



PHOTO OF THE DAY

PRABIR DAS



A deserted Bijoy Sarani intersection on a Friday morning. Until a couple of weeks ago, the roundabout was being given a major makeover to mark the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, but all that has had to take a back seat in light of recent events.

CHATTOGRAM

No shortage in supply, yet prices surge at pharmacies

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Asad Haider, a resident of port city's Rahattar Pool area, has been suffering from peptic ulcer for a long time. He was prescribed medicines for three months. One of the medicine he has to take is Sergel (Esomeprazole 20mg).

Although he could buy a pack of that for Tk 62 even last week, now the price has risen to Tk 68.

"I asked the salesperson about the reason for the increase in price and he said it was shortage of supply," Haider told The Daily Star.

"I don't understand the reason behind this shortage. The government has instructed medicine shops to remain open, but many in the area have been closed since the evening of March 25," he said, adding, "The supply chain of medicine should be uninterrupted in any situation for the sake of patients."

Malati Sarkar, a resident of Jamal Khan Road, had the same experience yesterday. She too said the medicine she bought cost more now than a week before.

"They told me it was because of a supply crunch," said Malati. "I had to buy the medicine at a higher price as the doctor asked me not to miss a single dose," she said.

Expressing concerns, SM Nazer Hossain, central vice president of Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB), told The Daily Star, "They [pharmacies] have increased the price of medicine in different areas and it is the responsibility of the drug administration to monitor the market, but the officials are not performing their duties properly."

Contacted, Mozammel Hossain, deputy director of Directorate General of Drug Administration, said demanding high price for medicine during a crisis is not only illegal but also unethical. "There is no shortage in supply of medicine throughout the country... we will definitely look into it," he said.

Shibu Prasad Das, executive member of Bangladesh Chemists and Druggists' Association, Chattogram district, also said there was no shortage in supply of any medicine, except for one brand of paracetamol.

"There is no reason for pharmacies to demand high price for medicine," he said, adding, "We have strictly instructed our members to sell medicine at regular prices."

DEATH FOR WAR CRIMES

Azhar's lawyers preparing to challenge SC verdict

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Defense lawyers for convicted war criminal ATM Azharul Islam are preparing a petition containing at least 10 grounds for seeking review of the Supreme Court verdict, that upheld his death penalty for his involvement in genocide and crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

The review petition will be filed with the apex court on April 5 when it will reopen after its ongoing closure, Advocate Shishir Manir, a lawyer for the Jamaat-e-Islami leader, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The SC was originally scheduled to reopen on March 29 after an annual vacation. But the authorities have declared general holidays at all courts across the country till April 4 due to the coronavirus outbreak.

"We have almost prepared the review petition for ATM Azharul Islam, including 10 to 12 grounds on which the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court may consider to exempt him from the charges brought against him", Shishir Manir said, adding that statements of the witnesses don't fully support the incidents of charges brought against Azharul.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Mahubey Alam told The Daily Star that his office will oppose the review petition when the Appellate Division holds hearing on it.

If the SC dismisses the review petition, Azharul will have an option but to seek clemency from the president confessing to his guilt, he said.

"If the Supreme Court dismisses the review petition and the president rejects the mercy petition of Azharul Islam, if he seeks review and mercy, there will be no legal bar for the authorities concerned to execute the death sentence of Azharul," the attorney general said.

The SC on October 31 last year upheld the death sentence of ATM Azharul Islam. A four-member bench of the SC's Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, by a majority view delivered the verdict around five years after the International Crimes Tribunal-1 handed down capital punishment to Azhar for crimes committed in Rangpur in 1971.

It upheld four charges against Azhar, but acquitted him of another. The SC released the full text of the verdict on March 15 this year, clearing the way for Azharul to move a petition seeking review of the verdict.

Azhar (67), who is now in Gazipur's Kashimpur Jail-2, was the commander of notorious Al-Badr force and president of Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of Jamaat -- a party which opposed the country's liberation -- in Rangpur during the 1971 war.

Law Minister Anisul Huq earlier told The Daily Star that the government would execute the apex court verdict on completion of all legal procedures.

Expressing satisfaction at the judgement, he had said Bangladesh has moved one step ahead in ensuring justice and rule of law.

'Country not in lockdown'

Says info minister, regrets harassment of people leaving home for urgent reasons

UNB, Dhaka

Mentioning that there has been no countrywide lockdown, Information Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud yesterday said it is very regretful that people are being harassed by members of law enforcement agencies when they go out for urgent reasons.

"No lockdown has been imposed in the country... anyone can come out and go to the streets, if necessary. It's very regretful that people face harassment when they come out and go to the streets. Police have not been asked to do so," he said.

The minister made the remarks at a Facebook live press conference from his official residence in the city.

He said the government has suggested people not to roam on streets unnecessarily.

Dr Mahmud said even the police headquarters on Thursday asked all its field-level officials that one can come out to the streets, unless required, and suggested the officials to send people back to their residences convincing them if anyone goes out to streets unnecessarily.

