

DSCC to provide food for another one lakh families

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) will provide food packs to one lakh poor families who are out of work during this Ramadan, DSCC mayor Sayeed Khokon told The Daily Star yesterday.

This new batch of aid follows a prior relief effort, where the city corporation authorities provided food aid to another one lakh families.

"After the last batch of aid (which started on March 28), we have decided to distribute food to another one lakh families during Ramadan," the DSCC mayor said.

He said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has directed public representatives and the administration to stand by those in need during the coronavirus pandemic.

DSCC has already received Tk 3 crore from government funds, and is also expending from its own fund, the mayor told this correspondent.

The food packs include rice, lentils, salt, potato, cooking oil, and soap, and is expected to last for one month, Khokon added.

DSCC has already formed committees in every ward to distribute the relief.

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Members of the Hindu community observe a candle light vigil at Bhojbol village in Moulvibazar on the occasion of "Akkhaya Tritiya" yesterday, to show respect to doctors for their tireless work during the coronavirus pandemic. People of the community believe that good deeds performed on "Akkhaya Tritiya", which comes in Bangla month of Baishakh, last forever. Members of Gobordhandhari Seba Sangha organised the programme.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

DGHS asks DU to be ready to test Covid-19

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

A month after writing to the health ministry stating their capacity to run coronavirus tests, Dhaka University authorities heard back from the authorities yesterday.

"The Directorate General of Health Services, in a letter today, asked us to take necessary steps for testing coronavirus," convener of the committee Prof Sharif Akhteruzzaman told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

Earlier, a technical committee of the university -- formed to take steps in this regard in line with national committee -- on March 29 issued a letter to the health ministry saying the university has the capacity to manufacture testing kits and conducting tests.

Talking to The Daily Star on Sunday, Prof Mamun Ahmed, another member of the technical committee, had expressed his frustration over the silence from the authorities in response to DU's offer for a month. "So far, no response was received from the government. Given the situation, we have said on our own volition that we want to cooperate with the government. What can we do if the government does not want our cooperation?" he had said.

"I have written on behalf of Dhaka University to help the government in this situation. There were three matters. Firstly, we want to use the testing and research opportunities we have. Secondly, we have technical manpower and expertise in this field. Our experts are ready to train others for testing. Thirdly, we have said that we have the skills and qualifications to manufacture a large quantity of kits at low cost. We made these specific proposals to the government."

Prof Mamun yesterday told this newspaper that the technical committee was preparing to hold a meeting to decide their course of action regarding the letter from DGHS.

Abul Kalam Azad, director general of DGHS, yesterday told The Daily Star that they are expanding their testing capacity, and involving Dhaka University for conducting tests is a part of that.

When duty calls

Bibhuti Bhusahn carries on Covid-19 duty at Barishal hospital even when all walked away

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

On March 28, Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) in Barishal nursed a 11-member roster -- three doctors, six nurses, and five technologists -- to work at its 150-bed Corona Isolation Unit from the next day. However, four out of the five technologists backed out almost immediately.

They all feared for their lives -- and came up with alibis to exclude themselves from the job, leaving Bibhuti Bhusahn Halder as the only swab collector at the hospital.

It's not like Bibhuti did not think of excuses as well. He went home in great anxiety, over his own life and for the safety of his family, and spent the night in distress.

He went over all issues at hand. The danger, potential for hazard, his inexperience and lack of training for this -- everything that he could think of.

But then it dawned on him, and he woke up with his mind made. "Well, someone has to do it," Bibhuti told himself.

The following morning, his parents and siblings gathered around their breakfast table to bid him farewell. "My mother (Ranjana Haldar) asked me if there was any way to avoid the duty. But after a while, she understood the situation and blessed me on my journey," he said.

"I'm sending you to serve people in need. They are also someone's daughters, sons, mothers, and fathers," Ranjana told her son.

Bibhuti's father Sudangshu Haldar is a retired assistant cashier of the same hospital. He too blessed his son and asked him to give it his best shot.

