

BANGLADESHI MIGRANT WORKERS

Thousands to move into makeshift govt facilities in Bahrain

JAMIL MAHMUD

Government authorities in Bahrain have recently started moving thousands of Bangladeshi migrant workers from their squalid living facilities to makeshift establishments, to contain the novel coronavirus outbreak.

The initiative was taken following many foreign workers being found coronavirus positive, said an official at Bangladesh embassy in Manama, adding that the opportunity is available for other foreign workers as well. As of yesterday, at least 97 Bangladeshis have been infected with coronavirus in Bahrain. No Bangladeshi has died of the disease yet there, said mission sources.

Being informed about the initiative, embassy officials helped some 200 to 300 Bangladeshi migrant workers shift to the new facilities in the last couple of days. It is expected many others will follow them, the official said.

In Bahrain, up to 10 Bangladeshi migrant workers share a small room which makes them vulnerable to the virus, he added.

In several video clips posted on social media on Tuesday, Bangladesh embassy officials were seen visiting migrant workers' residences and encouraging them to avail the opportunity.

Around 150,000 Bangladesh nationals are currently living in Bahrain, according to Bangladesh mission there.

Construction sector comprises the biggest share of Bangladesh workforce, about 70 percent.

Besides, Bangladeshis are also employed in cleaning companies, driving, farms and plantation. Several thousand, both male and female, are also working as domestic aides.

As of April 22, Bahrain reported 1,973 coronavirus cases, seven deaths

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With social distancing still remaining a far cry in Dhaka, locals have placed a mannequin by the roadside with an apt message -- maintain safe distance -- written on its body to caution people. It is also wearing a surgical cap and a mask to generate further awareness. This photo was taken in Mohammadpur bus stand area yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

CJ extends closure of courts till May 5

Urgent court functions to continue in limited scope

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain has extended the ongoing closure for all courts across the country till May 5 due to the coronavirus outbreak in line with the government's decision to extend the shutdown of offices.

The chief justice, however, decided to run court functions in a small scope in order to hear and dispose of very urgent cases during the holiday. The Supreme Court administration yesterday issued two separate circulars to this effect.

The chief justice took the decision following recommendations from the Supreme Court Special Committee for Judicial Reforms, SC sources said.

Supreme Court Registrar General Md Ali Akbar signed the circulars saying that social distance must be strictly maintained during court proceedings and the judges concerned will issue necessary directives and instruments in this regard.

In a circular, it has been said that the chief justice constituted a bench each of the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court for hearing and disposing of urgent cases during the holiday.

Justice Md Nuruzzaman will preside over the bench of the Appellate Division while Justice Obaidul Hassan will conduct

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FOOD SAFETY

Long-term package needed: ActionAid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Terming Covid-19 is a challenge to life and livelihood, ActionAid Bangladesh and some grassroots development organisations suggested the government to go for long term package to ensure food safety and employment.

They also suggested to take suitable initiatives for those living in remote areas like char, haor and hill-tracts as their needs may vary from the mainland.

Through a video conference yesterday, ActionAid Bangladesh and 14 associate grassroots development organisations placed nine recommendations to the government to ensure proper distribution of relief, healthcare and sanitation facilities to marginalised people.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, said it is not only that people are being infected and dying from Covid-19, but also affecting the country's economy, society and health.

"It's a challenge of life and livelihood," she said, adding that its widespread impact is spreading to remote areas such as chars, haors and hills.

In a press release, the organisations said the marketplace has shrunk due to transport lockdowns and regional lockdowns. Farmers are unable to sell their crops. Inadequate supply of raw materials has led to fears of further decline in production. If this goes on, famine may grasp the country in the coming days.

Therefore, issues like ensuring food and daily essentials

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7TH ANNIVERSARY OF RANA PLAZA TRAGEDY

Covid-19 adds to woes of survivors

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

For Yanur, life was slowly starting to get back to some normalcy. She had a child last year and her husband got a job at a construction site.

It wasn't much, but after seven long years, the 20-year-old was finally not haunted by her past anymore. At times, she even felt somewhat happy.

