

BANGLADESH UPDATE



2,341
New cases in 24hrs



7,56,955
Total cases



11,393
Deaths



6,77,101
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

3,172,459
Deaths



150,916,261
Total cases

COVID-INDUCED LOCKDOWN

RMG workers suffered 35pc pay cut last year

Says a study

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladeshi workers in the readymade garments sector suffered a 35 percent pay cut during the lockdown period amid the coronavirus pandemic last year, which had adverse impacts on their rights to food, health, housing, and even life, says a new study.

The industry also suffered from the closure of markets, suspended shipments, delayed payments, and a liquidity crisis, added the study.

The study report titled "The Weakest Link in the Global Supply Chain: How the Pandemic is Affecting Bangladesh's Garment Workers" was virtually launched yesterday.

The Subir and Malini Chowdhury Centre for Bangladesh Studies, UC Berkeley, in collaboration with the Institute for Human Rights and Business, with support from UNDP Bangladesh and Sweden conducted the study.

The report is drawn from in-depth interviews conducted between October 2020 and February 2021 with senior executives from international brands,

Bangladeshi suppliers, representatives of the international civil society, and Bangladeshi labour activists.

"Although the government mandates that furloughed workers be paid 65 percent of their salary for the first three months of the pandemic, union representatives claimed that many workers did not get paid as promised," the study said.

Referring to a survey by the Centre for Global Workers' Rights (CGWR) between 21 and 25 March 2020, it said 72 percent of furloughed workers had been sent home without pay. It also found that 98 percent of buyers -- many of them big global clients -- had refused to contribute to the cost of partial wages for furloughed employees, which was required under Bangladeshi law.

"A result of being paid extremely low wages meant that these workers had no savings to cover expenses while they waited for factories to reopen and government stimulus payments to be disbursed. This had adverse effects on several human rights -- food, health, housing, even life."

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PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Comotion on the Central Shaheed Minar premises as the Dhaka City (South) Awami League handed out Eid gifts for underprivileged children yesterday. There were too many hoping to get hold of the gift packs.

Worried, govt now plans tough steps

FROM PAGE 1

INDIA A MAJOR CONCERN

India is going through a devastating second wave of Covid-19. Hospitals in many states have been overwhelmed with patients amid a nationwide shortage of oxygen.

India's daily Covid cases hit a new high yesterday with 3.79 lakh fresh infections and 3,645 deaths in 24 hours. West Bengal, which shares a 2,216km border with Bangladesh, saw a 192-percent rise in infection rate in two weeks during which the overall rise of infection rate in India was 89 percent.

Assembly elections in five states, including West Bengal, and the Kumbha Mela, in which around 50 lakh Hindu devotees took part in Uttarakhhand, are mainly blamed for the sharp rise in Covid cases.

Considering the grave situation in India, the government closed its border with India from April 26. Only freight and stranded Bangladeshis are being allowed in.

In the last three days, at least 510 Bangladeshis have been allowed to return through Benapole. Of them, three were found Covid-19 positive, reports our Benapole correspondent.

These people had gone to India for treatment and had less than 15 days of valid visas. They would have to be in 14-day institutional quarantine.

However, a good number of people regularly cross the border illegally and this is a major concern.

At least 2,638 people were detained by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) in 2019 while they were entering Bangladesh illegally, BBC reported in December 2020 citing BSF's statistics. The number was 2,971 in 2018.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, sources tell The Daily Star. Many evade law enforcers' eyes.

Indian truckers and their helpers

enter Bangladesh often posing serious risk of spreading the Indian variant of Covid-19.

Prof Rashid-E-Mahbub, former president of the Bangladesh Medical Association, said, "Indian variant will come to Bangladesh ultimately."

The government should take steps to stop it from entering Bangladesh and prepare to stop the spread of the Indian variant, he said.

Infectious disease specialist Prof Ridwanur Rahman said the government should take three steps, keeping in mind that the Indian variant is likely to enter Bangladesh or has already entered Bangladesh.