So, he added, it is not right to harass anyone when they go out for a necessity.

He also criticised BNP for the gathering of thousands of people when its chief Khaleda Zia was released on Wednesday, amid enforcement of social distancing to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

"BNP manifested nothing other than its utter irresponsibility by allowing gathering of thousands of people," he said.

Noting that the whole world is facing a pandemic, he said they do not want to see the political blame-game at this time of disaster.

How sweet is home?

Employees share experience of working remotely

MATHEWS CHIRAN

Empty roads, shuttered shops and few people in sight, the effects of the coronavirus can be seen everywhere across the country. And yet, even during these times, work must carry on for many residents of the city.

Considering the circumstances, many corporations have instructed their employees to work from home. Remote work is not a new concept: it has been successfully implemented in many workplaces across the world. But for Bangladesh, it is somewhat of an uncharted territory.

Right now, there is no other option for many than to adapt to this new reality. Despite how difficult or strange it might feel at first, many are getting used to this new lifestyle and are trying their best to deal with the workload.

This correspondent has recently talked to several employees who are working from home, and they shared their experiences about what is it like to have meetings, submit assignments and give presentations, all using the virtual space.

While they all agreed that working from home is comfortable and relaxing, coordinating with colleagues can be a hassle. They mainly blamed it on the shortcomings of technology, as they think it is not quite there yet, at least in Bangladesh.

Shahadat Apurbo, a deputy manager (communications) at Brac, finds a comfortable spot at his Rampura residence and gets ready for work at 8am.

By 5pm, he closes all work-related software, which means he is done for the day.

"Working from home is undoubtedly

relaxing, as you have full freedom to follow your own workstyle. You can work at your own pace as long as you can successfully execute everything," Apurbo said. "However, proper coordination with colleagues is an issue and a reason for delays."

"Besides, you have to constantly keep your eyes on the computer screen for checking emails, having video conferences and much more, which is sometimes stressful," he added.

Iqbal Hasani, a public relations officer of Nuclear Power Plant Company Bangladesh Ltd, sits down to work an hour later than Apurbo but finishes at the same time, doing everything from his house at Bangla Motor.

"Who doesn't want to spend time with their family? Working from home is truly comforting," Iqbal said.

But working in the public sector brings its own set of challenges. "All government files are yet to be digitally converted, and it's not easy to coordinate with everyone," he added.

Shourav Ahmed, a systems integrator at IT company Ding, loves his current work arrangement but dreads the technical issues.

"You can give your 100 per cent at home since the environment is very convenient. But technical problems such as shoddy internet connection are a challenge," Shourav said.

"On top of that, you don't get the guidance you would while working from office," he added.

Even though this arrangement is relaxing, at the end of the day, individuals need to socialise face-to-face to strengthen

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A little foresight goes a long way

Sylhet private hospital preempts Covid-19 outbreak; ensures PPE for staff, sets up ICU, isolation units for patients

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Days before the nation started to panic over the crisis of personal protective equipment (PPE) for medical professionals and sufficient resources for infected patients, a private medical college hospital in Sylhet was prepared.

It ensured PPE for all its staff members, set up isolation units for patients, prepared ICU and post-ICU units, and managed ventilators -- the most important tools for treating coronavirus patients.

The institution concerned is North East Medical College Hospital, situated at Chandipul in the city.

"When coronavirus started spreading from Wuhan earlier this year, we started our preparation to fight it," said Prof Dr Shahriar Hussein Chowdhury, managing director of the hospital.

"Since the country lacks ICU facilities, we decided to focus on that. We have set up ICU and post-ICU units at our hospital," he said.

"We already installed three ventilators and two more will arrive next week. We have seven BiPAP machines (a device that helps with breathing) and prepared 17 observation beds," he said.

They also managed PPE for all their doctors, nurses and support staff, he said, adding that there are 450 staff members working at the hospital in three shifts.

"When our colleagues at different hospitals are worried for their safety while tending to patients, we are being able to serve people without any fear,"



Wearing PPE, the emergency medical officer of North East Medical College Hospital in Sylhet is busy at work. The hospital not only ensured safety gears for its staff members, but also set up isolation units and ICU for patients.

Sajeed Roy, the emergency medical officer at the hospital, said.

The hospital opened two hotline numbers to provide guidelines about coronavirus and its official Facebook page is now connected with "Corona Bot" -- which helps people know more about the virus and global situation.

"We are trying to get more equipment... although there is a shortage," Dr Shahriar said.

"These are challenging times and

we are possibly moving towards a perilous period. The government should remain more cautious and prepared. All retired and expert doctors should be asked to rejoin as the country needs their service," he added.

"Presently, the government is focusing on treating suspected patients at isolation centres... We have also prepared our institution and are ready to support the country," he said.



A goods-laden truck lost control and crashed into a newly-built footbridge in Shyamoli on Mirpur Road early yesterday, severely damaging the structure. Had the roads not been empty due to the coronavirus outbreak, the damage could have been much more serious.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

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