

# Don't admit or evaluate students without exams

UGC asks private universities

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The University Grants Commission (UGC) yesterday asked private universities to stop assigning their current students grades through online exams and evaluation, and to stop enrolling new students sans admission tests, due to the shutdown of educational institutions in light of the novel coronavirus outbreak in the country.

"Several universities have decided to assign grades to students without holding semester final exams and evaluation, and enroll new students without admission tests. This is unethical," UGC said in a statement yesterday. "We urge them to stop these activities immediately," it added.

Top UGC officials said they made the statement following a report on The Daily Star published on Sunday.

Two reputed private universities -- Brac University and Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) -- had decided on March

24 that they would not be holding final exams for the spring semester, and asked faculty members to complete students' grading based on coursework completed so far.

However, Brac University Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof Mohammad Tamim on Sunday afternoon confirmed to The Daily Star that they had moved away from their earlier decision, and have formed a committee to find a way out of the situation.

Meanwhile, three private universities -- IUB, United International University (UIU), and the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) -- have decided to enroll students for the summer semester without an admissions test, based only on their SSC and HSC results, officials of the universities had told The Daily Star last week.

UGC, in their yesterday's statement, said

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# Over 300 Bangladeshis seek voluntary return

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 300 undocumented Bangladeshi migrant workers have reportedly applied for their voluntary repatriation from the Maldives amid fear of coronavirus outbreak in the island nation.

Maldivian news portal Sun Online yesterday published a report in this regard, citing the country's economic ministry.

The development came a day after Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen reportedly said four to five countries including the Maldives have reached out to Bangladesh to take back undocumented nationals from their respective countries.

According to the Sun Online report, the Maldivian government will issue travel documents for the undocumented workers with the assistance of Bangladesh embassy and also bear the workers' travel costs.

Meanwhile, Maldivian National Emergency Operations Center on Sunday announced that the Maldivian government had initiated an operation to temporarily relocate migrant workers who are living in congested shared quarters in order to protect the migrant population from a potential Covid-19 outbreak, says the report.

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# Courts' closure extended till April 14

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain has extended the closure of all courts across the country, including the appellate and High Court divisions, till April 14 due to the outbreak of coronavirus.

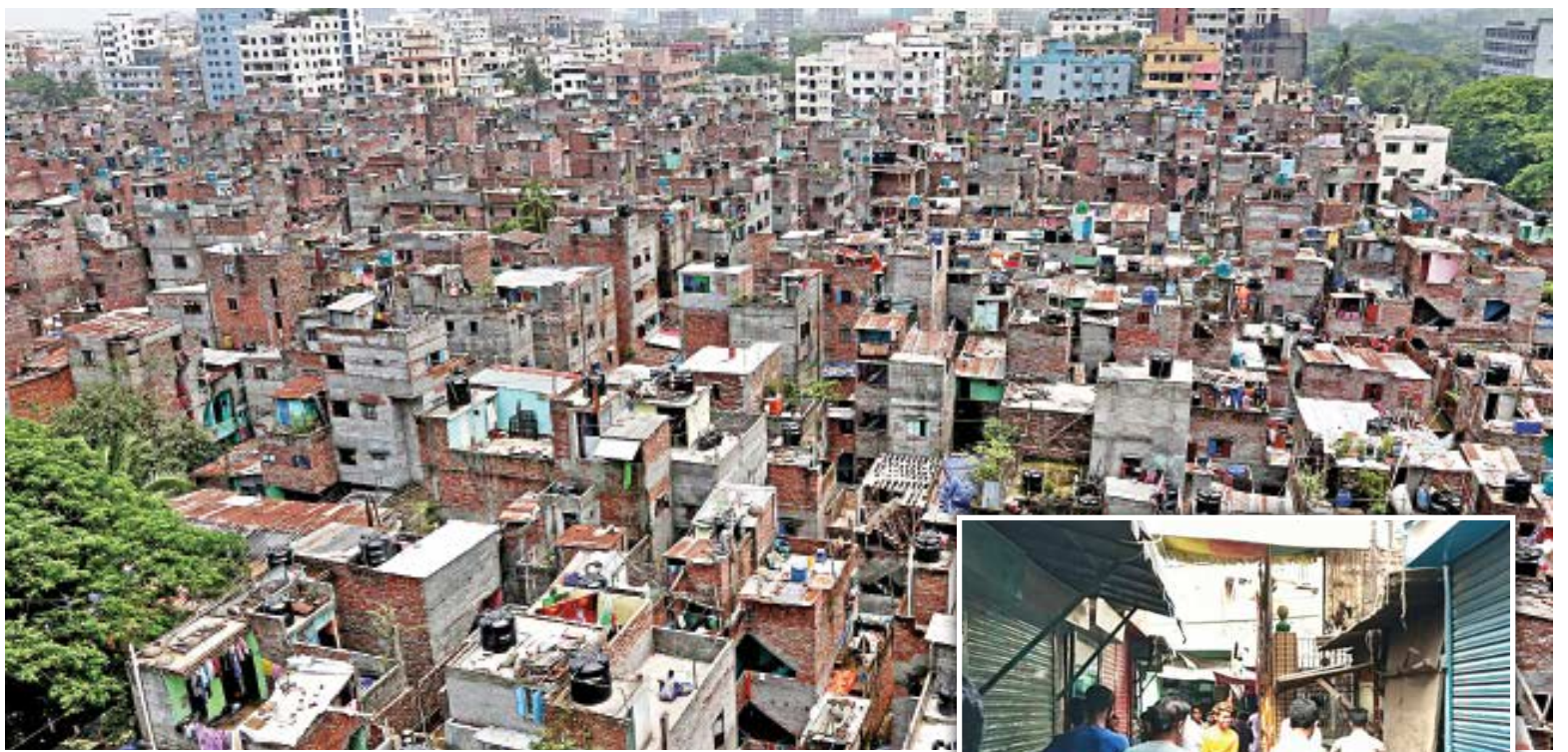
Supreme Court Registrar General Md Ali Akbar issued a circular yesterday in this regard.