The steps are: get more people vaccinated, increase the oxygen supply capacity, and increase the number of antigen tests.

The National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 also expressed concern that the country might be in a crisis once the Indian variant enters. The authority should strengthen vigilance, it said in a press release on Wednesday.

Prof ABM Abdulla, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's personal doctor, said there is apprehension that the Indian variant might enter Bangladesh.

"The passenger travel ban [from India to Bangladesh] must be enforced strictly," he told The Daily Star yesterday. A cabinet division official said the home ministry has already been directed to beef up surveillance by Border Guard Bangladesh so that no one can enter Bangladesh illegally.

The Indian variant B.1.617 is more transmissible than earlier strains of the virus. A study published in Cell journal on April 20, said that the variant has a mutation that increases its potency to infect human cells. In laboratory settings, the variant proved to be 20 percent more transmissible, said the study.

The WHO said the B.1.617 variant had as of Tuesday been detected in over 1,200 sequences uploaded to the GISAID open-access database "from at least 17 countries".

EID RUSH
Eid will be celebrated in mid-May and the government is likely to allow public transport after the current spell of restrictions ends on May 5.

People in large numbers are more than likely to head home outside the capital to celebrate Eid. Around 80 lakh to 1.2 crore people leave Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Gazipur before Eid during normal times, passengers welfare organisations estimated.

Thousands of people left Dhaka defying government directives to spend Eid at their homes twice last year. This was blamed by experts as a reason for quick spread of the virus across the country.

To ease the rush, the government is likely to extend the closure of public and private offices until Eid since there is the likelihood of being only three working days between May 6 and the Eid holidays, a cabinet division official said.

The authorities will issue an embargo on government officials leaving their work stations.

The government yesterday instructed garments factory owners to allow holidays of their workers according to the zones they are in so that there is no crisis of transport and physical distancing while travelling could be maintained.

Begum Monnujan Sufian, state minister for labour and employment, gave the instruction at a tripartite meeting of union leaders, government high-ups and factory owners at Srama Bhaban.

Prof Abdulla said people should celebrate Eid at where they are now while Prof Rashid said the authorities should prevent the mad dash home usually seen ahead of Eids.



DRUG-RESISTANT DISEASES

PM suggests five actions to fight those

Speaks at dialogue at UN HQ via video conference

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed on the importance of five actions to fight against antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as it is crucial for preventing future pandemics.

The Prime Minister put forward the actions at the high-level Interactive Dialogue on AMR through her pre-recorded statement played at the opening segment of the dialogue at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The actions include an integrated multisectoral action plan on AMR, including a collective action plan by the international community at both regional and global levels with a special focus on low- and middle-income countries; and good manufacturing, laboratory practices, and surveillance framework.

The three other actions are equitable access to affordable and effective antibiotics, as required, through a transfer of technology and sharing of ownership; sustainable financing for AMR containment activities and finally global public awareness in combating AMR through political commitment and partnership among the member states.

"We need to implement the 2015 Global Action Plan on AMR, 2016 UN political declaration on AMR, and formulate AMR national action plans," she said.

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US, European countries reject Syria election results in advance

AFP, United Nations

Western members of the UN Security Council, led by the United States, France and Britain, on Wednesday rejected the outcome of Syria's May 26 presidential election in advance, a position denounced by Russia as "unacceptable."

"The failure to enact a new constitution is proof positive that the so-called election on May 26 will be a sham," US ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said during a monthly session of the Security Council on Syria.

LPG price slashed

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The contract price rate set by the Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco) each month is the dominant price for LPG in Asia and elsewhere in the world. BERC chairman added that they would revise the price every month based on the price in the international market.

However, the commission did not fix the price of the LPG gas sold by the state-owned Liquid Petroleum Gas Ltd (LPG). The current price of gas sold by company in 12.5kg LPG cylinders is Tk 591.

