



Attendants wait outside as patients who were previously in Dhaka Medical College Hospital's burn unit get transferred to the newly constructed Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery. The previous burn unit is being transformed into a facility for Covid-19 patients. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO:
ANISUR RAHMAN

Many Bangladeshis in Malaysia facing food crisis

Rights activists urge Dhaka to actively engage with KL to open a distribution channel

PORIMOL PALMA

Dhaka should actively engage Kuala Lumpur to make sure that the Bangladeshi migrants undergoing hardships in Malaysia amid coronavirus pandemic get food through a government distribution channel, said migrant rights activists in Malaysia.

They said some non-profits with support from individual donors have been reaching out to the migrants, who have remained unpaid and run out their savings, to provide food for the last three weeks, but those efforts are inadequate compared to the needs on the ground.

"We are getting emergency calls from various parts of Malaysia that they don't have any savings and need food. The situation is going from bad to worse," said Mohammad Harun Al Rashid, chief coordinator of a non-profit, Bhalobashi Bangladesh, and a rights activist based in Malaysia.

Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia too has provided some assistance to be distributed to the migrants through Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC), but that's also very minimal, he said.

There are some eight lakh Bangladeshis, including an estimated two lakh undocumented, in Malaysia that has been enforcing movement control order since March 18 due to Covid-19.

Until April 18, at least 5,305 people were infected and 86 of them died. For now, the partial lockdown is until April 28, but it may be further extended with some relaxations, Malaysian media reported quoting officials concerned.

All factories and businesses, except for the emergency ones, have remained closed -- a situation that is hurting migrants the most.

Malaysian nationals have been provided various incentives, including cash. Malaysian authorities asked the employers to pay wages to the workers, including migrants, though they remain in the dormitories and don't work to avoid risks of infection.

However, there are numerous cases that migrants are not being paid wages, said Harun Al Rashid. Those who are undocumented and work on contractual basis are even in more trouble, because they are mostly not being paid now as they remain in dormitories now, he said.

Rashid said some Malaysian organisations, including MTUC, Our Journey, Tenaganita, have been trying to mobilise funds from individual donors, but that has really been inadequate. Even, due to shutdown, it is not possible to get many volunteers who can distribute food to the remote areas all across Malaysia.

Bhalobashi Bangladesh, through an online campaign, early April asked those in food crisis to register. It then got applications of over 50,000 migrants. "Not all of those needing food could register," he told The Daily Star by phone from Johor Bahru recently.

Abu Hayat, an independent researcher based in Kuala Lumpur, said migrants working in some of the remote areas outside Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, especially in Penang and Johor Bahru, are not getting

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Withdraw case against 2 editors

Demands rights watchdog

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Committee for the Protection of Fundamental Rights yesterday demanded immediate withdrawal of a case filed recently against bdnews24.com Editor-in-Chief Toufique Imrose Khalidi, Jagonews24.com Acting Editor Mohiuddin Sarker and six others under the Digital Security Act.

In a statement, the rights body also demanded that the government refrain from harassing or arresting them in the controversial law.

Mominul Islam Bhasani, president of Baliadangi upazila unit of Swachchasebak League, filed the case on April 17 against the two senior journalists for "deliberately publishing false and defamatory news".

Two Facebook users named Shawan Amin and Rahim Shuvo were also accused in the case filed with Baliadangi Police Station.

In the case statement, Mominul said the authorities recovered 68 sacks of rice, meant to be sold among the low-income people at Tk 10 per kg, in the upazila's Palashbari on April 9.

The next day, Upazila Food Controller Nikhil Chandra Barman filed a case with the same police station accusing six people, including local rice dealer Amirul Islam, his brother Jamirul Islam and wife Kulsum Akhter.

"I have no connection with the accused and they are not my relatives. But the two news portals ran two stories linking me to the misappropriation and claiming that the accused were my relatives... I asked their local correspondents to run a rejoinder, which they did not," Mominul said.

He further said one of his brothers -- Aminul Islam, not Amirul, -- is the chairman of Boro Palashbari Union Parishad.

He said the accused tarnished his image and that of his party and defamed him by spreading false and fabricated information.

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CJ calls meeting with SC judges to discuss operation of judiciary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain will hold a meeting with Supreme Court judges today to decide about the judiciary, as its functions have remained halted since March 26 due to ongoing coronavirus outbreak.

"The chief justice is observing the overall situation of the judiciary and discussing this issue with Supreme Court judges. Some lawyers have sent few applications to the chief justice for running court functions to a short scale during the ongoing closure. All the issues may be discussed at the meeting tomorrow (today)," Supreme Court Spokesman Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the court is a crowded place where judges, lawyers, litigants, journalists and court staff gather during its proceedings.

"If court functions are allowed in this situation, public health will be put at risk. The chief justice is thinking of all relevant aspects," Saifur said.

The justice in the meeting with the Supreme Court judges may decide on the extension of court holiday as the government has extended the closure of the offices till May 5, he added.

The SC spokesman added that some magistrates are working at subordinate courts across the country in line with instruction from the chief justice in order to deal with urgent matters including bail petitions.

Contacted, Attorney General Mahubey Alam told The Daily Star saving lives of people should be the first priority.

Then the court functions may be resumed and later on the loss incurred by lawyers and litigants and its recovery will be handled, he said.

The attorney general also said the lockdown must be strictly maintained in the country like that of Germany in order to conquer the coronavirus.

