

Prof Muntasar Mamun's condition improves

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Noted historian Prof Muntasar Mamun, who was hospitalised with Covid-19, has been shifted from the intensive care unit (ICU) to the cabin at Mugda Medical College Hospital in Dhaka.

Prof Monilal Aich Litu, president of the hospital's Covid-19 dedicated doctors' committee, said they have shifted Prof Mamun to the cabin as his condition is stable now.

A six-member medical board was formed yesterday for his treatment following the prime minister's directives.

Prof Monilal said the PM has been inquiring about Prof Mamun's condition. Her office requested to form a board on Monday evening, he added.

The 69-year-old Dhaka University professor was admitted to the hospital on Sunday evening with Covid-19 symptoms.

He tested positive on Monday. After his health deteriorated, the professor was shifted to the ICU.

Family sources said test sample from Prof Mamun was collected 10 days ago, as he came in touch with his mother, who had earlier tested positive for the virus.



Social distancing protocols and the fear of being infected with Covid-19 are distant problems for countless people in the capital, who have no roof over their head, and now -- due to the nationwide shutdown -- no way to earn their bread. Men of various ages, most of them homeless and destitute, wait patiently in a congested yet disciplined queue for several hours near Doyel Chattar, knowing some samaritan will come along with food for them before iftar. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Primary students' stipends increased finally, after 18yrs

Disbursement resumes; each to receive pending amount before Eid

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has approved the disbursement and increment of stipends, and extension of Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP), paving the way for financially assisting 1.37 crore elementary students, which was halted for over six months.

After PM's approval, from now on, the amount of stipend will increase by 50 per cent, and each primary student will receive a yearly amount of Tk 1,000 for buying school supplies like uniforms and bags, said PESP officials.

The government increased the stipend after 18 years, despite the erosion of real value over the period. The amount was fixed in 2002 and has not been revised since then, officials added.

"The PM approved extension of our project for 18 months and increased the stipend amount on Monday," Yusuf Ali, project director of PESP's third phase, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Officials had requested for extension of the project in December last year, but due to the pandemic, decisions were kept pending and so did disbursement of stipends.

He said authorities will disburse pending instalment of October last year within a week, according to the old stipend amount. They will disburse instalments of January and April, according to the increased amount, before Eid-ul-Fitr.

The government sends the money directly to students' mothers through mobile banking services four times a year -- in April, July, October and January.

To qualify for the stipend, selected students must have 85 per cent monthly attendance. They also need to take all school examinations and attain a minimum of 33 per cent marks for each subject.

According to the old stipend amount, each student

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Sale of unauthorised Covid-19 home test kits rampant online

MUNTAKIM SAAD

In spite of disapproval by the drug administration, unauthorised rapid Covid-19 test kits are being sold online through e-commerce sites and social media.

According to World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, Bangladesh is only using Real Time PCR testing method, as opposed to Rapid Diagnostic Test (RDT) kits. WHO says the accuracy of the latter's diagnosis is questionable.

However, RDT kits are being imported illegally by these sellers without the knowledge of the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA). Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) said they are being imported through international courier services.

These kits are being advertised on Facebook pages and free classified advertising sites, seeking both wholesale and retail buyers.

Recently, police and Rab have seized 1,475 rapid testing kits from the capital's Banglamotor, Shahidbagh and Nikunja areas in separate drives.

"Good News! Now you can test coronavirus sitting at your home with 80 percent accuracy! It's almost the same as a diabetes test," read an advertisement on Facebook by Looks International Ltd on April 9. The advertisement cited their location at Dhaka's Karwan Bazar.

It included a contact number, and said a minimum of 1,000 test kits have to be ordered. The post was deleted right after

Rab's drive.

Called, a staffer of the company picked up. He said they had initially imported these kits but later halted sales after the law enforcers' action.

"No lab visits, no doctors. Just one finger prick of blood!" read another Facebook post, saying its diagnosis comes in 10 to 15 minutes, with a staggering 92 percent accuracy.