Ever since, Bibhuti has been working tirelessly, not even going home from March 29 out of concern of spreading the virus to his family. "I have to work in the unit daily for about 8-10 hours. I feel homesick, but I cannot risk spreading the virus."

The hospital authorities arranged his accommodation at the hostel of Caritas -- a welfare organisation by Catholic Bishops in Bangladesh, half a kilometre away from the hospital. But it's not like he can sleep well, his nights haunted by the burdens of the day. "I cannot sleep thinking of the fear, sufferings and anxiety of the patients."

Amidst all of this, Bibhuti is left high and dry by the hospital authorities on one front: food. For all his work, dawn to dusk without any leave from the first day, the technologist still has to worry about arranging for his



own food, which can become a headache for someone working on a contagious disease.

As the thought of spreading the virus accompanies him all the time, he prevents himself from going out of the isolation unit during his shift. Sometimes, though he is hungry, he continues to work through his hours and can only get a meal once he's back at the hostel.

There's a lot of social anxiety that comes with the job too. "When I go to the hospital store to collect my PPE, my colleagues avoid me. I know this is normal, and I encourage it, but I can't help but feel a lot of pain," Bibhuti said.

Dr Bakir Hossain, director of SBMCH, said, "We are proud of Bibhuti. When all else looked away, he alone took up the responsibility. He is a real hero."

Asked about Bibhuti's food troubles, Dr Bakir said, "We have already written to higher authorities to sanction special food allowance and other benefits for him."

Contacted yesterday, Bibhuti said law enforcement agencies have started to provide food support to him for the last couple of days. "Besides, the hospital authorities and district administration have arranged a room for me at a hotel in the city," he said.

Shutdown in Dhaka affects migrant workers in Bahrain

Undocumented workers not getting regularised as passports don't reach in time

JAMIL MAHMUD and RASHIDUL HASAN

The government of Bahrain this month declared an amnesty programme for undocumented migrant workers to get regularised. This should come as good news for undocumented Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf nation, about 30,000 of whom are expected to avail the programme which runs until December 31 this year.

However, these migrant workers are facing difficulties in obtaining the documents necessary for the regularisation, thanks to delay in passport delivery from Dhaka amid the countrywide shutdown.

The Bangladesh embassy in Manama has submitted a requirement of about 10,000 new copies of passports to authorities concerned in Dhaka several weeks

back. But they haven't arrived as of Thursday, the last working day of the week, said an official at the mission.

"Most of these 10,000 passport seekers are waiting to be legalised," the official told The Daily Star by phone.

Once regularised or legalised, the workers will have the option to decide whether to stay in the Gulf country or return to Bangladesh, said sources at the mission in Manama.

The embassy official said a good number of Bangladeshi workers have been thronging the embassy office each day to get their passports. Such is their urgency that they're making this journey in spite of the shutdown in force in Bahrain, the official added.

But the embassy is unable to help them out, he said. Besides getting visa, foreign workers also need to show passport as an identification document.

Asked, Maj Gen Shakil Ahmed, director general of Immigration and Passports department, told The Daily Star they are aware of the situation and therefore have taken measures to send around 6,000 passport books to Bahrain immediately.

"We are trying to send passport books to Bahrain through special measures today," he said on Thursday over the phone, without elaborating details of how this will be carried out.

Earlier, the immigration and passports department sent passport books to Bangladesh missions in

Kuwait, Lebanon, South Korea and some other countries through special measures, he added.

Bangladesh's air communication with Bahrain and other countries has remained suspended since mid-March due to coronavirus outbreak.

Bahrain is home to about 150,000 Bangladeshis. About 70 percent of them are low-paid workers in the construction sector. Besides, several thousand Bangladeshis, both male and female, are serving as household workers there, according to the Bangladesh mission in the country.

Sheikh Mohammed Tauhidul Islam, labour welfare counsellor at the Bangladesh Embassy in Manama, recently said response for the amnesty programme is very

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Food production, veg supply will continue

Says agriculture minister

UNB, Dhaka

Agriculture Minister Dr Muhammad Abdur Razzaque on Monday said the government has taken various steps to continue food production and ensure uninterrupted supply of vegetables and perishable agricultural products amid the crisis created over the novel coronavirus outbreak.