The survivor of the Rana Plaza tragedy, who worked on the sixth floor of the building, severely injured both her legs in the incident. But after taking treatment for a long time and sheer willpower, Yanur, on a wheelchair, moved on with her life.

But then came coronavirus and once again turned her life upside down.

Due to the ongoing shutdown to prevent the spread of the virus, her husband lost his job. The family is now struggling to survive with no money to buy food and other essentials such as medicine.

"I started working at the factory when I was 13 to support my family," she told this correspondent yesterday. She currently lives with her husband and child at a small rented room in

Savar's Arapara area.

"I got married two years back. My husband worked at an RMG factory in Gazipur. We moved to Savar last year. Unable to find work at garment factories, he started working at the construction sites to support us," she added. "It wasn't much, but we were able to survive."

But due to the shutdown, he is out of work. "We are now in a severe crisis. We have run out of our savings, have no money to buy food or even milk for our son... we don't know what to do. Just when we're hoping for a change, this happens," she said.

She said she did not get any relief after the outbreak. On top of that, the landlord is also putting pressure on them for rent, she added.

Not just Yanur, many survivors of the Rana Plaza tragedy are now facing a similar crisis.

Today is the seventh anniversary of the tragedy. At least 1,100 people were killed and over 2,500 injured on April 24, 2013 in the building collapse, considered one of the major industrial disasters in the country.

For the survivors and victim family members, every year, the memory of

the day reopens old wounds. But this year, the coronavirus pandemic has added to their miseries as most of them are struggling to survive due to the shutdown.

Another survivor Nilufar Begum (35), who worked on the fifth floor of the building, severely injured her right leg in the incident.

She received long term treatment at several hospitals, but said her health has not improved. "Not only was my right leg broken, I also sustained injuries in my head and back. The pain still hasn't receded," she said, adding that she was stuck for nine hours before being rescued.

Nilufar received Tk 3 lakh from several organisations after the tragedy, which was spent on initial treatment. "I was barely surviving before... but the recent shutdown has left me with nothing," Nilufar cannot work outside anymore, and requires assistance for all types of movement.

After her husband left, she became dependent on her 13-year-old son, who worked at a store in Savar Bazar Bus Stand area.

"My son used to make Tk 200 a

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M'singh Medical College gets PCR machine from BAU

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Authorities of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) yesterday handed over a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) machine to the Microbiology Department of Mymensingh Medical College (MMC), to test samples of Covid-19 suspects in Mymensingh region.

BAU professors led by Prof Dr Md Abdul Kafi handed over the machine to MMC Principal Prof Dr Chitta Ranjan Debnath, said MMC sources.

Dr Debnath said BAU has given the machine for as long as it is needed, and assigned two professors of its microbiology and hygiene department to assist with the tests.

He expected that the machine will be installed by Friday, and they would go for tests soon.

Dr Md Bahatur Rahman, a senior professor of BAU's Microbiology and Hygiene department, said this German qPCR machine is an advanced model, and can deliver test results within two hours.

Earlier, a PCR machine was installed at the laboratory of MMC's microbiology department to test coronavirus suspects on March 28. The machine could test 94 samples at a time, and now it would be double through two machines, helping hundreds of Covid-19 suspects in Mymensingh region, said the principal.

The lab has given hope for testing coronavirus suspects of the region, said Dr Hossain Ahmed Golandaj Tara, Mymensingh divisional convener of Coronavirus Monitoring Cell.



Carriages lie idle while a horse eats from a bucket at a field in Lalbagh. With the shutdown to prevent spread of coronavirus in place, some 30 operators and around 60 horses are facing hard times. For the operators, not only there is no passenger, food is also scarce these days. Still they are trying to make sure that the horses are being fed. This act of kindness is also out of necessity as these animals are a source of their livelihood. Oftentimes, the drivers go hungry to feed the horses, which takes Tk 300 per horse a day. This photo was taken on Wednesday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

150 intern doctors at SBMC quarantined

All hostels were locked down on Tuesday after four of them contract Covid-19

OUR CORRESPONDENT, BARISHAL

Around 150 intern doctors are living under quarantine since Tuesday, as all hostels of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College (SBMC) were locked down after four of the interns tested positive for coronavirus.