Each box contains 25 test kits. The wholesale price of each kit is around Tk 450 while the retail price is from Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,600, the post mentioned.

In a Facebook group, one Suman Saha posted, "If anyone is looking for business opportunities, contact me. I have ready stocks, including Covid-19 test kits."

Earlier, a scandal occurred as the Gazipur city corporation mayor self-financed import of 50,000 unauthorised testing kits. He even distributed some of those to a few hospitals and upazilas.

Major Imad Uddin Laskar, company commander of Rab-3, said people who are worried about Covid-19 symptoms generally search for kits on e-commerce sites and Facebook for self-testing.

Rab said they will continue drives against the unauthorised testing kits stocked with the sellers.

Currently, WHO does not recommend the use of antigen or antibody detecting rapid diagnostic tests. Rapid diagnostic

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17 'JMB men' held in capital

They were planning to migrate to Saudi Arabia for 'jihad': CTTC

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of police claimed to have arrested 17 members of JMB from the capital's Kakrail area, who were planning to join a so-called jihad after migrating into Saudi Arabia.

On information, police conducted a drive in front of Public Health Office, opposite Kakrail Mosque, around 7:15pm on Monday and made the arrests, Towhidul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of CTTC unit, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The arrestees are Haider Ali, Mahmudul Hasan alias Masum, Jamirul Islam, Billal Hossain, Sheikh Arafat alias Johnny, Imrul Hasan alias Emon, Saiful Islam, Mozammel Haque, Md Shahjalal, Md Akhtaruzzaman, Mahmudul Hasan alias Sabir, Abid ul Mahmud alias Abid, Sohail Sardar, Obaidul Islam alias Sumon, Mahmud Hasan alias Sharif, Majedul Islam alias Mukul and Sohag Hasan.

CTTC unit seized 19 cell phones, Tk 2.34 lakh and \$922 from their possession.

"In primary interrogation, all the arrestees admitted that they are members of mainstream JMB," said ADC Towhidul.

Towhidul, who led the operation, said an engineer named Syed Mostaq bin Arman, left Bangladesh for Saudi Arabia in 2017 and is still staying in the country. Mostaq released some audio speeches and videos on his YouTube channel, inviting others to join "jihad" at a place called Ghazwat-ul-Hind in Saudia Arabia as a soldier of Imam Mahdi, he added.

"Inspired by this audio and video clip, the arrestees communicated with Mostaq and tried to go to Saudi Arabia to prepare for war as Imam Mahdi's soldiers," said Towhidul, adding that they left home in mid-March.

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The long wait for test reports

Slow Covid-19 diagnosis worry patients in Ctg as hospitals struggle with backlog of samples

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

After a teacher of Chittagong University caught a fever with a mild cough, she was rightly concerned, and went to Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID) for Covid-19 test last Wednesday.

A staffer collected her sample and asked her to contact them after seven days for the report. When asked why it would take so long to get the report, he could not say anything. "You just have to collect the report after a week," he said.

Like this teacher, many people are worried about not getting the test results in time, while they continue to show symptoms of coronavirus infection.

"As we can't confirm whether it's Covid-19 or not, we don't know what step to take next, or prepare for self-isolation," said the worried father of another suspected Covid-19 patient.

"I have read that the PCR test requires several hours but BITID cannot deliver the report before a week passes," he added.

Testing for coronavirus began at BITID on March 25. It was the only centre for testing at Chattogram at the time, while another testing facility was launched at Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU) on April 21.

The two centres can test around 260 samples a day. For example, a total of 183 samples were tested in BITID while a total of 83 samples were tested in CVASU on Sunday. The two centres test samples collected from at least five districts of Chattogram division, said sources.

Citizens and health experts have urged the authorities to increase the number of testing facilities in Chattogram for the sake of patients.

