

MINIMISING COVID-19 RISK  
Another 385  
prisoners released

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prisons authorities yesterday released 385 more convicted prisoners -- as part of the government's early release plan to ease accommodation crisis and minimise risk of coronavirus infections in the overcrowded prisons.

"We have released 170 inmates on Saturday and 385 more will be released today [Sunday]," Col Abrar Hossain, additional inspector general of prisons, told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

The home ministry, after taking opinion from the law ministry, recently ordered prisons authorities to release 2,884 prisoners who were convicted for one year or less for minor offences but served months in jails.

"The rest will be released in a week gradually," Col Abrar added.

The 170 prisoners released on Saturday served jail term of six months, the other 385 served between three months and less than six months while the rest have been in jail for less than three months, jail sources said.

As per the home ministry order, the prisons headquarters recommended releasing around 5,000 prisoners under three categories.

There are more than 3,000 prisoners in the first category who were sentenced to two-year imprisonment.

The second category includes 1,413 life-sentenced prisoners who served more than 20 years in jail, and there are 36 prisoners with physical disabilities under the third category.

"We did not get any decision about 1,413 life-sentenced prisoners and 36 disabled prisoners," said an official of the prisons headquarters.

There are around 90,000 prisoners

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REMINISCING RAMADAN AT DU

After all, what more can one do if the countrywide shutdown for coronavirus leads to complete desertion of one of the capital's most happening iftar spots? A photo from last year, right, shows the booming iftar scene at the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University, where people sat in circles with their friends under the open sky and bonded over peyaju, beguni and jilapi. That very field now remains empty, above, save for the overgrown grass.

PHOTO: COLLECTED, STAR



Iftar gatherings  
that once were

Dhaka University's TSC deserted during Ramadan amid coronavirus shutdown

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

What was once one of the most happening, liveliest places in the city, full of youth, life, and culture, now remains almost deserted amid the nationwide shutdown. Dhaka University's Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) would be especially buzzing during Ramadan, as students as well as visitors would gather there to have iftar with friends.

Just last year, it was a common scene to find diverse groups sitting in a circle, with traditional iftar items, or biryani packets in hand, waiting for the azaan with hundreds others around them.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, DU authorities on March 16 suspended academic activities till March 28 and asked students to vacate the hall by March 20.

They later announced suspension of academic activities for indefinite period.

Also, to contain further spread of the coronavirus, on April 23 this year, the Ministry of Religious Affairs passed a statement banning any form of gatherings during iftar.

Such directives have left one of the city's most happening iftar hubs empty.

"We used to gather at TSC half an hour prior to iftar no matter wherever we were throughout the day. It was a must. Shared so many moments of joy while bonding with friends over peyaju, beguni, jilapi and other iftar essentials. All I can do is reminisce these moments staying at home," said Jobol E Rahamat, a student of theatre and performance studies department.

Iftar has always been an occasion for old friends to reunite, and TSC used to bring together many former students of DU during Ramadan.

"The iftar we used to have together at TSC was very special. We did not have proper plates, so we would use old newspapers to hold the iftar items. I would go back for experience again and again after leaving the campus. Hopefully the shutdown will be lifted one day and I will sit with my friends to have iftar under the open sky at TSC," said Sonia Afrin Ishita, who graduated from the university two years ago.

Meanwhile traders, staff of dormitory canteens, food shops and tea stalls, who used to sell iftar items for this time of the year to make extra money, are facing severe crisis this year.

"I normally sell, but during Ramadan I would sell some iftar items too. This year I am not being to able run my regular business, let alone getting extra income," Swapan mama, a popular tea vendor at TSC area, told The Daily Star with a heavy heart.

Grameen Telecom  
giving masks to a  
million people

CITY DESK

Grameen Telecom is providing non-medical face-masks, made from cloth, to one million underprivileged individuals free of cost, said a press release.

Already 72,000 masks have been distributed through various organisations. According to international researchers and announcements by Directorate General of Health Services, coronavirus transmission can significantly reduce by using masks made of cloth, especially knitted fabrics.

Grameen Telecom has taken the initiative to reach out to the difficult-to-reach population and those who cannot afford masks. These two-layer masks made of knitted fabrics can prevent coronavirus from spreading.

The masks are being produced at the facilities of Grameen Fabrics and Fashions Ltd. So far, 2.05 lakh masks have been produced, with two lakh produced every week.

Individuals and organisations interested in acquiring masks for distribution at their own initiative can reach out through email at info@grameentelecom.net.bd.