"The government has taken necessary measures to continue the production of agro products amid the coronavirus situation as well as ensure their export, import, and food supply," he said.

The minister made the remarks while speaking at an online meeting regarding the marketing and supply of vegetables, seeds and fresh agricultural products, at his ministry.

The Department of Agriculture Marketing has started conducting mobile marketing of agricultural products with the help of deputy commissioners concerned, and potato, vegetables and onion were included in the relief materials

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'Bring returnee migrants, families under social safety'

Rights group urges PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A migrants' rights organisation has appealed to the prime minister to announce a social safety net programme for the returnee migrants and their families, who are not being included in any of the social protection schemes declared by the government.

Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP), a grassroots migrants' organisation, said over the last one month, they had telephone calls with about 1,600 migrant workers and their families.

An analysis of those calls gave an idea that estimated 25 percent migrant families are now facing a serious economic crisis as migrant members of the families have no longer been able to send money home.

"Many of them have extremely limited

or no access to food, putting them on the brink of starvation. Existing health risks are also worsening due to families' inability to purchase essential medicines," said Shakirul Islam, chairman of OKUP, in a statement.

Apart from that, these migrant families are also facing difficulties in accessing emergency support being provided by the government. The government has announced provision of ration for 50 lakh people, but the migrant families are not being included in the list since they do not fall into the category of people living below the poverty line, he said.

Some of the migrant families also hesitate to approach local leaders because of social prestige, though they are now going through food crisis.

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STRANDED IN INDIA 3 special flights to bring them home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines will operate three special flights from Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai to bring back Bangladeshis stranded in India due to suspension of flights following the Covid-19 outbreak.

The Kolkata-Dhaka flight will be operated on May 1, Delhi-Dhaka on May 2 and Mumbai-Dhaka on May 3, Biman MD and CEO M Mokabbir Hossain told the media through a WhatsApp message.

On April 25, the national flag carrier operated a charter flight from Delhi to bring back 166 Bangladeshis who were stranded in India for over a month.

At least 2,500 Bangladeshis including students, tourists and medical treatment seekers remained stranded in different cities of India, especially in Chennai, Bangalore, Delhi and Hyderabad due to the outbreak, the foreign ministry said in a statement on April 3.

Following the outbreak, the Indian government suspended air communication with Bangladesh, among other countries.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi in a recent statement said they are working to bring back all stranded Bangladeshis from India.

A number of Bangladeshis nationals have already returned home from Kolkata, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and other border areas with the support of Bangladesh missions there, the statement said.



After the downpour of the past few days, the road beneath Jinjira overpass (that goes from Dhaka to Mawa) has been severely damaged and waterlogged. While larger vehicles like trucks can still pass through, CNG-run autorickshaws and smaller vehicles are getting stuck in the muddy street that runs for almost a kilometre. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Govt provided free legal aid to 5 lakh people in 10 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has provided legal aid to 5,07,040 poor and helpless people of the country free of cost in the last 10 years, reported law ministry yesterday, on the eve of National Legal Aid Services Day.

The assistance was provided since 2009 till February this year through National Legal Aid and Services Organisation (NLASO) under the law ministry.

NLASO has collected Tk 35.36 crore as compensation by settling 1,26,492 legal aid related cases and rewarded the money to victims, said a ministry press release yesterday.

NLASO has provided legal aid to 3,84,823 disadvantaged people through 64 district offices, 20,092 through Supreme Court Legal Aid Committee, and 18,207 labourers through Dhaka and Chattogram labour legal aid cells during the period.

Meanwhile, the law ministry has been running the national helpline to provide legal aid to poor people, particularly labourers, free of cost, even during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

A total of 83,918 people have received legal assistance through the helpline since its launch in 2016, a ministry source said.

The toll-free helpline is open 24/7 under instruction from Law Minister Anisul Huq.

Since 2013, the ministry is observing National Legal Aid Services Day every year.