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**News Brief**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has announced a number of stimulus packages of Tk 72,750 crore to overcome the possible economic shock from the ongoing shutdown enforced due to the deadly COVID-19 outbreak. Sheikh Hasina at a press conference from Ganobhaban yesterday said, her government will provide working capital of Tk 30,000 crore for the COVID-19 affected industries and service sector institutions with 4.5 percent interest while the rest 4.5 percent would be borne by the government. In the second package, which will be for the small and medium industries, the government will provide Tk 20,000 crore as working capital with the loan receiving enterprises paying only 4 percent out of 9 percent interest. In the third package, the Bangladesh Bank will expand its Export Development Fund, aiming to increase the facility for importing raw materials. As an advantage, the central bank will enhance its EDF facility from \$U 3.5 billion to \$US 5 billion. For the last package, Bangladesh Bank will introduce a new loan facility system titled 'Pre-shipment Credit Refinance Scheme'. The amount of this loan facility will be Tk 5,000 crore in total where the interest rate will be 7 percent. The packages also included Tk 5,000 crore for paying the salaries and allowances of the workers of export oriented industries as announced earlier. The Premier said, the government simultaneously took four programmes under the work plan to be implemented in phases categorized as "immediate, short and long". The four programmes are: increasing public expenditure, formulating a stimulus package, widening social safety net coverage and increasing monetary supply," she said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday received donations for her relief and welfare fund from 50 public, private and statutory organisations including several ministries. Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Dr. Ahmad Kaikaus received the cheques on behalf of the Premier at the Prime Minister's Office. The Prime Minister being connected with a videoconference from Ganabhaban said, her government has been working untiringly to reach foods to every doorstep. She urged the well-off people to stand by the distressed in their bad time in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

Eighteen more people were diagnosed with coronavirus in the country in the last 24 hours, taking the total of number of such cases in the country to 88. One people died with the pandemic during the period raising the death toll to nine. Health Minister Zahid Maleque while informing this at a virtual media briefing in Dhaka yesterday urged all to following directives for COVID-19 with more seriousness. The IEDCR officials at the briefing for the first time gave an account of area wise spread of the virus saying of the fresh 18 cases 12 were detected in Dhaka, five in Narayanganj and one in Madaripur. They said that community transmission of coronavirus is indeed happening but it is limited to five clusters across the country.

Information Minister Dr. Hasan Mahmud terming the stimulus package announced by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as unprecedented said, the declared economic package is being hailed by every people. Through a video conference in Dhaka yesterday he said, the Premier brought all people, including labourers, baggers, small and medium industry owners, under the economic package. He also said, Bangladesh has declared Taka 72,750 crore, which is nearly 2.52 percent of GDP while India has declared 0.8 percent of their GDP.

Foreign Minister Dr. A K Abdul Momen has said, Bangladesh is keeping contact with the countries which want to send back undocumented Bangladeshi workers due to job cut amid deadly COVID-19 pandemic. He informed this to the newsmen yesterday after holding an inter-ministerial meeting at the Expatriate Welfare Ministry also attended by Expatriates'

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Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmad and Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal. The Foreign Minister said, the government has allocated Tk 4.5 crore for ensuring food, medical services and other necessary things for the expatriates living in different countries.

The government has put its best efforts to help foreign citizens and permanent residents stranded in Bangladesh due to COVID-19, a Foreign Ministry press release said in Dhaka yesterday. Meanwhile, a total of 322 US citizens left Dhaka yesterday as the US government arranged a second chartered flight for those who opted to go back home on their personal choice. Earlier, on March 30, 269 US citizens left Bangladesh by a similar chartered flight. According to another media report, one hundred forty-one Bangladeshi nationals, who got stuck in West Bengal in India, returned home through Benapole check-post under special arrangement in the last three days.

The government has issued an order extending the nationwide holiday further until April 14 in the wake of the deadly novel coronavirus outbreak. But kitchen markets, food shops, pharmacies, hospitals and all emergency services will remain out of the purview of the general holidays. All factories in the country's eight EPZs will remain shut until April 14. Meanwhile, BGMEA has urged its members to keep their factories closed through the nationwide shutdown till April 11.


The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh - CAAB extended the suspension of all international and domestic flights excepting special and cargo flights until April 14 in an effort to contain the spread of coronavirus in the country. CAAB in a press release yesterday said, 16 countries will come under the restrictions.

Meanwhile, the Police Headquarters yesterday said, nobody, other than emergency services, will be allowed either to leave and enter the capital city until further notice.

The International Committee of the Red Cross in Bangladesh has joined hands together with the Prison Directorate to enhance the preparedness of the 68 prisons across the country to prevent the transmission of coronavirus. Another report says, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society in association with Denise Red Cross has launched a 'psychosocial support cell' to support the mental health of the people, who become anxious over the spread of the global pandemic COVID-19 in the country.

Social Welfare Ministry allocated around Taka Tk 22.96 crore to its 1,192 institutional units to stand by low-income group people including the distressed, disabled and hijra people in the wake of novel coronavirus outbreak.

Posts and Telecommunications Division launched an app dubbed "Corona Identifier" which would help people to know about COVID-19 affected patient immediately as well as raise awareness. Using the app, anyone can know the status regarding the intensity of coronavirus spread in the community.

  
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