

Joining hands to wash hands

Ward councillors, local leaders, residents come together in Dhaka to install handwashing facilities

MATHEWS CHIRAN

After a tiring session of painting a nearby store, labourer Shaheen Mia finds the newly set up public hand-washing station, and he along with his co-worker grabs the bar of soap and scrubs away all dirt and grime, and possibly the coronavirus.

"We usually wash our hands with water only after work. Finding a bar of soap for ourselves is rare when we stay outside. Such an initiative is definitely helpful for us, especially amid this crisis," said Shaheen when approached by this correspondent.

This station, equipped with proper water supply and soap, is situated at Badda's Satarkul and is servicing residents and passers-by during a time when keeping one's hands squeaky clean is essential.

Like Shaheen, many passers-by are fully utilising the facility set up by Nilufar Yeasmin Etee, reserved ward councillor elect (38,39,40), in Badda.

She alone has set up at least 15 such stations in the three wards, keeping the current pandemic in mind. Although she is yet to assume office, she installed them on her own initiative.

"Although I'll assume office in May, I'm still a representative. I can't wait for the city corporation's assistance or direction to help my people amid this crisis," said Etee.

"At first, I wasn't sure the initiative would work. I first installed two basins beside by house for public use. After a while, people from all around started using them," she continued. "Then I realised that this is important for the people, and I should install more of them at different locations of the wards."

"Many residents made requests



Councillors, local leaders and residents of Badda have come together to install hand-washing stations at different points, which are equipped with supply of soap and water. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

to set up stations near their places, and I did so and installed some beside mosques too," she told this correspondent, adding that she will continue the initiative till the crisis remains.

So far, she has set up hand-washing stations at different locations, including Alirmor, Satarkul and Nururchala. She has a monitoring team which visits the areas two times a day to see if soap and water are available.

Till now, there has been no incidence of people stealing soap or the basins, as everyone is cooperative, she said.

It is not just Etee, however, as general ward councillors are also doing the same. Masum Gani, councillor of ward-21, on his own initiative has installed three such

stations at different points in the area. "As part of measures to tackle Covid-19, we're installing them where there is frequent movement of people," said Gani. The city corporation is providing bleaching powder, toilet paper and a few bars of soap, but the councillor himself is doing most of the work.

When asked if anything gets stolen, he replied, "No, people here know each other and are helpful to keep the initiative going."

Beside main roads, healthcare facilities such as Ibn Sina installed their own hand-washing facilities for those who enter their buildings, but passers-by can use them as well.

Even local leaders and some residents have joined in.

Kamal Uddin Saheen, an organising

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

'Stay put till flights resume'

UK High Commission advises its nationals

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UK High Commission in Dhaka has advised British nationals, who are staying in Bangladesh now, to be prepared to stay in the country until commercial flights resume.

"If you are a British national in Bangladesh, you should be prepared to stay in the country until commercial flights resume," it said. "You will need to be ready to comply with local isolation, testing or quarantine requirements, and to rely on the local health system."

The travel advisory was issued on Sunday as Biman Bangladesh has suspended its operations in last two routes - Manchester and London - for a week since yesterday amid global pandemic of Coronavirus.

With this, Biman Bangladesh has suspended all its routes. The British High Commission said given that many restrictions remain in place, and continue to be introduced, moving within Bangladesh may become more difficult than normal for British nationals.

"Unless you have an urgent reason to travel within Bangladesh, you may have to stay where you are whilst the flight ban

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Blood donation stalled

Donors term police obstruction, lack of transportation as major obstacles

NILIMA JAHAN

On March 26, 19-year-old Iqbal Hossain (not his real name), a volunteer of a blood donation organisation, was out to donate blood to an anaemia patient at Ibn Sina Hospital of Sylhet.

Although the roads were deserted, the teenager from Jaintapur felt a sense of duty, especially because the rarity of his A-negative type blood. However, a police personnel suddenly approached him and started beating him up for stepping out into the streets, without even hearing him out.

"The police didn't pay heed to him, even after he mentioned what he was out for. Instead, another officer joined in and started baton-charging him. Shaken, my friend ran from the scene and came back home instead of going to the hospital," said Sabbir Hossain, Iqbal's friend and fellow volunteer.

After Iqbal's story was posted on an online blood donation platform's group, others came forward expressing fear of similar incidents happening to them, especially after coming across some videos that have gone viral on social media.

Md Nazrul Islam, who has donated blood and platelet over 80 times, said he couldn't go to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) to donate platelet to a cancer patient who was badly in need of it on Sunday.

"I had to refuse because I was afraid that I would not get any scope to tell police that I'm out for a noble cause. Sometimes, they don't wait to hear any explanation," he said.