Help is on the way  
Ctg man gives free bike rides to patients,  
emergency commuters

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Srijon Roy, a resident of Chattogram's Jamal Khan Road, was in a rush to deliver some emergency medicine to his ailing mother on Tuesday. This meant he would have to scour for vehicles amid the transport shutdown, to reach his village home in Hathazari's Nandir Hat.

Fighting through the situation, he managed to hire a rickshaw and reach Muradpur intersection, but ultimately, couldn't find the next vehicle that would take him to the village.

Then he remembered. One Kamrujjaman had made a Facebook post, offering to transport people in emergencies to their destinations on his motorbike.

Srijon quickly found Kamrujjaman's number and made a call, asking for help. In 10 minutes, Kamrujjaman was present at Muradpur, cordially inviting Srijon to hop on the bike.

"I was in big trouble. I couldn't find any vehicle to go home," Srijon told The Daily Star. "I want to salute Kamrujjaman for this noble deed."

"I've come to know that he voluntarily helps patients, their attendants, and blood donors by taking them to hospitals," Srijon added.

Kamrujjaman, however, doesn't think of himself as a hero. An employee of an import company in the city, he has been involved in social activities since school



Kamrujjaman, ready on his motorbike.

days.

Talking to The Daily Star, Kamrujjaman, who resides in the city's Oxygen Shitol Jhama area, said when the shutdown started in late March, common people started to suffer, some for lack of food, others for transport issues.

"I wanted to stand by those who are suffering. But how? I'm not from a well-off

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PPE sought for  
healthcare heroes

Rights body asks four govt officials to comply with HC directives within 3 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A rights organisation yesterday sent a legal notice to four government officials, requesting them to provide necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) and medicine to doctors, nurses and health workers of all government hospitals in three days in line with the High Court's March 22 directives in a bid to properly treat coronavirus patients.

Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) sent the notice to Health Secretary Md Asadul Islam, Additional Health Secretary (Hospitals) Md Shirajul Islam, Director General of Directorate General of Health Services Prof Dr Mohammad Abul Kalam Azad, and Director of Central Medicine Store Department Brig Gen Shahidullah through emails.

Advocate Manzill Murshid, who served the notice on behalf of HRPB, told The Daily Star that he will move a contempt of court petition before the HC against the four officials if they don't comply with the notice.

Following a writ petition filed by HRPB, the HC on March 22 ordered the health secretary to purchase/procure/collect the PPE, surgical mask, gloves, shoe covers, gowns, sanitiser and other necessary equipment in seven days for treatment of coronavirus patients. The HC asked the officials concerned of the government to send all those to doctors, nurses and staff members for their safety.

In the legal notice, Murshid said healthcare providers are reportedly facing a shortage of PPE. Not providing PPE to them is a violation of the HC directives and also a contempt of court.

Dhaka Bank  
donates Tk 1cr to police

CITY DESK

Dhaka Bank Limited has donated Tk 1 crore to Bangladesh Police to procure personal protective equipment (PPE) and masks, says a press release.

The donation came on April 28 to ensure safety of police personnel, who are working at field level from the beginning of coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Beximco Pharmaceuticals Limited has produced international standard PPE and masks for police from the donated amount, the release says.

Police have been at the frontline during Covid-19 pandemic and doing commendable job to make citizens stay at home and maintain social distancing, it further says.

They are not only providing relief to people in need but also taking the affected persons to hospitals.

So, in discharging their duties, police personnel are getting exposed to the risk of being infected with the deadly virus, it adds.

AUG 21 ATTACK CASES

Pandemic causing  
delay in HC hearing

ASHUTOSH SARKER

The coronavirus outbreak has caused an unusual delay for the High Court to start hearing on the sensational August 21 grenade attack cases although it has accepted the appeals of the convicted accused more than 15 months back.

The offices concerned of the HC of Bangladesh Government Press were working to prepare the paper books of the cases, but they could not finish it as their functions have been postponed since March 26 due to the shutdown enforced for curbing the Covid-19 pandemic.

A paper book that contains all details of a case, trial proceedings, statements, evidence, orders, verdict and other relevant documents is necessary for the HC to hear and dispose of a death reference or an appeal.

"The authorities concerned were about to finalise preparation for the paper books... It would be completed if the offices could get one week," Supreme Court Spokesman Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star recently.

The paper books will be readied in few weeks after the offices resume working and the HC will start hearing the appeals and death references of the August 21 grenade attack cases, he said.

Attorney General (AG) Mahbubey Alam told this correspondent that his office will take necessary steps after reopening of the courts for the hearing.