With the new price rate, the BERC has set the LPG price twice in a month. On April 12, the commission fixed the retail price of LPG for the first time.

But many consumers expressed concern over the implementation of the new price as the regulatory body could not execute the decision of its previous price rates.

Consumers from different districts alleged that the LPG distributors and the retailers did not follow the rates set by the regulatory body on April 12.

Idris Ali, a resident of Dohar upazila in Dhaka, said he bought 12kg gas for Tk 1,030 last week. "No matter how much the government reduces the price of gas, we do not get the benefit. We will not get gas at government-fixed prices," he said.

Mozammel Haque, a shopkeeper in Jamalpur, said he had been buying LPG between Tk 980 and Tk 1,000 for long. "I could not purchase LPG at government-fixed rates yet."

Seeking anonymity, a resident of Cumilla's Chaudhagram, said he bought 12kg gas at Tk 1,050 from the upazila town this week.

At yesterday's briefing, Ruhin Hossain Prince, central committee member of Communist Party of Bangladesh, said the BERC earlier fixed the price at Tk 975 only to protect the traders' interests. But traders did not implement that rate.

The BERC chairman said they learnt from various sources that new prices were not being implemented at the retail level.

"We will take actions based on specific allegations against the distributors for selling gas at higher prices," he said.

The BERC, as a single regulatory authority, on April 12 fixed the retail price of LPG for the first time in Bangladesh.

Previously, the state-owned and private companies used to set their prices separately.

MAYHEM DURING MODI VISIT

Hefajat hardliner Harun arrested

The ex-Huji man was held earlier for plot to attack US Embassy, blast in madrasa

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Ctg

Mufti Harun Izzah, education and cultural affairs secretary of the now-dissolved central committee of Hefajat-e-Islam, has been arrested over the violence during the Indian prime minister's visit last month.

Rab officials picked him up from Jamiyatul Ulum Al Islamia Madrasa, known as Lalkhan Bazar madrasa, in Chattogram early yesterday.

RAB-7 Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Moshiohur Rahman Jewel told The Daily Star, "We detained Harun Izzah after his involvement was found in the violence in Hathazari on March 26 during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"He will be handed over to Hathazari Police Station with which eight cases



were lodged over the Hefajat mayhem."

Once an active organiser of banned militant outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji), Harun was arrested at least two times before this for being involved in the 2013 bomb blast in the Lalkhan Bazar madrasa

and conspiring with Lashkar-e-Taiba to launch an attack on the US Embassy in Dhaka in 2009.

Senior police officials of Chattogram Metropolitan Police said after the fierce clash in Hathazari which left four people dead, Harun appeared at the Chattogram Medical College Hospital with his followers on the evening of March 26.

Under pressure from him, the authorities handed over the bodies of

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Local production

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Bangladesh is trying to source vaccines as the country's mass inoculation programme stumbled following India's restriction on export of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine produced by Serum.

Administration of the first dose has been postponed and the second dose is uncertain for 13 lakh people as India has yet to confirm when the shipment might arrive in Dhaka.

The Bangladesh government approved on principle the local co-production of Russia's Sputnik V and China's Sinopharm vaccines involving Bangladeshi drug makers.

The drug administration yesterday issued authorisation for emergency use of Sinopharm.

"We expect to receive five lakh doses of Sinopharm as a gift in two weeks," said Maj Gen Mahbubur Rahman, director general of the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA).

There is no legal restriction now on the import and use of Sinopharm in Bangladesh.

Earlier on Tuesday, the government sought an immediate supply of the vaccine from China during the first meeting of the China-led initiative for Covid-19 vaccines.

On the same day, the DGDA issued emergency use authorisation to Russia's Sputnik V.

"The price has not been fixed yet. It will be fixed through government-to-government negotiation," the DG said.