"We collect 300-350 samples a day from five districts but our lab has the capacity of carrying out around 150 tests a day," said Prof Dr Shakil Ahmed, in-charge of BITID laboratory, adding, "We are testing over 180 samples a day and we sent some 80 to 90 samples to CVASU laboratory for testing."

"CVASU does not collect any sample by their own source rather they just test samples collected and prepared by us in their lab," he explained the reason behind the de.

"We have to work under tremendous pressure till midnight in lab," said Prof Shakil. "Still we have around 450 samples in stock. How will we deliver reports in a day or two?"

"But we are now delivering reports in four days on average," he said.

Asked whether the quality of samples would fall if left for days, Prof Shakil said it is true that quality of samples fall gradually but those can be preserved in minus 20 degree Celsius temperature.

"We preserve the sample in standard method and there should be no doubt about the accuracy of the result," he said.

Prof Shakil also stressed on increasing the testing facilities in Chattogram. "Patients will be benefited if testing starts in Chattogram Medical College (CMC) lab," he said.

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Nepotism in OMS rice enlistment process protested in Barishal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, BARISHAL

Protesting mismanagement and nepotism in the enlistment process of the special open market sale (OMS) list, a citizens' platform handed over a memorandum to the district administration yesterday noon.

The "United Platform of Barishal to Resist Covid-19" alleged that enlistments are being done by considering political identity.

Manisha Chakrabarty, coordinator of the platform, said, "We have received at least 200 complaints from 10 wards across five areas of Barishal City Corporation. We demand proper investigation and fare enlistment of the ultra poor."

"We received these complaints from Chadmari, Rupatali, Bhatikhana, Nazir Mahalla and Palashpur areas, some of the poorest neighbourhoods of the city," added Manisha, also a leader of left-leaning political party Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD).

Faruk Hossain, resident of Chadmari slum area under ward 10, alleged that his name was not included in the list as he does not have political connections with the ruling party.