He, however, could not specify the update and details of the cases.

Law Minister Anisul Huq on January

1 this year told The Daily Star that the Bangladesh Government Press will publish copies of the paper books of August 21 attack cases very soon, and then the government will take necessary steps through AG's office for the hearing.

The death references on the cases reached the HC on November 27 last year for examination of the trial court's verdict.

The HC on January 13 this year accepted the appeals filed by the convicted accused. The same day, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman also stayed the part of the trial court verdict that fined the convicts.

The bench passed the order as the appeals filed by the convicts, who are now in jail, were included in its cause list, the then Assistant Attorney General Md Yousuf Mahmud Morshed had told The Daily Star.

The HC will hold hearing on the appeals after relevant procedures are completed, he added.

A Dhaka court on October 10, 1018 sentenced 19 persons -- including former state minister and BNP leader Lutfozzaman Babar to death, and 19 others -- including BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, to life imprisonment in the two cases filed for the August 21 grenade attack.

At least 24 people were killed and around 300 injured in the grisly attack on an Awami League rally on the capital's Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004.

Sheikh Hasina, now the prime minister and the then opposition leader in parliament, narrowly escaped the attack with an ear injury.

Free, responsible  
media can take  
country forward

Says info minister on World Press Freedom Day

UNB, Dhaka

The role of free, independent and responsible media is very crucial in order to take the country forward, said Information Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud yesterday.

In addition to that, he said, independent and responsible media is important in building a multifaceted society.

The minister made the remarks while speaking from his office at the Bangladesh Secretariat on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2020.

He said the country's journalists and others engaged in media are working with a great risk amid this global coronavirus pandemic. He also spoke about journalist Humayun Kabir Khokon who died from coronavirus infection he contracted while on duty and prayed for the salvation of his departed soul.

The minister said the present government believes in freedom of the press. This is why the media saw huge progress and expansion after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina came to power in 2009, Dr Mahmud added.

The number of dailies in the country increased to 1,294 in 2020 from 445 in 2009, while that of weeklies to 1,208 now from 208 in 2009, he said.

He said the number of state-run televisions was two in 2009, but it is now four. The number of private television channels was 10 in early 2009; now 45 private television channels have got permission to operate, said the minister, adding that there was no FM radio in 2009, but now 24 FM radio stations have got permission and most of them are in operation.

There was no community radio in the country in 2009 whereas 32 community radio stations have been given permission now, he said, noting that many of the permitted community radio stations are in operation.

These statistics show that Sheikh Hasina and her government believe in freedom of the media, he added.

Drugstore fined  
for selling not-  
for sale saline

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A mobile court of district administration fined a medicine store Tk 40,000 for selling government saline, which is not for sale, in Cumilla on Saturday night.

The court led by Executive Magistrate Amit Datta fined Nurul Amin Patwary, owner of Inan Medicine Point at the city's Kandirpar.

He sold a bag of sodium chloride solution saline (500ml) at Tk 3,000 to a person, said the executive magistrate.

"We only fined the drugstore owner under Consumer Rights Protection Act as it is his first-time offence," said Amit Datta.

The Institute of Public Health produces the saline for government hospitals where it is applied for patients for free, said Dr Mojibur Rahman, director of Cumilla Medical College Hospital.

"A section of dishonest people is involved in such incident," he said.

When asked about it, Cumilla Civil Surgeon Dr Md Nematuzzaman avoided the question, telling this correspondent that he would "talk about the matter later".

Bidyanondo, SAAF  
team up to support  
22,000 families

CITY DESK

Suhana & Anis Ahmed Foundation (SAAF) has provided Tk 1.05 crore as a special Covid-19 financial support to Bidyanondo Foundation, enabling immediate support to 22,000 families in remote areas of Bangladesh, a press release said.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Bidyanondo Foundation has been one of the first undertaking initiatives to provide food, and medical safety gear to people in dire straits. To date, the organisation has fed an upward of 200,000 families, and arranges food for about 15,000 people daily.

In addition to the need for proper food and nutrition, Bidyanondo has also distributed 5,000 personal protective equipment (PPE) and 20,000 masks. The organisation has connected BGB units, Navy and Coast Guard to cover remote areas of the country.

Anis Ahmed, co-founder, and trustee of SAAF, said, "Partnering with Bidyanondo Foundation is a watershed moment in our Foundation's journey."

Kishor Kumar Das, founder of Bidyanondo, said Suhana & Anis Ahmed Foundation came forward when they were in financial difficulties.



PHOTO: COLLECTED