The circular said "general holidays" have been declared till April 13 and a scheduled holiday will be observed on April 14 on the occasion of Pabela Baishakh.

The circular was issued in line with the government notification issued on April 5, extending the closure of all offices till April 14.

# What if social distancing is not an option?

Lack of space, income push Geneva Camp residents to uncertainty



This aerial view of Geneva Camp shows how congested the place is. Maintaining social distancing here during the time of Covid-19 is quite difficult, simply due to its architecture. Beyond this, there's a lack of caution from the inhabitants that also fuel worries about the coming weeks, inset.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN, MUNTAKIM SAAD

MUNTAKIM SAAD and RASHIDUL HASAN

It's a melting pot of activities. Children are playing on the alleys, groups of youths are playing dice, adults gossiping on the street, and opened shops are crowded by both buyers and onlookers.

The whole of Mohammadpur's



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Geneva Camp, a densely-populated settlement of more than 40,000 Urdu-speaking people, holds the same scenario. The narrow alleys, inside the camp, where darkness prevails even in daytime, are always bustling with crowds.

This is somewhat unusual at a time when the government has declared a countrywide shutdown, forcing everyone to stay home in a bid to contain the novel coronavirus outbreak.

However, the intermingling of the camp residents exposes them to the risk of contracting the virus, which can be especially potent for the densely populated camp where healthcare isn't always available.

"This is the usual scenario here. We have no option. When electricity goes off, people can't stay inside (due to the heat). You would have seen more crowd at night," said Parvez, who was sitting at a local shop while gossiping with eight others.

"If anyone of us catches the virus, the whole camp will be affected," said Tipu Sultan, a resident.

This fear has gripped around 7,500 families living in the camp on 12.60 bighas of land.

Also known as Bihari Camp, the conditions in the densely populated camp are dire. Houses are separated by two-foot wide passageways -- shared by residents,

goats and chickens -- and around 100 people share a single latrine.

Each family with eight to 10 members on average live in eight feet by 10 feet single rooms. The rooms have no windows. Residents elevate their beds to make space for possessions underneath, because there's nowhere else to put them.

Under such poor living conditions, terms like physical distancing, social distancing and personal hygiene appear quite far fetched.

"How will we maintain a 'lockdown' here? You see..." questions one Parul, pointing to her tiny room that she shares

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Proper functioning of the agriculture sector is crucial in these times. Even when one stays home, one still has to eat, and it is essential that farmers keep up the good work they do all year round. Though market prices are down, these honest souls are still at it, even if for the sake of their own livelihoods. This photo was taken from Chattogram's Halishahar area on Sunday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

# DU student dies after hospitals 'denied treatment'

DU CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka University student, who had been suffering from cancer, died yesterday after several hospital authorities allegedly denied him treatment in fear that he had coronavirus.

Suman Chakma, a student of Institute of Education and Reaserach, breathed his last at his village home in Khagrachhari at 8:30pm, said his father Supen Chakma.

"Suman was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2018 and took treatment at hospitals of India and Bangladesh. He even started attending class this year after he started to feel well," Supen said.

"Suman came home after the university vacated its dorms in March. Soon afterwards he fell ill, so we took him to Dhaka," he added. They went to several hospitals but every one of them to admit him.

"After that we brought him back home and was giving homeopathic medicine that we collected from Chattogram. Stock of that medicine also finished and we couldn't source more, as vehicular movement was suspended. We lost him due to lack of proper treatment and medicine," said Supen.

