

INTEREST-FREE LOANS 2,000 lawyers appeal to SCBA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 2,000 Supreme Court lawyers appealed for loan to Supreme Court Bar Association after it had decided to provide interest-free loan to its members during the coronavirus crisis.

"We're still receiving applications. We will scrutinise those next week and then start giving loans," SCBA President Advocate AM Amin Uddin told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said SCBA executive committee will hold a meeting to decide on the amount of loan.

On April 15, the committee decided to provide the loans. On April 16, SCBA Secretary Barrister Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal told this newspaper that the loan term will be three years. "We have already created a fund of Tk 50 lakh," he had said.



The countryside shutdown might have brought everything to a standstill but everyone's hair is still growing without care. In this predicament a rickshaw-puller has decided to put his barber skills to the test by experimenting on youths who are in need of a haircut. This photo was taken yesterday from the capital's Motijheel.

Ctg private hospitals yet to join the fight

Opening of 100-bed Covid-19 hospital delayed

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

The private clinic owners' association of Chattogram was supposed to open a 100-bed hospital only for Covid-19 patients in port city on April 25 but it is now uncertain from when the hospital will begin its operations.

Contacted, Dr Liakat Ali Khan, general secretary of the association, yesterday told The Daily Star that they have set up 30 beds.

Citizens and rights activists in the port city have expressed their concern over the delay in opening the hospital.

On April 4, the office of Chattogram divisional director of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) issued a gazette notification where it was mentioned that the government dedicated 12 private hospitals in Chattogram for ICU support of Covid-19 patients.

Following this, the private clinics owners' association initiated a new move with a proposal to divisional health chief where they said instead of using 12 hospitals, they would dedicate a 100-bed hospital for Covid-19 patients, said sources.

They started to renovate Holy Crescent Hospital in Khulshi area, which was left abandoned for several years. The move started on April 5, the day after issuance of the gazette notification. They promised to open the hospital with a 20-bed ICU facility by April 25, but it's yet to see the light of day.

"We don't understand what the problem is... we saw some hurried activities from the owners of private clinics when government issued a gazette notification for requisition of 12 private clinics for Covid-19 patients but now we're seeing a clear lack of effort from them," said SM Nazer Hossain, central vice president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB).

"The sooner the hospital opens, the better it will be for patients showing coronavirus symptoms," he told The Daily Star.

Asked, Dr Liakat said they prepared 30 isolation beds and 10 ICU beds so far. "We are ready to open the hospital and waiting for government approval," he said.

Asked about the promised 100 beds and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

1 lakh aspirant migrant workers in uncertainty

Top Baira leader says recruiting agencies incurred Tk 2,000cr loss due to Covid-19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An estimated 1 lakh migrant workers could not travel for overseas jobs in the last two months due to the coronavirus outbreak, a top leader of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) said yesterday.

As a result, the country's recruiting agencies have to incur a loss of about Tk 2,000 crore, said Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman, secretary general of Baira.

"We have about 1 lakh visas in our hands... a huge investment of us remains frozen. We couldn't recover the money as we couldn't send the workers," he told this newspaper by phone.

He said that the recruiting agencies have to shut their offices because of the outbreak.

This put some 32,000 employees of about 1,600 recruiting agencies in uncertainty, he said, adding that they invested money on various purposes including as deposit against workers' visas and to buy their plane tickets in advance.

Meanwhile, following Baira's appeal to the prime minister, the expatriates' welfare ministry has decided to give each recruiting agency 50

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

DU to fix longstanding problems at dormitories

Only students to be allowed to stay post-pandemic

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University (DU) authorities on Tuesday decided to allow only "legal" students to stay at the dormitories once the university opens.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the provost committee organised to discuss the health risk of students in the post-coronavirus period and overall atmosphere of the dormitories, said a press release of the university.

"Only legal [those with formal student status] students will be allowed to stay at the halls as per the rules of dormitories. Those who do not have student status cannot stay at the halls and they have to vacate within the time limit given by the authorities," reads the release.

A total of five decisions including this were taken in a bid to reduce health risk of the students, improve the residential, educational and overall atmosphere of the dormitories, to resolve the "gono room" crisis, and renovate the dormitories.

The meeting also decided that no student can

stay on the floors of any room and if necessary, they might share a room with another student following due procedure.