Supreme Court Bar Association President AM Amin Uddin told this newspaper that the lawyers cannot run their profession and people cannot go to courts to seek justice due to the ongoing closure, a negative impact has been made on the judiciary.

There is nothing much to do in this situation for the recovery of the loss as coronavirus outbreak is a global problem, Advocate Amin Uddin said.

The SCBA president said he requested the chief justice over phone to run the Supreme Court functions at a shorter scope during the ongoing shutdown in order to give some relief to lawyers and justice seekers.

"I hope the chief justice will consider my request," he said.

Take measures to sell produce of grassroots farmers

Ministry asks local admin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock yesterday directed its district and upazila-level officials to take measures for selling produce of grassroots farmers and entrepreneurs.

The items that are to be sold are eggs, milk, fish and poultry.

The ministry took the decision to meet buyer demands and mitigate the loss entrepreneurs and farmers are incurring because of the ongoing lockdown.

Those involved in this sector have been facing huge losses due to disruption of supply chain amid the coronavirus crisis, said a ministry official.

He said milk and eggs are being collected from grassroots farmers under supervision of district livestock departments, with assistance from district administration in Chattogram, Cumilla and Faridpur. They are selling the items through mobile sales centres at prominent points in the districts at fixed prices after relevant announcements, he added.

He further said authorities have formed mobile milk-testing teams, consisting of veterinary surgeons, sanitary inspectors and compounders to ensure quality.

The initiative is benefiting all stakeholders: farmers, entrepreneurs and buyers, he continued.

After witnessing success of such initiatives in three districts, the ministry decided to expand them to all districts and their upazilas.

'We'll come out of it together'

Maldives foreign minister thanks Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Maldives expressed deep gratitude to Bangladesh for supplying much-needed food and medical supplies to address the adverse impacts of the global coronavirus pandemic.

"Thank you PM Sheikh Hasina, FM @AKAbdulMomen, #Bangladesh Govt. & Navy for the generous & timely contribution towards our fight against COVID-19," said Maldives Foreign Minister Abdullah Shahid in a tweet, after some 100 tonnes of food, medicine and medical supplies were handed over to the Maldives authorities yesterday.

"The Navy Ship in our harbour with food & medical supplies is testimony to the strong bond of brotherhood between our two countries."

"In our efforts to provide maximum protection against #covid19 and to provide appropriate healthcare, our hope is that it reach Maldivians, Bangladeshis or any other foreign national equally, with no discrimination. We are in this together and we will come out of it together!" Abdullah Shahid tweeted.

A Bangladesh Navy ship started on April 15 for the Maldives, carrying more than 100 tonnes of food, medicine and medical equipment as assistance.

It arrived in Male on Tuesday and the assistance was handed over yesterday.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to the Maldives, Rear Admiral Mohammad Nazmul Hassan, handed over the supplies as a gift from Bangladesh to the Maldives authorities.

Maldives Foreign Minister Abdullah Shahid, Defense Minister Mariya Ahmed Didi and Foreign Secretary Abdul Ghafoor were present at the handover ceremony in Male, among others.

Another 339 US citizens leave Dhaka

4th chartered flight carries mostly expat Bangladeshis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 339 US citizens left Dhaka early yesterday as the United States government arranged the fourth chartered flight for those who opted to return amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Carrying the US citizens -- mostly expatriate Bangladeshis -- the special flight of US-based chartered airlines Omni Air left Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 12:52am, an official of aviation security at the Dhaka airport told The Daily Star.

The US citizens left Bangladesh as part of the US State Department's worldwide drive to take back home citizens who were abroad during the outbreak.

Earlier, 919 US citizens left Bangladesh in three special flights since March 30.

Bangladesh suspended air communication with all countries except China till April 30, following the outbreak of Covid-19.

Ctg to get two more labs to test Covid-19

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Two new laboratories are going to open in Chattogram by next week for testing Covid-19 samples, aiming to increase the testing capacity to 350 from the present capacity of around 150 a day.

The laboratories are at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU).

Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury is scheduled to inaugurate testing activities in CVASU today, said sources.

Currently, Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID) is the only institution in Chattogram to test Covid-19.

Many collected samples are left untested for four to five weeks at the BITID laboratory as doctors and technicians there are struggling to cope with the pressure of increasing demand.

Just to give an idea, 140 samples were tested in BITID on Tuesday while around 700 were left untested. The institution has to collect samples from at least eight districts of Chattogram division, according to sources involved with the process.

Under these circumstances, adding two more laboratories would bring a much-needed relief for the overburdened staff members at the BITID laboratory and it would also help patients through giving them the test reports in a short time, said Prof Dr Shakil Ahmed, in-charge of BITID laboratory.

The laboratories are set up at the microbiology department of CMCH and the molecular biology department of CVASU.

A PCR machine from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) came to CMCH on Monday while a technical team has started installing the machine in a newly-built laboratory maintaining protocol, said CMCH Director Brig Gen Humayun Kabir yesterday.

"We expect to start testing by next Saturday," he said, adding, "Initially, we will test 100 samples a day."

Meanwhile, CVASU Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Gautam

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As people struggle to make a living amid the shutdown, this elderly rickshaw-puller has decided he will not bow down to the virus. He puts on his bright orange protective suit, goggles and mask, and goes out every day amid the coronavirus outbreak, looking for passengers in the deserted city. The photo was taken near the High Court recently.

PHOTO:
FIROZ AHMED