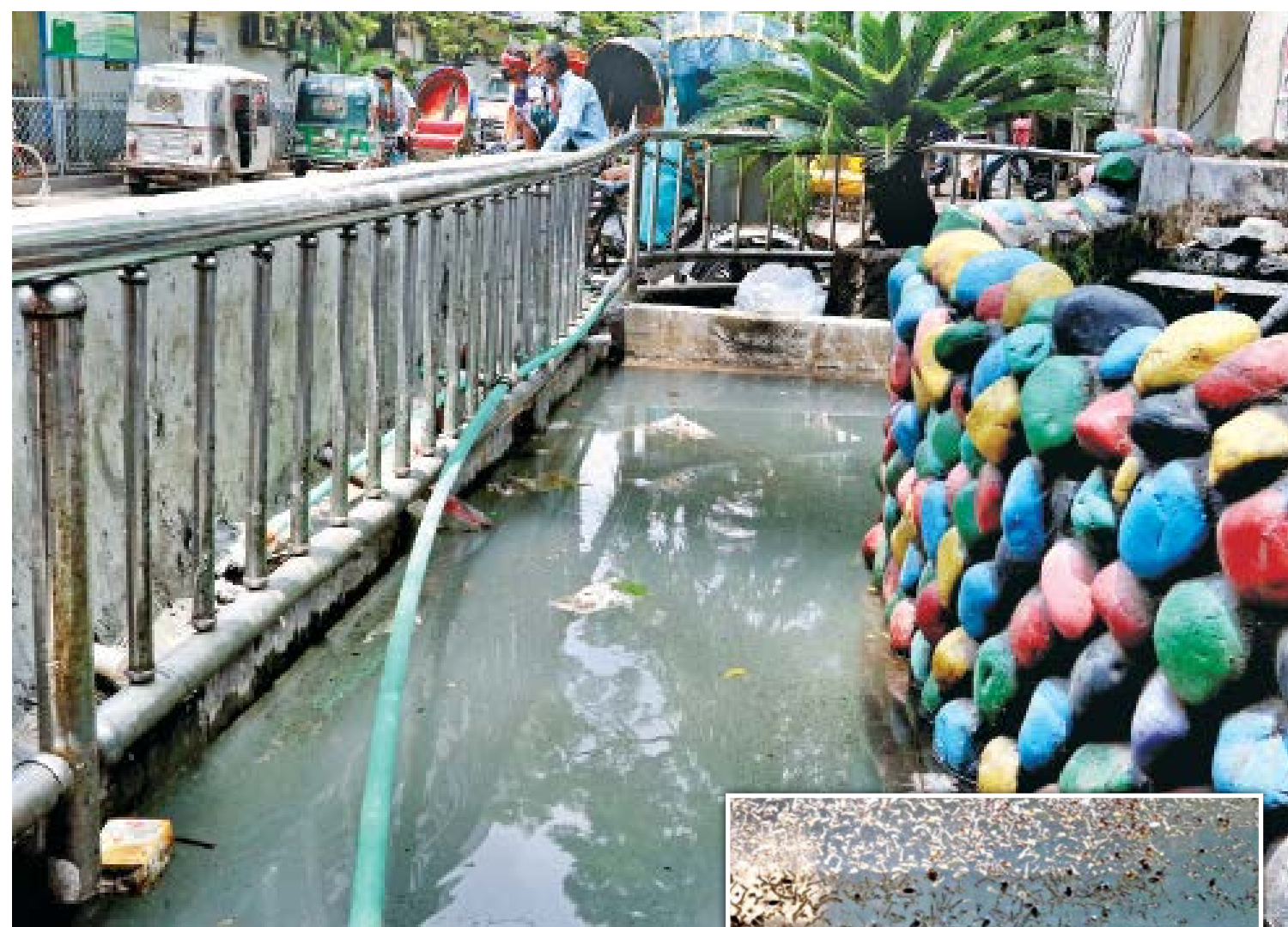
Rickshaw-puller Shahid, resident of Palashpur Slum area under ward 5, alleged the same while speaking to this correspondent.

Faruk Hossain Shikder, regional controller of food at Barishal, said there are five committees to scrutinise the lists. "We are yet to receive any such allegation," he told this newspaper.

"It's an ongoing process. If we find any fault in the enlistment, we will cancel the entrant after investigation," he added. However, he did not mention what to do regarding those who have allegedly been left out of the list.

Deputy Commissioner SM Ajar Rahman said, "We have received the memorandum and the allegations will be investigated. We will not accept any enlistment based on political identities."

According to the regional controller, the special OMS programme will sell 20kg of rice for Tk 10 per kg to enlisted card-holders.



This fountain near Dhaka Medical College Hospital's burn unit no longer serves its original purpose of beautification. Left unattended for months, it has rather become a prime breeding ground for mosquitoes. Inset, mosquito larvae are visible under the still water. This is especially concerning amid the coronavirus outbreak, and the government has been served a legal notice to take action against mosquito menace as "dengue season" is approaching. The photos were taken recently.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

DENGUE IN DHAKA Legal notice served on city mayors, DGHS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A resident of Dhaka city yesterday sent legal notice to mayors of both city corporations, health secretary and director general of Directorate General of Health Services, requesting them to take necessary steps in 24 hours to kill Aedes mosquitoes.

Fahima Ferdous served the legal notice through emails, saying if the respondents do not take measures within the period, she will take appropriate legal action.

The mosquito menace in Dhaka is currently proliferating alongside the Covid-19 outbreak. A total of 80 people died and 5,600 were infected by dengue fever at this time last year, she said in the notice.

She also said the government has taken measures to tackle the pandemic but the two mayors have not taken necessary steps to tackle the mosquito menace, although they are constitutionally responsible for ensuring residents' good health.

Fahima told The Daily Star that she will move a writ petition before the High Court, seeking necessary orders if steps are not taken.