According to Afsana Nazneen Priya, a call centre agent of Roktadaner Opekkhay Bangladesh, the organisation got 19 blood requests from different critical patients over Saturday and Sunday. However, they could only serve eight patients as most donors were unwilling to go out during the lockdown.

Along with this panic, another issue that contributes to this is the lack of transportation during the shutdown.

"Since we work from home, we cannot ensure transport facilities for our donors. It is also difficult for patients' attendants to ensure transportation for donors," she said.

"Besides, the person who will donate blood shouldn't walk or run before or after donating blood. They must be well rested," she added.

Md Rubel Miah, a glass factory worker of Tangail, was overcome with anxiety when he was failing to manage a platelet donor at the DMCH for his 11-year-old brother suffering from kidney disease.

Rubel isn't the most well-connected person in this city, yet he contacted a number of donors with the help of a blood donation organisation. However, everyone turned him down due to the ongoing situation.

Md Belayet Rahman Aslam, a donor who donated even during the lockdown, said he had to face a lot of hassle while coming to DMCH from Mirpur 12.

"Since there was no public transport, I walked till Kazipara and found a motorbiker, and requested him to take me to DMCH. The biker was also in fear of getting beaten up by the police, but he agreed when I told him my case," Belayet said.

Rakhi Biswas, hailing from Sunamganj, initially struggled to find a donor for her husband Probangshu Das, who is suffering from severe rectal bleeding. She called some 25 donors who matched the blood type, but every one of them denied the journey to Mount Adora Hospital of Sylhet, fearing police and the army. Rakhi, alone in the city with her sick husband, eventually found a donor with help from the hospital, but only after going through a lot of trouble. Had it not been for the hospital's help, the couple's future could've been hanging in the balance, she said.

LOCKDOWN IN INDIA

Govt planning evacuation of Bangladeshis stranded there

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is weighing options to evacuate several hundred Bangladeshi citizens who have been stranded in India amid a 21-day lockdown that the country has been enforcing since March 24 in a bid to stop the transmission of novel coronavirus.

"We are working out the details on how to do it. We are talking to Biman Bangladesh, which we are considering to be the better option," Farid Hossain, press minister of Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi, told The Daily Star yesterday.

As of yesterday, more than 500 Bangladeshis, mostly in Chennai and Bengaluru, contacted the Bangladesh High Commission through its hotline number.

Majority of them want to return to Bangladesh, while some are facing financial problems and others need to extend their visas.

Farid Hossain said local Indian airlines are not available, adding that the High Commission is talking to Air India as well as Biman for evacuation of the stranded Bangladeshis.

"Those who will return to Bangladesh will have to pay themselves. If Biman is chartered, the passengers' relatives can buy tickets from Bangladesh. In that case, there will be no issues of money transfer," he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Ctg doctors consulting patients over phone, IM

BMA publishes list of 100 physicians who are providing the service free of cost

ARUN BIKASH DEV, Ctg

A number of doctors in Chattogram are offering treatment to patients remotely, as they are not attending private practice amidst countrywide shutdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Physicians were offering treatment over phone and via social media and instant messaging (IM) services like WhatsApp and Facebook since Sunday. Moreover, they are not charging any fees for this service.

Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), Chattogram published a list of 100 doctors who will deliver treatment to patients through teleconference. In the list published on Sunday, the organisation mentioned names and telephone number of the doctors, so that patients can contact them in any emergency situation.

Shuvescha Ghosh, an expecting mother, has been trying to consult a gynecologist for a week, in vain. A friend of hers informed her about the BMA list, and Shuvescha dialled the number of Dr Priti Barua, a consultant of gynecology yesterday morning, and narrated her problems to the doctor. Dr Priti advised her some medication and lifestyle changes.

"I was tensed about my health condition, but after talking to the doctor, I feel relieved," she told The Daily Star.

Contacted, Dr Barua said she received some four phone calls from patients since yesterday morning [till 11:30am] and advised them according to their problems.

"I cannot attend private chamber but I feel a sense of peace that I can serve my patients through

phone," she said.

Dr Bijay Sarkar, another doctor of the list, told The Daily Star he received three phone calls yesterday morning [till 12:30pm]. Most of them seemed to be worried as they were suffering from flu and mild fever.

"I assured them not to be worried and prescribed them medication," he said.

Contacted, Dr Faisal Iqbal Chowdhury, general secretary of BMA Chattogram, said their list includes consultants of different disciplines.

Patients can avail their service from 10am to 1pm, and again from 6pm to 9pm.

"We know many patients are worried as doctors have not been attending their private practice, so we have initiated this teleconference treatment service on humanitarian grounds," he said.

