 spread in the country. The photo was taken in front of Chadni Chak market in the capital around noon yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

## COVID CURBS Shop owners continue protests

Demand shops, malls be allowed to open

STAR REPORT

Traders took to the streets again yesterday, demanding that the government allow shopping malls, markets and shops in the capital and in other districts to open.

Holding placards that read "We do not want lockdown, open all markets", the demonstrators continued their protests for the third consecutive day yesterday, the day when the highest number of Covid-19 patients were detected and the highest number of patients died.

Business leaders also demanded stimulus packages for small traders before enforcing the "lockdown".

Traders staged demonstrations in New Market, Mirpur and a few other areas in the capital against the government's

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

## The rise of 'robo-plants'



AFP, Singapore

Remote-controlled Venus flytrap "robo-plants" and crops that tell farmers when they are hit by disease could become reality after scientists developed a high-tech system for communicating with vegetation.

Researchers in Singapore linked up plants to electrodes capable of monitoring the weak electrical pulses naturally emitted by the greenery.

The scientists used the technology to trigger a Venus flytrap to snap its jaws shut at the push of a button on a smartphone app.

They then attached one of its jaws to a robotic arm and got the contraption to pick up a piece of

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

## ROAD TO FREEDOM THIS DAY IN BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR HISTORY

### US asks for 'peaceful accommodation'

APRIL 7, 1971

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

#### RESISTANCE WAR CONTINUES

Today, a small team of Bangalee members of EPR put up a brave fight against Pakistan EPR forces in Nazirhat, Chattogram and captured 18 of them as prisoners.

On the same day, the Pakistan army launched a three-pronged attack on Kalurghat Radio Station in Chattogram. The resistance fighters had to retreat in the face of heavy attack, and took shelter at their base in Kalurghat.

The resistance battles started today in Shilmandi, Narsingdi. The Bangladeshi force assembled a small team at its hideout at Danga and attacked the Pakistan army. Heavy fighting went on for two days. The Pakistan army suffered heavy casualties in the fight. On April 9, the liberation fighters retreated to Ashuganj in the face of reinforced attack from the Pakistan army.



#### US URGES PAKISTAN FOR 'PEACEFUL ACCOMMODATION'

The United States of America called on Pakistan today to take "every feasible step" to end the conflict and to achieve a "peaceful accommodation" in the civil disturbances that have racked the eastern half of the country since March 25.

Noting that it was prepared to assist in any international humanitarian effort to alleviate suffering caused by recent events, the United States also urged the Pakistani government to avail itself of offers of assistance from the international community.

"We have discussed these matters with the Government of Pakistan," Charles W Bray, SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

## WB POLLS 78pc turnout amid sporadic clashes in 3rd phase

AGENCIES

An estimated 78 percent turnout was recorded despite sporadic incidents of violence and stray clashes in the polling for the third phase of West Bengal assembly elections for 31 seats yesterday.

West Bengal in India was the most important, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist BJP party attempting to win power there for the first time in what would be a major symbolic victory.

The state, home to about 90 million people, has seen thousands killed in decades of political violence, and the current campaign has triggered deadly clashes between supporters of the BJP and the ruling TMC party.

The TMC, headed by fierce Modi critic Mamata Banerjee, has accused the

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

## DALLAS MURDER SUICIDE Grieving family in disbelief



PHOTO: COLLECTED

All five in this photo were victims of "murder suicide" that left six dead in Dallas yesterday.

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Grieving family members yesterday sought further investigation into the deaths of six of their relatives in Texas after police in the US state said two brothers killed their parents, grandmother and sister before dying by suicide.

The family of five in Texas was originally from Doharpura village of Pabna Sadar upazila. The brothers' grandmother was visiting them and was due to come back to Bangladesh earlier this month but could not because of the Covid-19 situation in the country, said family members at the village.

Relatives in the village also demanded the

SEE PAGE 5 COL 5

## MARCH 26 MAYHEM Mamunul, 16 others sued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A case was filed against Hefajat-e Islam Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque and 16 others with the capital's Paltan Model Police Station on Monday.

It was filed for allegedly torching vehicles, vandalising shops and looting valuables near the Baitul Mukarram national mosque during Hefajat's demonstrations on March 26, Abu Bakar Siddique, officer-in-charge of the police station, told The Daily Star.

Khandaker Arif-uz-Zaman, a businessman of Wari area, lodged the case against them, the OC said.

Arif-uz-Zaman is also the deputy office secretary of Dhaka South Jubo League.

Besides, 2,000-3,000 unidentified people were accused in the case, added the police official.

The clash had ensued when Hefajat men brought out a procession from the

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

## LAUNCH CAPSIZE

### Death toll now 35

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Six more bodies were recovered from the Shitalakkhya yesterday morning, after Sunday's passenger launch capsized.

The bodies started floating near Koilaghat area in the river from 6:00am. River police searched and recovered six bodies till 10:30am, said Mina Mahmuda, superintendent of River Police in Narayanganj.

With them, the death toll rose to 35. One more person is still missing, police said.

The identities of the six could not be known immediately.

The launch named Sabit

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4



#### PRAYER TIMING APRIL 7

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 4-40 12-45 4-45 6-21 7-45  
JAMAAT 5-15 1-15 5-00 6-24 8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



Amid an upsurge in Covid cases and deaths, a huge number of Bangladeshis ignoring physical distancing crowd at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital as they try to get into the terminal and catch their flights. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HUQ

## India's 2nd surge overtakes first wave

Next 4 weeks 'very critical'; New Delhi imposes night curfew

AGENCIES

The Indian capital of New Delhi yesterday imposed a night-time curfew until April 30 with much of the country struggling to contain a second surge in coronavirus infections that has eclipsed the first wave.

The next four weeks in India's fight against Covid-19 will be "very, very critical," said senior government health official Vinod Kumar Paul, warning that the respiratory disease was now spreading much faster than in 2020.

"The pandemic has worsened in the country...There is a serious rise in cases. Warnings were given that the situation should not be taken for granted," Paul told reporters.

India, the world's second most populous country with 1.35 billion people, has administered 80.9 million vaccine doses, the most after the United States and China, but it lags far behind in immunisations per capita.

Healthcare and similar frontline workers as well as people over 60 have been the main recipients of vaccinations so far. Inoculations of people above 45 began only on April 1.

"All Central Government employees of the age of 45 years and above are advised to get themselves vaccinated, so as to effectively contain the spread of Covid-19," the Indian government said in a media statement.

New Delhi authorities launched the 10:00 pm to 5:00

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2