



OLD (DHAKA) HABITS DIE HARD ... While the rest of the city wears a deserted look under the ominous shadow of a coronavirus outbreak, the mood at Old Dhaka seems to be a little different. Known for being social and outgoing, hundreds of ‘Dhakaiyas’ crowd a street in Dayaganj, albeit some wearing masks. *Top right*, hawkers sell protective clothing by the streets of Nababpur, using some creativity to put the product on display. *Bottom right*, At Gulistan, three youths are spotted getting into a CNG-run auto-rickshaw, returning from Shakhari Bazar with a haul of kites, presumably stocking up to fly during days of quarantine. The photos were taken on Monday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

264 UK, 154 Turkey citizens leave Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 264 UK and 154 Turkey citizens left Dhaka on special flights yesterday afternoon. They had opted to return home amid the Covid-19 outbreak, for which their governments arranged their return flights home.

A special chartered flight of the British Airways carrying the UK citizens left Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) at 3:49pm, Group Captain AHM Touhid-ul Ahsan, director, HSIA, told The Daily Star.

Among the UK-bound, were 10 infants and a few Bangladeshis who are permanent residents in the UK.

Earlier in the day, a special flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines had ferried around 157 UK citizens from Sylhet to Dhaka, said the HSIA director.

Meanwhile, 154 Turkey citizens left Dhaka for Ankara on a special flight of Turkish Airlines at 1:12pm, an official of the Aviation Security (AVSEC), HSIA, told The Daily Star.

In the last 26 days since March 26, citizens of various countries including USA, Russia, Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Bhutan, Germany and several other EU countries, left Dhaka through chartered flights amid the outbreak.

Besides, sources at the airport said, the 4th chartered flight for US citizens arranged by the US Department of State and US embassy in Dhaka was also scheduled to leave HSIA last night for Washington, DC.

Worried for families back home

70 lakh workers have next to no access to Bangladeshi TV channels in Middle East, North Africa as satellite transmission remains halted

RASHIDUL HASAN and JAMIL MAHMUD

Although the state-owned Bangladesh Television has started broadcasting in Middle East and North Africa recently on a pilot basis, private TV channels from Bangladesh are still out of reach in the regions, limiting some 70 lakh Bangladeshi migrants from knowing about their homeland’s present situation amid coronavirus outbreak.

Transmission of all Bangladeshi television channels are now being ensured via Bangabandhu-1. Earlier, the channels had telecast programmes in Middle East using “free-to-air” technology through installing devices at residences, said officials.

More than 30 channels’ transmissions remained stopped since December last year because Bangabandhu-1 did not cover the region yet.

Bangladesh Communication Satellite Company Limited (BCSCL) Chairman

Shahjahan Mahmood on April 12 said BTV World’s experimental transmission started at 1am on April 10 to the Middle Eastern and North African countries using Bangladesh’s lone satellite Bangabandhu-1.

BCSCL, assigned to operate Bangabandhu-1, has taken the initiative as almost 70 per cent of the around 1 crore Bangladeshi expatriates live in the Middle Eastern and North African countries, he said.

“Initially, we are working on BTV World and based upon the outcomes, we would start the process for private TV channels,” he added. Shahjahan also said a tender would be floated at that time. “We would sign an agreement with the lowest bidder.”

Meanwhile amid the global coronavirus pandemic, Bangladesh missions in Middle East have found it difficult to convey messages to expatriates -- largely migrant workers -- on the evolving situation.

Finding no other way, recently Bangladesh Ambassador to Saudi Arabia

Golam Moshi sought help of Saudi state television to air his message in Bangla to convey some crucial steps -- including visa extension and treatment for both regular and undocumented migrant workers.

As authorities in different Middle Eastern countries have taken various measures including imposing curfew and countrywide shutdown, television channels have become even more important to reach information to Bangladeshi workers.

Talking to this newspaper, Ambassador Moshi said he contacted the ministers concerned including post and telecommunications minister and repeatedly requested them to take measures to start the channels’ transmission in Middle East.

“However, they only assured me verbally but did not resolve the problem,” he said.

Moshi, also Bangladesh’s permanent representative to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, said some migrants

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Press Council seeks food aid for journos, media workers

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Press Council has urged deputy commissioners (DC) to look out for journalists and media workers during the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

The organisation has asked DCs of all districts to prepare lists of journalists and media workers and arrange incentives for them, a letter signed by the council’s secretary M Shah Alam said. The letter was sent to all DCs of the country on Sunday.

Citing the stimulus packages for providing food assistance announced by the government, the letter said journalists and media workers at the district and upazila levels also need this aid, as they have been working to bring information to people’s doorsteps risking their lives.

It urged that the list be prepared in consultation with leaders of respective press clubs and journalists’ organisations.

10 days of food for Tk 10

Youth for Bangladesh steps forth to support middle, lower-middle class

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Youth for Bangladesh (YFB), a voluntary organisation, recently started an initiative to sell “10 days of food for Tk 10”, which particularly targets middle and lower-middle class residents in Dhaka city and other districts.

The food packets they provide include rice, potato, lentil, oil, chips and chocolate for children, etc. Two teams, one for managing food and another for distribution, are working under the initiative. Food items are bought with funds collected from members of the organisation.

To inspire people to have patience in these difficult times, they also stick various inspirational messages on the packets.

A total of 250 families have so far received the food packets, and the organisation has listed another thousand families for distribution.