"Hall authorities will take measures to supply beds to the rooms where there aren't any," added the release citing the meeting.

Attendees of the meeting also opined that the "gono room" culture will end if the aforementioned decisions can be implemented properly.

"But, cordial assistance from all the active students' organisations will be needed to stop the gono room culture and to prevent non-students from occupying the rooms," it added.

The university authorities will complete renovation and cleansing of the dormitories during the vacation.

DU authorities had earlier issued several notices asking non-students and outsiders to leave the halls, but to no effect.

On January 20 last year, authorities of every hall

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

22 lakh Bangladeshis in KSA to get medical service over chat app

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday launched a call centre for the 22 lakh Bangladeshi expatriates who are currently living in Saudi Arabia, through which they can avail medical services using the instant messaging smartphone app Imo.

The service was launched through a virtual press conference organised by the ICT Division, where foreign minister AK Abdul Momen and expatriates' welfare and overseas employment minister Imran Ahmad also spoke.

The service is free for all Bangladeshis living in Saudi Arabia, and was launched on Imo because it is a popular communication medium in the Gulf country.

The government's Access to Information (a2i) programme has designed the model of the call centre, named Prohash Bondhu, which will be run by Synesis IT.

Five Imo numbers (+8801400611995, +8801400611996, +8801400611997, +8801400611998, +8801958105020) were announced at the programme, along with a hotline (+8809611999111) where Bangladeshi expats can call from 9am to 9pm, seven days in a week.

Apart from medical service, expats can also avail other

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

80-YEAR-OLD BEATS CORONAVIRUS

OUR CORRESPONDENT, DINAIPIR

Amid all the doom and gloom of rising coronavirus cases in the country, 80-year-old Moslem Uddin yesterday returned home from the Rangpur Dedicated Corona Isolation Hospital, making a full recovery from the virus after 14 days of treatment.

The hospital's chief and Principal of Rangpur Medical College (RMC) SM Nurunnabi confirmed the discharge to The Daily Star.

According to his family, Moslem had been in Dhaka for a long time. He returned to Rangpur on the morning of April 1, and was physically ill at the time. Arriving at Rangpur, he went to his son-in-law's house in Rangpur city, where he developed symptoms like fever, runny nose and cough. On April 16, Moslem was admitted at Rangpur Medical College Hospital for treatment as he was diagnosed with coronavirus.

On April 20, he was referred to the Dedicated Corona Isolation Hospital.



Moslem received a bouquet of flowers and a letter from doctors.

PHOTO: STAR

SM Nurunnabi added that after 14 days of treatment, his physical condition improved, and two consecutive coronavirus test reports came back negative, so it was decided to discharge him from the hospital.

All the doctors led by his chief

gave a farewell to Moslem yesterday with a flower bouquet and a letter.

In Rangpur division, so far 13 out of 111 people -- from Gaibandha, Rangpur, Nilphamari and Thakurgaon -- have returned home after recovery from Covid-19. Three people have died.

Aedes MOSQUITOES Drives after May 10 to find breeding grounds: minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local Government and Rural Division Minister Tajul Islam yesterday said authorities will conduct mobile court drives after May 10 if they find favourable breeding conditions for Aedes mosquitoes at houses and offices in Dhaka city.

He was speaking at an inter-ministerial meeting at Wasa Bhaban in the capital.

The minister urged house and office owners to keep premises clean and take steps to destroy Aedes breeding grounds.

He said roofs, toilets, flooded floors, drums and water containers at construction sites must be cleaned by owners.

The government recently decided to form a "dengue monitoring cell" to combat the disease in the city.

Since January 1, at least 295 dengue patients were admitted to different hospitals across the country till Sunday, said Aysha Akhtar, an assistant director of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). Sixty-five of the patients were from outside Dhaka.

DEATH OF SENIOR SBMCH DOCTOR Family files murder case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A murder case was lodged yesterday with Barishal city's Kotwali Police Station, after police recovered the body of Dr Md Al Azad Sajol, a senior consultant at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH), from the bottom of an elevator shaft at Mamata Specialised Hospital (MSH).

Dr Shahariar Badhon Utchash, Dr Azad's brother, lodged the case without accusing anyone, said Abdur Rahman Mukur, officer-in-charge (investigation) of the police station and investigation officer of the case.