"From BMA, we are also providing personal protective equipment, including gloves, goggles and masks to doctors in different hospitals in Chattogram, so that doctors can provide treatment to patients keeping themselves safe," he said.

However, it's not just doctors on the list who are keeping their doors open to patients, albeit virtually.

Dr AKM Rezaul Karim, professor and head of Paediatric Haematology and Oncology in Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), issued a notice to his patients through his Facebook account on Sunday, where he said he could not attend his private chamber regularly due to the Covid-19 situation. Rezaul mentioned his cellphone number and asked patients to send

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Newborn rescued from dumpster

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

These days, port city's Ice Factory Road remains mostly quiet due to the countrywide shutdown announced by the government to slow the spread of coronavirus.

But yesterday morning was different. A scream broke through the silence and forced people to take notice. And when they did, they were shocked -- a newborn lying in a roadside dumpster was screaming as loud as he could.

Locals informed police right away and law enforcers from Sadarghat Police Station rescued the baby boy around 11am, said OC Fazlur Rahman.

"The infant's condition is okay now. At first, we took him to CCC Memon Maternity Hospital," he said, adding, "After primary treatment, doctors referred the neonate to Chattogram Medical College Hospital."

The baby is now being treated at the childcare unit of the hospital.

The OC said they were trying to identify who left the baby in the dumpster.

Sylhet, Khulna get PCR machines



PHOTO: COLLECTED

The equipment that arrived at KMCH yesterday will enable tests to be conducted from next week.

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital and Khulna Medical College Hospital yesterday received polymerase chain reaction machines that will be used to test for Covid-19.

Dr Himangshu Lal Roy, deputy director of Osmani hospital, said once the machine is installed at the microbiology and virology laboratory and pathologists are trained, the lab will be functional for testing coronavirus.

"It will take another five to seven days to start testing in the lab," he said, adding that all suspected patients in Sylhet will be then tested there, instead of sending samples to IEDCR in Dhaka.

Since the coronavirus outbreak in Bangladesh, IEDCR was the only authorised organisation to test suspected patients. On March 26, three other labs -- two in Dhaka and one in Chattogram -- started testing.

Medical colleges at Rajshahi and Mymensingh have already received PCR machines.

Meanwhile, Dr ATM Monzur Morshed, director of KMCH, said after installing the PCR machine following necessary procedures, they will be able to conduct tests within a week.

Dr Sailendranath Biswas, focal person of Corona Isolation Unit at KMCH, said using the machine, they will be able to test Covid-19 with samples of throat swabs and blood and provide results within a day.

BDR CARNAGE CASE

SC appeal delayed by closure of court

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The ongoing coronavirus outbreak has caused a delay in filing appeals with the Supreme Court challenging its High Court verdict in the sensational BDR carnage case.

No appeal was filed with the SC's Appellate Division against the HC verdict in this case, as authorities concerned are yet to provide the certified copy of the judgment to the defence and state sides, as court activities remain suspended as precautionary measure against the outbreak.

The certified copy of any HC verdict is necessary for both the defence and prosecution to move appeals before the Appellate Division, challenging an HC judgment.

The HC on January 8 released the 29,059-page full text of its verdict, that confirmed death penalty for 139 accused and upheld life imprisonment of 185 others for their involvement in the atrocities and massacre at the BDR Palkhona headquarters in 2009.

The verdict is one of the largest in the world in terms of accused involved (846) and numbers of pages.

"We have applied to the copy section of the High Court for the certified copy of its verdict in BDR mutiny case, after it [HC] released the full text in January this year. The section was scheduled to give us

an estimate of the cost for a certified copy on March 29. But, the section could not give the estimate till date as court functions have been closed due to coronavirus," Advocate Aminul Islam, a defence lawyer for more than 400 accused of the case, told The Daily Star March 29.

He said, "We hope we will get the estimate after April 5, when the court activities are scheduled to be resume. After we receive the certified copy, we will prepare the appeals for our clients, who are now serving in jail, and then we will file appeals with the apex court seeking acquittal for our clients (convicted accused). The appeals will be filed in 30 days after we will receive the certified copy," he said.

"Once the appeals are filed, the Supreme Court may set a date for starting their hearing. The chief justice may constitute a bench for hearing and disposing of the appeals in this particular case," Advocate Aminul said, adding that it cannot be said at this moment how much time will be needed for final disposal of this case.

Contacted, Supreme Court spokesperson Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star on Sunday that the HC's copy section has readied the certified copy of the HC verdict in BDR carnage case, and it will be supplied to the state and defence sides after April 5.

"A new printer machine worth Tk

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



There may be no one left on the streets to notice them, but bougainvillea flowers have graced springtime in this empty city with its exquisite colour. This photo was taken yesterday in front of Ramna Park.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED