

CJ suspends limited court functions till Apr 27

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday suspended till April 27 his earlier decision to run court functions in a limited extent.

Supreme Court (SC) Registrar General Md Ali Akbar issued two separate circulars to this effect yesterday, citing unavoidable reasons.

The chief justice however convened a full court meeting with judges of Appellate and High Court Divisions today. The meeting is scheduled for 11:30am through video conference, according to another circular issued by the SC registrar general.

Syed Mahmud Hossain on April 23 decided to operate functions of courts on a limited scale following demands from some lawyers, in order to hear and dispose of very urgent cases. This decision has now been suspended till April 27.

The chief justice that day extended shutdown for courts across the country till May 5 due to ongoing outbreak of coronavirus. This decision will remain effective.



WHEN BEING SAFE IS ALSO IN FASHION ... A family takes a rickshaw ride, dressed up in full protective gear -- gowns, headcaps and eyewear, and even the child is not left out. For the rickshaw-puller, however, a fabric mask is all that is in affordable range. The photo was taken from Motijheel yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

No homecoming for frontline heroes

Doctor couple being barred by landlord, municipal mayor from returning home after Covid-19 recovery

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

A couple -- both doctors working at Agailjhara Upazila in Barishal -- recovered from coronavirus after taking treatment at hospitals for around 10 days.

But they are now facing a new problem.

They cannot return home in Gournadi upazila headquarters, as the house owner and local municipality mayor are opposing it, the couple alleged.

"We were infected with Covid-19 while treating patients. But, now we can't return home. We're feeling very helpless," the husband, a medical officer of Agailjhara Upazila Health Complex, told The Daily Star.

For the couple, returning home becomes more imperative as they have stayed in quarantine for 14 days.

The wife, a medical officer at Paisarhat Sub Health Center in the upazila, tested Covid-19 positive on April 13 and her husband tested positive three days later.

At first, they took treatment at Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital, and later at Kurmitola General Hospital in the capital.

"Last night [Friday], we got fresh test results and came to know that we tested negative. We were told by hospital authorities that we would be released today," the husband said.

When he called his house owner on Friday night to let him know that they were returning home as they have recovered, he was told that he and his wife would be allowed to return if upazila nirbahi officer and Gournadi municipality mayor give permission.

UNO Israt Jahan gave her nod when he contacted her, the doctor said.

"But, when I called Gournadi Mayor Harisur Rahman, he told us not to go home as people may panic and he [mayor] would not take any responsibility for an untoward situation," he said. The mayor asked them to stay in Agailjhara where they work, he said.

He then talked to Agailjhara UNO and Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer and they asked the duo to stay at Agailjhara Upazila Rest House.

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288 Bangladeshis repatriated from prisons of Oman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Oman has sent back some 288 Bangladeshi workers who were imprisoned or in deportation camps, on various grounds, including not having valid documents.

"Carrying the Bangladeshi citizens, a special flight of Oman Air landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Friday night," Group Captain AHM Touhid-ul-Ahsan, director of the airport, told journalists.

Last month, Oman sent back 180 Bangladesh nationals amid the outbreak of Covid-19. According to media reports, the Oman government has taken steps to repatriate foreign prisoners following the outbreak, under a special amnesty of the Sultan of the country.

The returnee workers received Tk 5,000 on arrival at the airport, in accordance with government decision taken early this month.

Besides, the expatriate welfare ministry decided to provide loans -- from Tk 5 lakh to Tk 7 lakh -- upon return of the jobless expatriate workers amid the pandemic to help them pursue economic activities especially in the agriculture sector.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen earlier told the media that a few Middle Eastern countries urged Dhaka to take back "our undocumented workers including inmates".

The foreign minister said his office would try everything possible to prevent any major setback involving "our migrant workers".

Bangladesh, he said, was ready to receive its nationals in principle but Dhaka informed the Middle Eastern countries concerned that "we would take them back in phases for quarantine preparedness" and "facilities are being developed for their accommodation".

On Wednesday, the foreign minister at a video conference with his counterparts of OIC executive committee member states, urged the OIC countries to give utmost importance to the issue of job retention of domestic and resident migrant workers.

Momen also urged humanitarian organisations to advocate for migrant workers job retention in the OIC countries.

MARKET MONITORING

'Do it with help from the army'

SC lawyer says in legal notice to govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Supreme Court lawyer yesterday sent a legal notice to the government requesting it to monitor the prices of daily essentials with assistance from armed forces, in order to keep the market stable during the holy month of Ramadan.

Advocate Moniruzzaman Lincon served the legal notice through email to the secretaries to the commerce ministry and Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB), asking them to take necessary steps to this effect within five days.

He said in the legal notice that the prices of everyday commodities have reportedly hiked, although the government has said there is no shortage of goods.

Most people of the country are facing problems in purchasing daily essentials during the ongoing coronavirus outbreak, he said in the legal notice.

The lawyer said in the legal notice that army personnel are now in the field and they are working very well to tackle the coronavirus crisis in the country.

DRUG SMUGGLING

New Rab DG Mamun warns of stern action

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newly-appointed Director General of Rab Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun yesterday warned of stern action and "not giving any concessions" if anyone is found carrying out narcotics smuggling or militant activities during the period of coronavirus.

"We are trying to get vehicles carrying daily necessities cross through highways very quickly. A group of drug dealers are trying to smuggle narcotics taking the chance, but I would like to warn them that they will not be exempted and will face maximum punishment," the DG said yesterday.

He made the remarks while addressing reporters through video conference from the Rapid Action Battalion headquarters regarding the force's initiatives during the month of Ramadan.

The elite force has continued their crime-prevention activities during the coronavirus situation, and arrested around 1,382 people on charges of different criminal activities between March 8 to April 24, said the DG.

He said that they are also working to suppress militant activities, and some 32 militants were arrested between March 4 to April 24.

The DG said they have operated 358 mobile courts so far, and a total of 2,240 people have been fined Tk 3.4 crore for violating social distancing protocol.

Eighteen companies have been sealed and nine people were imprisoned for illegally importing low-quality testing kits and selling unhygienic masks and gloves in the capital's Uttara, Gulshan, Mohammadpur and Babubazar areas, he said, adding that a fine of Tk 62 lakh has also been realised.

Mamun said the retail market will also be monitored during Ramadan to curb undue price hike.

DG Mamun further said, "We have to be careful during the crisis so that no rumors can be spread." He suggested verifying the information before sharing anything on social media.

"We have already arrested 11 people for spreading rumors on social media and have kept 50 other sites under monitoring," said Mamun.

Grameen Shakti giving food to 1,750 families

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As part of its humanitarian efforts, Grameen Shakti head office staff has started providing food assistance to some 1,750 underprivileged families across the country.

Initially, a "Food Distribution Program" targeted 1,000 families in 10 districts, with rice, lentils, potato, soybean oil and soap being distributed to each of the families, says a press release.

Between April 3 and April 14, it reached 800 of the targeted families in 8 districts -- Tangail, Jamalpur, Dinajpur, Kishoreganj, Shariatpur, Madaripur, Faridpur and Nilphamari.

They are set to provide the rest of the relief in Netrakona and Thakurgaon.

Furthermore, Grameen Shakti started a new initiative to provide food for three months to an additional 750 underprivileged families, the release adds.

Due to lockdown measures taken to tackle the coronavirus crisis, underprivileged low-income people have lost their means of livelihood and are facing a terrible food crisis, the release further says.

Legal aid for those who can't afford it

Govt helps resolve 4.3 lakh disputes free of cost

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Shah Alam and Jahanara got married seven years back in Cumilla, and they were living peacefully with their two children despite struggling with finances. But as time went on frequent disputes among family members ultimately led to the two getting divorced.

Witnessing the conflict, after the divorce, neighbours sent Jahanara to the district legal aid office in Cumilla for a settlement. After a discussion, the office sent a notice to Shah and a family member of his, but they did not respond.