Suman had posted about his predicament on Facebook on March 26. "I have not been infected with coronavirus but this situation tells I'd have to die because of the virus," his status read.



# IMPROVING CROSS-BORDER CONNECTIVITY AIIB approves \$404m loan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has approved a \$404 million loan for upgrading the Sylhet-Tamabil highway to four lanes, aiming to improve Bangladesh's intercity travel and cross-border connectivity.

The board of AIIB approved the loan at its April 3 meeting, AK Mohammad Fazlul Karim, additional chief engineer of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD), told The Daily Star yesterday.

Of the total loan, \$369 million will go for the project directly while rest would be used for other expenditure including paying the interest, Fazlul Karim, also the project director, said.

Project funds will go towards the construction, operation and maintenance of roads, in addition to institutional and project management support, according to an AIIB press release.

"As the first stand-alone transport project supported by AIIB in Bangladesh, the project will allow the Bank to gain experience in cross-border connectivity in South Asia," said AIIB Vice President (Investment Operations) DJ Pandian.

"At the same time, the project will allow the country to improve sustainability and potentially attract private sector participation and community involvement in road maintenance."

The upgrade of the 56.16-kilometre national highway between Sylhet and the Tamabil border crossing will improve overall commuter safety and reduce travel times for road users, including freight vehicles and buses, RHD officials said.

The Sylhet-Tamabil road (about 56.16 kilometres) is part of the Dhaka-Narsingdi-Sylhet-Tamabil National Highway corridor with a total length of 286 kilometres. The government is working to upgrade Dhaka-Sylhet Highway with the finance of Asian Development Bank.

Tamabil, a hilly area in Sylhet across the border of the Indian state of Meghalaya, about 5km from Jafong, is a popular tourist destination. The corridor is strategically important for sub-regional connectivity with the seven northeastern states of India, as well as Bhutan, Myanmar and China.

Fazlul Karim said review work for the detail design is almost done and they have a plan to start the physical work of the project within October

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# Healthcare made easy

Telemedicine service Pulse bringing doctors' appointments to smartphones

CITY DESK

Telemedicine is an innovative sector of healthcare that allows patients to consult doctors remotely. Now, it is proving useful during the coronavirus pandemic. Pulse Healthcare Services is one such cloud-based telemedicine platform that has come forward.

Pulse launched its services last year to connect doctors and patients through a secure, online video conferencing platform. It also initiated a digital helpline in February.

With frontline healthcare professionals being at high risk battling the crisis, the objective, according to founder Rubaba Dowla, was to create a robust platform that allows patients to consult doctors from home in any part of the country, be it rural or urban.

"Telemedicine could help solve problems without overcrowding hospitals and putting people at further risk," said Rubaba, "All you need is a laptop or smartphone with internet access and you can consult with over 150 general physicians or even specialists anytime, from anywhere."

During the pandemic, citizens have been grappling for access to healthcare, while most service providers find it hard to manage the excess demand. "Elderly citizens and patients with co-morbidity are at high risk now. Pulse platform can be used as virtual chamber for our physicians," mentioned a press statement from the organisation.

Sonia Bashir Kabir, co-founder of Pulse, said, "Amid the spread of Covid-19, the adoption of telemedicine has shifted into hyper-drive globally over the past month, with virtual healthcare interactions. We believe Pulse can make a difference especially in rural areas where access to healthcare is limited."

"I consulted an expert physician specialising in internal medicine through Pulse. I received the prescription quite easily as well," said Rowsan Ara (49) of Gazipur.

She said her husband has also been using the platform and received satisfactory service. "I think this platform will be

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# Office timing rescheduled for Ramadan

UNB, Dhaka

The government has rescheduled the office timing for the upcoming Ramadan from 9am to 3:30pm for all government, semi-government, autonomous and semi-autonomous institutions.

The decision was taken at the weekly cabinet meeting held with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair at her official residence Gono Bhaban yesterday.

Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said this at a press briefing at Secretariat after the meeting.

Banks, insurance and other financial institutions, post office, railway, hospitals, state-owned industries and factories and other companies will fix their own office timing for Ramadan, he added.





## মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়

### নারী নির্যাতন প্রতিরোধকল্পে মানসিকসেউ্টরাল প্রোগ্রাম

করোনাভাইরাস পরিস্থিতিতে সহায়তার জন্য

ফোন বা এসএমএস করুন

নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিরোধে ন্যাশনাল হেল্পলাইন সেন্টারে

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- নিজ গৃহে অবস্থান করুন
- সামাজিক দূরত্ব বজায় রাখুন
- করোনা সংক্রমন প্রতিরোধ করুন



নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিরোধে

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