"We have detained nine MSH staffers for interrogation, and we are scrutinising all possible causes of his death," the OC said.

Md Rassel, assistant commissioner (Kotwali) of Barishal Metropolitan Police (BMP), said different branches of law enforcement agencies -- including Rapid Action Battalion, Police Bureau of Investigation and Criminal Investigation Department -- are involved in investigation. Officials are consolidating and scrutinising information collected by them with top priority.

Mokter Hossain, deputy commissioner of BMP, said investigation is in primary stage and investigators are looking into all details.

Earlier, Dr Zahirul Islam Manik, director of MSH and head of surgery at SBMCH, said Dr Azad went missing since Monday evening, and they informed police on Tuesday morning. Officers recovered Dr Azad's body around 1:30pm on that day.

Dr Azad was a senior consultant at SBMCH's burn and plastic surgery unit and was working part-time at MSH, residing in a room on the hospital's sixth floor.

He was buried at Dhaka's Keraniganj, where he used to live with his wife and two children, said Shibuddin Khokon, the deceased doctor's cousin.

"He was famous for his kind-hearted demeanour, and at least 20 families regularly received grants for him," he said.

Healthcare providers at increased risk in Barishal

Many hiding Covid-19 symptoms from physicians

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

On April 15, an elderly person was admitted to the medicine ward of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) in Barishal in an unconscious state.

Attendees of the 70-year-old from Banaripara did not inform doctors that he had breathing difficulties and cough, which became evident after a chest X-ray.

Immediately, physicians sent his sample to the lab and the man was tested Covid-19 positive, said Dr Sudip Halder, president of Indoor Doctors' Association of SBMCH. "As a result, we're keeping the medicine unit-3 locked down. Doctors, nurses and other staffers at the unit have been quarantined since April 16," he added.

This is not an isolated incident. There are a number of reports that people suspected of coronavirus infection and their attendees are excluding vital information of their contact history, putting healthcare providers and others at risk.

Experts said this is leading to panic and further spread of the disease. Such patients are even infecting doctors, who are on the front line of the battle against Covid-19. They said many patients hide their contact information so that they are not refused treatment, or become stigmatised.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

PepsiCo, Brac to provide 1.4 million meals to the needy

CITY DESK

PepsiCo in Bangladesh and the beverage company's philanthropic arm the PepsiCo Foundation has partnered with Brac to provide over 1.4 million meals to underserved families. The initiative is part of PepsiCo's #GiveMealsGiveHope global programme, under which the company plans to provide 50 million meals across the world.

Brac will be the on-ground implementation partner for the programme, working closely with local administration and law enforcement authorities.

Debasish Deb, Country Manager, PepsiCo Bangladesh, said, "We are committed to give our full support to the Government of Bangladesh in its fight against the pandemic and will continue to do our best to serve the Nation in these challenging times."

Can't put a price on 'friendship'

Community-built market lets distressed families shop for free

MUNTAKIM SAAD

Imagine a market where anyone can buy daily essentials, but instead of money, they use friendship points!

Non-profit organisation "Thank You Foundation" has implemented such an initiative named "Bondhutter Bazar" (Friendship Market) in Uttara, in a bid to stand beside the poor and needy during the tough times of shutdown.

The organisation has been providing the underprivileged with food aid since the beginning of the pandemic. To expand their programme, they launched the market on April 25, in Uttara Sector-6.

Ashik Faruqi, founding president of the organisation, said economically distressed families will be able to shop from Bondhutter Bazar for free.

"We have put points on the products. A person can shop for a maximum of 500 points per week. It's enough for a four to five-member family," Ashik said.

The market will remain open from 10am to noon throughout the month of Ramadan from Saturdays through Thursdays.

The initiative is funded by Thank



At the Bondhutter Bazar at Uttara's Sector 6, items are labelled with points instead of price tags. Thank You Foundation allows those without privilege to shop here for free, upto 500 points per week.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

You Foundation. However, if anyone wants to contribute they can do so in the following ways: 01703979767 (bKash); 347 891 9280 (USA, Canada); +817016710421 (Japan)

To contact Thank You Foundation, one may call 01918802894, 01676940102, or reach out via their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ThankuFoundation>.