Ariful Rahman, founder of YFB, said, “We’re aiming to help the middle and lower-middle class families who feel uncomfortable to receive relief, but nonetheless are struggling.”

“We understand their predicament. People who want to receive this service are contacting us through our Facebook page,” he said.

Shehanur Rahman Asif, president of YFB’s central committee, said, “Even though these people are having a hard time, they are hesitant to ask for help due to social norms. It’s high time to step forth and extend support.”

Like this initiative, YFB is running different programmes to tackle the misfortunes brought on by the coronavirus pandemic and are helping others in whatever way they can.

CMSD show caused over low-quality masks

UNB, Dhaka

A show-cause notice was issued to Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD) on allegation that low-quality products including N95 masks are being supplied to some government hospitals, said a press release of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

After reviewing the allegation and the supplier’s response, the ministry formed a three-member investigation committee on Sunday, the release said.

The committee, headed by Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) Additional Secretary Md Saidur Rahman, was asked to submit its report within three working days.

Earlier, physicians of some government hospitals, including Mugda General Hospital, complained of receiving low-quality masks.

Bangladesh Doctors’ Foundation (BDF), a forum of physicians, on Monday, said 170 doctors -- both at public and private hospitals -- have been infected with coronavirus while treating patients.



A youth scours across the street with his hands full, as a sudden bout of rain put people in a helter-skelter while buying essentials from a TCB truck at port city’s Kazir Dewri Bazar. The photo was taken yesterday around noon.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Don’t discriminate while distributing relief: Quader

UNB, Dhaka

Road, Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday urged all concerned to continue relief distribution work properly, and said that no discrimination during the process will be tolerated.

Quader, also general secretary of Awami League, warned those involved in such malpractices at a press briefing at his house.

“Continue relief distribution as directed by the prime minister, but no discrimination will be tolerated in the name of relief distribution,” he said.

About BNP’s allegation that their relief distribution programme was foiled, the minister said it is completely baseless. “The nation is united today under the brave and tested leadership of Sheikh Hasina to face the present crisis,” he added.

He reiterated that “rice thieves” will not be spared.

164 more return from India

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another 164 Bangladeshis, who were stranded in Chennai, India for over a month following the outbreak of coronavirus, returned home yesterday by a special flight of US-Bangla Airlines.

The chartered flight landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at around 3:05pm, said an official of the airlines.

Most of the Bangladeshis who returned yesterday had gone to India for treatment, he added.

After completion of health screening, it would be decided who will be sent to self-quarantine or to institutional quarantine, an official at the health desk of Dhaka airport told this correspondent.

Among the first 164 who returned from Chennai earlier on Monday, 142 were advised to stay in self-quarantine at home while 22 were sent to Ashkona Hajj Camp for institutional quarantine, said Md Jahirul, a doctor at the health desk.

US-Bangla is scheduled to operate four more flights from Kolkata and Chennai.

At least 2,500 Bangladeshis including students, tourists and medical treatment

seekers remained stranded in different cities of India specially in Chennai, Bangalore, Delhi and Hyderabad due to Covid-19 outbreak, the foreign ministry said in a statement on April 3.

Meanwhile, a flight of Turkish Airlines yesterday brought back 20 Bangladeshi nationals to Dhaka, who were stranded in Turkey due to outbreak of coronavirus, said officials at Dhaka airport.

BIMAN FLIGHT FROM DELHI ON FRIDAY

Meanwhile, Biman Bangladesh Airlines will also operate a special flight from New Delhi on Friday.

“As per the government’s decision, Biman will operate a special chartered flight from Delhi to bring back Bangladeshi nationals in India,” Biman Managing Director and CEO Md Mokabbir Hossain told media.

He said the flight would bring back 162 Bangladeshis, and the passengers will bear the cost.

Mokabbir said Bangladeshi nationals can purchase tickets for the flight from Biman’s mobile app or website from today until 2pm on April 23.

UNDP, UECL to give food support to 5,000 women

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Enterprises & Co Ltd (UECL) have taken a joint initiative to provide food support to 5,000 poor women in Jamalpur, Kurigram and Gaibandha.

In addition to raising awareness about spread of Covid-19, UNDP, under its “Strengthening Women’s Ability for Productive New Opportunities” (SWAPNO) project, has initiated food distribution in 126 unions for marginalised women.

Some 540 women received food assistance on April 20 in 15 unions of Bakshiganj and Dewanganj of Jamalpur.

“The increased risks of losing jobs and income, inability to easily access essential services are some of the hardships that will disproportionately affect the poor. This partnership will deliver food to the poor households,” said Sudipto Mukerjee, resident representative of UNDP Bangladesh, in a statement yesterday.

ADDRESSING COVID-19 OIC to hold video conference today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) will hold an extraordinary meeting of its executive committee at the level of foreign ministers via video conferencing today as part of its efforts to address issues related to the novel coronavirus.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen will participate in the meeting, the foreign ministry said in a statement yesterday.

The meeting comes as part of a series of measures taken and campaigns launched by the OIC since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The meeting is expected to review the effects of the pandemic on member states’ public health, security and financial stability.

The current OIC executive committee comprises of six member states -- Bangladesh, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, The Gambia, United Arab Emirates, and Niger.

The meeting will be chaired by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, chair of the 14th Islamic summit conference, with the presence of the foreign ministers of these six countries and OIC secretary general.