Bangladesh is 15th among the 20 Asian countries in terms of vaccination. The country has administered 3.3 doses per 100 people while Palau is at the top of the list with 74.3 doses, according to the Asian Development Outlook 2021.

Despite repeated calls from the experts not to rely on a single source for vaccines, the government did not initially seek the vaccines developed by China and Russia because neither had WHO approval.

Besides, the international bodies lent funds to Bangladesh to buy only the vaccines recognised by the WHO or three Stringent Regulatory Authorities.

The World Bank lent \$500 million for buying vaccines under the "Covid-19 Emergency Response and Pandemic Preparedness" project.

The Asian Development Bank will lend \$940 million to Bangladesh for the same purpose by the end of May.

During a press briefing on Wednesday, ADB Country Director Manmohan Parkash stressed the need for production capabilities within the country.

"Vaccination will not be a one-year thing," he said.

There are good Bangladeshi drugmakers that can produce the vaccines with the vaccine developers.

"If that happens, it will be a long-term and sustainable solution," he said. GOVERNMENT WORKING ON CO-PRODUCTION

"Three pharmaceutical companies have vaccine producing capacity. One of the companies can produce eight million doses a month. The protocol is not fixed yet," Maj Gen Mahbubur Rahman said.

A DGDA official, however, said the co-production will take several months to begin.

The Sinopharm is a double dose vaccine three weeks apart and has an efficacy of 79.34 percent, according to the New York Times Covid-19 vaccine tracker.

Created by the Beijing Institute of Biological Products, this vaccine was put into clinical trials by the state-owned Chinese company Sinopharm.

The World Health Organization will decide next week whether it can be approved for emergency use.

China has already stockpiled more than a million doses of the vaccine and is using it at home. Besides, it is also exporting to many countries in Asia, South America and Africa.

Anvir's 5 family members leave

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(AVSEC) at the airport confirmed to The Daily Star.

The aircraft is operated by Sky Soundation Limited, a company of Bashundhara Group, said the official wishing anonymity.

The family members left the country two days after Anvir was accused in a case over abetting suicide of a college student at a flat in the capital's Gulshan.

According to the passenger list, a copy of which has been obtained by this newspaper, the five family members include Anvir's wife Sabrina Sobhan, their two children, wife of Anvir's

younger brother Yeasha Sobhan and her daughter.

Sources at the airport told The Daily Star that security officials were on alert to make sure that Anvir could not leave the country as a Dhaka court imposed a travel ban on him.

Talking to this newspaper, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman said the chartered aircraft sought permission on Tuesday to operate a flight and they granted the permission.

The passengers got clearance from the Special Branch of police and then the chartered flight left the country, he added.

Instigation behind 'suicide'

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the court through his lawyers.

The HC bench of Justice Mamnoon Rahman and Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman refused to hear any of the anticipatory bail petitions on the cause list stating that the bench has no jurisdiction to hear such petitions.

The HC bench said it would not entertain any anticipatory bail petitions due to the pandemic and restrictions.

"Some anticipatory bail petitions have wrongly been included in the cause list for hearing today," Justice Mamnoon Rahman told lawyers at the beginning of the proceedings of the bench.

Anvir did not appear before the HC bench, said his lawyer Md Munsurul Hoque Chowdhury.

Sudip Chakrabarty, deputy commissioner (Gulshan division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, yesterday told reporters that immigration police checked two passports of Anvir and said he had not left the country after April 26.

"There was no direct suicide note...

but she [the victim] wrote about her extreme emotional distress and frustration in her diaries," said the DC.

Chakrabarty quoted a diary entry, saying, "You [the accused] will see tomorrow and feel me in your heart."

He said, "It is very important and similar to a suicide note."

"After we went to the crime scene, we found a picture of the victim and the accused on the wall and her frustration and distress was written in her diaries. It seemed to us that a promising 21-year-old woman did not die by suicide without a reason or instigation."

He said another important due is that on the morning of April 26, the victim told her sister, who lodged the case, over the phone about "serious consequences" and said anything might happen any time.