Sources at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) said after tests came out positive, authorities locked down Habibur Rahman Hostel, Jamilur Rahman Hostel, Dr Nur-ur-Nabi Interns' Hostel and Girls' Hostel.

As a result, about 150 interns out of 209 are currently under institutional quarantine. Mentionable, 111 interns were scheduled to be admitted at the hospital but they reportedly did not arrive.

Some of the interns alleged that they are suffering from food crisis, as the cooking staff have fled.

SBMC Principal Dr Asit Kumar Das said authorities have already started testing all interns, and around 55 of them tested negative.

SBMCH Director Dr Bakir Hossain said there is no food crisis in the hostels, because Barishal City Corporation's mayor and hospital authorities sent necessary food to those who are quarantined.

Healthcare operations of the hospital faced some problems, but about 60 doctors will join the hospital in the next two days and then everything would be solved, he said.

'FAILURE TO PROTECT PEOPLE' Resignation of top DGHS boss sought

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Supreme Court lawyer yesterday sent a legal notice to the director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), Prof Dr Abul Kalam Azad, asking him to step down from his post as "he has failed to take necessary measures to protect people from the outbreak of coronavirus".

Advocate Md JR Khan Rabin served the legal notice through email, saying that Abdul Kalam Azad and other officials concerned of DGHS have not provided sufficient and proper personal protective equipment (PPE) to doctors, nurses, police personnel, officials and journalists on time to protect them from Covid-19.

Therefore, 3,380 people including doctors and nurses, police personnel and journalists tested positive for coronavirus and 120 died till April 22, he said in the notice.

Advocate Rabin said the DG of DGHS failed to protect people from coronavirus and therefore, has no right to hold office.

He said he will move a writ petition before the High Court for if Dr Azad does not step down within a reasonable period.

Usha Ganguly no more

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Noted theatre personality Usha Ganguly, who gave



a new direction to Bangla theatre in Kolkata, died at her residence in South Kolkata yesterday at the age of 75.

Ganguly was found motionless at her flat in Lake Gardens area of the city by her maid around 7am, her family said.

A doctor was called in who declared that she died of a massive cardiac arrest, they said.

Winner of Indian government's prestigious Sangeet Natak Academy Award, Ganguly is survived by a son but lived alone in her flat. Her husband

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Half of coastal poor have no idea what Covid-19 is: study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly half of the lower-income group living in coastal areas do not have any idea about the Covid-19 virus and primary protective measures against it, a non-government organisation claimed yesterday, based on their survey.

COAST Trust conducted this survey among lower wage earners in Cox's Bazar and Bhola districts through random selection, to assess primary knowledge of the coastal poor and to understand how they are following health directives, said a press release sent yesterday.

It was seen that despite the massive awareness campaign across the country, 49 percent of respondents don't know basic rules of hand-washing and 43 percent said they are not able to follow those rules for different reasons, including lack of availability of soap.

Around 24 percent have no idea about social distancing, and 56 percent respondents either don't know about home quarantine or have misconceptions about it.

Some 13 percent said they don't know why one should wear a mask.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Executive Director of COAST said they conducted this survey to know how the poor people of coastal area are fighting against this completely unknown disaster.

Saadat Hussein passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former cabinet secretary and former chairperson of Public Service Commission Saadat Hussein passed away on Wednesday. He was 73.



He was admitted at the intensive care unit of United Hospital, his son Shahzad Saadat told media.

He was buried at Nikunja-1 Graveyard after Zuhr prayers yesterday.

Saadat was born in Noakhali on November 24, 1946. He studied economics at Dhaka University, received his PhD from Boston University and joined the Civil Service of Pakistan in 1969.

He is survived by his wife, son, two daughters, and friends and well-wishers.



An elderly woman wields a piece of wood at the Basila road intersection in Mohammadpur yesterday, as dozens of low-income people came out to the street after not receiving food assistance for days. Locals alleged that the ward councillor's men took their names and NID numbers several times, but they never received any aid. Many of these daily wage earners also said they were also being pressured by their landlords to pay rent, which they could not pay because their income sources have been cut off.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN