

Staff Reporter



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday termed the fight against coronavirus a “war” and urged people to stay at homes to discharge their responsibilities at this critical time.

“We won in 1971 against our enemy by standing shoulder to shoulder. Fighting coronavirus is also a war and in this war, your responsibility is to stay home. Inshallah, we’ll win the war with everyone’s efforts,” she said.

The Prime Minister made the plea while addressing the nation yesterday evening on the occasion of the Independence and National Day 2020.

State-owned Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television simultaneously broadcast the Prime Minister’s address. Private television channels and radio stations also aired the Prime Minister’s speech.

She asked the people of the country to strictly follow the health instructions to fight against coronavirus and avoid public gatherings.

Sheikh Hasina, in her over 23-minute speech, said right at the moment highest priority for the government is to save people from the virus.

Bangladesh has so far confirmed 27 cases after testing 794 people. Five people have so far died while seven others recovered.

The Prime Minister said the World Health Organisation (WHO) has already declared the coronavirus crisis a pandemic and noted that the Independence Day will be observed in a different context due to the outbreak as the whole world is upset due to the spread of this virus.

“The rich or poor, developed or developing, small or big, all countries are more or less affected with this virus. Bangladesh is not free from this infection,” she said, urging everyone to avoid arranging programmes that causes public gatherings.

Hasina said she is aware that people are passing their days in one kind of panic and worry. “I can understand their psychological condition, but in this crisis moment, we’ve to face the situation with patience and courage,” she said.

Hasina called on the expatriates who returned from coronavirus-affected countries to thoroughly follow home-quarantine instructions. “Just stay separately for 14 days only, these instructions have to be followed to save your family, neighbours, people of the area, and above all the people of the country,” she said.

She also said it would be easy to protect ourselves by following some health instructions and requested the people of all religions to perform prayers at home.

Hasina said IEDCR has opened hotline numbers while doctors opened their 500 numbers. “If the coronavirus symptoms show up, please contact with those numbers. The government is arranging all sorts of treatment.”

The Prime Minister said although coronavirus has the ability to spread quickly, it is not that much deadly, noting that most of the people affected by this virus get well within a few days but it became deadly for people with underlying medical conditions and the old. She urged

everyone to pay the highest attention to those of the family who are most sensitive.

“Don’t be panicked. Panic destroys logical thinking. Your awareness will keep you, your family and above all people of the country safe,” she said.

The Prime Minister also described various effective and time befitting measures of the government taken from the very beginning of coronavirus outbreak in China and noted that 6,58,981 people have been screened at different ports.

“Since January, we’ve taken massive programmes and preparations to tackle the infection of coronavirus. A national committee has been formed under the leadership of the Health Minister,” she said.

Besides, Hasina said, committees have been formed in city corporations, municipalities, districts, upazilas and unions level.

She said six hospitals have been prepared for coronavirus patients in Dhaka, besides three more hospitals are being readied. Separate beds have been prepared at district and upazila level hospitals.

The Prime Minister mentioned that 14,565 isolation beds have been prepared, including 10,050 in Dhaka. For institutional quarantine, 290 institutions have been prepared where 16,741 people can be given services.

The Prime Minister said Bangladesh identified its first coronavirus cases on March 8 and till yesterday the number of corona-infected persons is 39. Four of them, who were suffering from various diseases, died while five people went back home after treatment.

Until Tuesday, 37,037 people have been quarantined where 9,885 got their release certificates and 267 persons have been kept in isolation and 277 got release certificates, she said.

Hasina said health workers have to play an important role in providing treatment to the infected people. “Sufficient materials have been supplied for their safety and enough materials have been preserved as highest priority has been given for their safety. Don’t be confused.”

As of Tuesday, she said, the stock of testing kit was 13,000 while another 30,000 will reach the country very soon. There are eight machines in Dhaka for test while work is going on to set up testing labs in seven other divisional headquarters.

“Don’t spread rumours,” she said warning of stern actions against the rumour-mongers.

The Prime Minister hoped that the world will get rid of this calamity very soon due to the development of the science and technology and with the efforts from all.

“At this crisis moment, we’ve to be tolerant and sensitive. No one tries to take the chance, there’s no scarcity in the market,” she said.

In this connection, the Prime Minister said the supply chain is intact with the outer world and within the country.

“Don’t raise the prices of essentials illogically, don’t increase the misery of people. Steps have been taken to monitor the markets everywhere,” she warned.

‘Time to help each other’

The Prime Minister said a good number of people in the country have lost their jobs due to coronavirus outbreak. “We’ve to stand beside them.”

She said the low-income group will be provided assistance under the ‘Return-to-Home’ programme for the homeless and landless people as there will be homes free of cost, six months food and cash assistance. “District administrations have been directed in this regard.”

Hasina said accommodation capacity has been created in Bhashanchar Island to provide shelter and employment for 100,000 people. “The government will take steps if anyone wants to go there.”

The Prime Minister said VGD, VGF and rice for Tk 10 per kilogram will be continued with free medicine and treatment. "I'm urging the rich to come forward for the poor."

She mentioned that there might be a blow to industrial production and export, and mentioned that the government has taken some measures for this emergency period.

Hasina announced a Tk 5,000-crore incentive package for export-oriented industries and this money will be used for providing the salaries and wages of workers and employees only.

Besides, she said, the Bangladesh Bank has already taken some pro-business steps. The central bank will not announce any customer as loan defaulter till June next.

Hasina mentioned that the timeframe for export earnings has been increased to six months from the existing two months. Likewise, the import payment has been increased to six months from four months.

She also said the limit of mobile banking has been increased, the payment of power, water and gas bills have been extended to June without any fine or surcharge and the payment of instalment of the NGOs has been suspended.

"The whole world is now going through uncertainty, but our government is ready to face any kind of tough situation. We're the government of the people, we're always with the people. I'm keeping my eyes on the situation," she said.

Hasina said it is the time for austerity and urged people not to purchase excessive consumer goods which are not essential, and don't hoard and let the fixed-income group people buy.

"We're self-sufficient in food production. This year we've bumper production of Aman crop and the government warehouses have more than 1.7 million metric tonnes of foodgrains," she said.

The Prime Minister also said private mill owners and farmers have huge foodgrains as stock. In the current season, the country has bumper production of potato, onion, chilli and wheat.

She urged the farmers not to leave any land without cultivation. "Please move for more production."

Hasina said the test of the humanity of human being occurs during a disaster.

"This is the time to help each other and show humanity. The Bengalees are a nation of heroes. The Bengalee nation faced various disasters and crisis with united efforts," she said.