Six months later, Shah applied to the legal aid office to restore his conjugal relationship with Jahanara. The office took necessary legal initiatives and called Shah, his family members and Jahanara to the office in February this year and finally resolved everything through mutual understanding and compromise.

A marriage registrar was called, and the two got married again, in presence of representatives from USAID, International Consortium for Court Excellence and Democracy International.

The couple is doing well now, according to a recent study report of the law ministry.

Like Shah and Jahanara, thousands of low-income citizens are getting legal aid free of cost from National Legal Aid and Services Organisation (NLASO) under the law ministry.

The government has provided legal aid to 4,29,723 helpless individuals in the last six years -- since 2014-2015 fiscal till February, 2020 -- bearing all costs. A total of 1,02,296 cases related to such disputes were disposed of through NLASO during the same period.

NLASO operates through its district legal aid offices across the country.

Besides, 19,011 people have received legal aid at the Supreme Court through Supreme Court Legal Aid Committee (SCLAC) during the period, the report said.

SCLAC has provided legal assistance to 216 underprivileged prisoners who had been suffering in

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CORONAVIRUS IMPACT

32 fellowships offered for students of 9 public univs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

SAVE Youth Bangladesh, a Dhaka University-based youth platform, is offering 32 students from nine public universities fellowships to conduct social research on different aspects including impact of Covid-19 in the country.

Funded by UKaid, the programme will jointly be implemented by SAVE Youth Bangladesh and International Foundation for Electoral Systems, says a press release.

Fellows will also work on erasing misleading information, rumours and other issues over coronavirus and its socio-economic impact. Aynul Islam, moderator of the project and an associate professor of DU, told The Daily Star.

The 32 students are from Dhaka University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University, Barishal University, Islamic University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, BSMSTU, JKNIU and Jagannath University.

Prices of essentials shoot up in Ctg

DWAIPAYAN BARIUA, Ctg

With Ramadan already underway, prices of essentials continue to soar in Chattogram kitchen markets -- at a time when hundreds of thousands of people are struggling with reduced income due to the restrictions brought about by the coronavirus outbreak.

Shoppers at the port city alleged that retailers are charging high prices at will, taking advantage of weak market monitoring.

Prices of edible oil, lentil, ginger, onion, ginger, garlic, chickpeas, chicken and palm and soybean oils have seen a sharp rise over the last two weeks.

However, prices of items like sugar, green chili and cucumber were still stable, giving some comforts to buyers.

During the first week of the month, prices of lentil saw a hike by Tk 15 per kilogramme due to sudden rise in demand, the price increased by Tk 10-15 per kilo again after Shab-e-barat.

Traders in Kajir Dewry Bazar and Karnaphuli CDA market were found selling Australian red lentils at Tk 90-95 a kg, which was Tk 78-80 per kilogramme just two weeks ago.

A five-litre can of soybean oil saw a price hike of at least Tk 25 in the last two weeks. Prices of different quality of chickpeas also rose by Tk 10-20 while traders were selling it for Tk 72-80 a kg.

"We face this every year during Ramadan," said homemaker Saju Ara Begum. "On top of that, with the restriction in place for coronavirus, the situation is more complicated now."

Meanwhile, prices of ginger saw an exorbitant hike in the last two weeks, reaching Tk 280-300 per kg against the previous rate of Tk 220 a kg.

According to Mohammad Suman, a retailer at Karnaphuli CDA market, sudden price hike in the wholesale hub at Khatunganj is to be blamed.

He also said the supply of ginger is quite low in the market.

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Phrases like "stay at home" and "social distancing" seem to be no less than a luxury for many in the megacity, for whom even a roof over their heads is far from reality. Homeless people find shelter in concrete storm drain pipes in the capital's Motijheel, with rags for curtains. Inset, some have to make the footpaths their bed, like Borhan Uddin and his sister, who have had to settle for a street corner nearby.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