After checking digital footprints, the victim's mobile phones and CCTV footage, the police have found evidence that the accused used to visit the flat, he said.

But police have not found any proof of Anvir visiting the flat on the day of

the incident or the day before.

The police will interrogate everyone mentioned in the case as well as the ones whose names will come up in the investigation, Chakrabarty said.

About threats made to the victim's family, the DC said police have looked into the matter.

"We are in touch with the family and will provide all them with security."

He refuted allegations that police were not arresting the accused because of his influence. It could just have been an unnatural death, but the case is at this stage because of police promptness.

"On the basis of evidence collected immediately from the spot, police convinced the family to file the case over instigation of suicide."

On Monday night, police recovered the body of the college student of Cumilla at a rented flat in Gulshan.

The following day, her sister sued Bashundhara Group MD Anvir.

According to the complaint, Anvir developed a relationship with the victim and promised to marry her.

Gonoshasthaya at their doorstep

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ambulances for Covid-19 patients who call the institution or book the service using an app, Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, founder and trustee of GK, told The Daily Star on Wednesday night.

Former vice chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Prof Dr Nazul Islam inaugurated the service virtually during a programme at GK's Dhanmondi hospital yesterday.

The service is currently being provided every day from 9:00am to 8:00pm, he said.

Initially three teams will work to treat Covid-19 patients at home. Each team will have senior and junior physicians, nurses, pathology technologists, physiotherapists and volunteers.

Dr Zafrullah said the ambulance that will visit the Covid-19 patients' houses will have an X-ray, ECG machine, a ventilator and all other necessary equipment.

He said the mobile medical team will not charge any fees for their services and will charge about half the cost of other tests, including the Covid-19 test.

The medical team conducting house visits will also be accompanied by a motorcycle, the rider of which will return to the hospital with the X-Ray cassette and/or a potential Covid-19 patient's sample.

Covid-19 patients will be divided into four categories according to the symptoms

they are exhibiting. These are: mild, tolerable, tolerable with comorbidities (diabetes, heart or kidney disease, stroke, asthma, etc.) and severe.

Dr Zafrullah said the first three types of patients can be treated at home.

They will be treated according to the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO). The doctor will give them certain medicines after going through the X-ray image on their mobile phones. The technician will collect blood samples for necessary tests.

Patients exhibiting severe symptoms will be transferred to the hospital.

If a patient tests positive for Covid-19, the necessary medicine will be sent to his or her residence and necessary treatment will be provided.

The nurse will train the patient and his or her relatives in the use of oxygen cylinders and pulse oximeters. If necessary, plasma treatment will be arranged at home.

In addition, chest X-rays, ECG and all the tests that need to be done will be carried out.

In other words, a hospital will go to a corona patient's house, Dr Zafrullah said. He said not all Covid-19 patients need to go to hospital.

There are two types of services they can provide through home visits -- firstly, carry out tests on a large scale and secondly, if any Covid patients calls them,

their medical team will go to the patient's residence and provide the necessary treatment.

Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury told The Daily Star that the government had not taken the necessary precautionary measures regarding Covid-19 treatment.

"I have been saying from the beginning that oxygen is most needed for Covid-19 patients. We can easily produce that oxygen ourselves. It costs around Tk 30 crore to build a small oxygen plant, and it is not difficult for the government to spend [that amount]. If the money is given to the hospitals as a grant, they can produce oxygen as per their requirement," he said.

"At the same time, we will teach other people of the Covid infected patient how to measure temperature, blood pressure and oxygen level. We will provide this service from door to door, so that the crowd in the hospital is reduced and the panic among the people is also reduced."

Zafrullah said there is no alternative to stand by the people the way Covid-19 situation is deteriorating. We can say for sure that the positive results will be visible within 15 to 30 days of the door-to-door treatment gets started.

Call 01709-66994 and 09602111940 to avail the medical services of the