

Condition of nat'l professor Anisuzzaman critical: family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health condition of National Professor Anisuzzaman is developing from concerning to critical level, his family said yesterday.

Earlier on April 27, the Dhaka University professor emeritus was admitted to Universal Medical College Hospital after he fell seriously ill.

Prof Anisuzzaman was shifted to the capital's Combined Military Hospital (CMH) on Saturday, as his condition was not improving. Apart from heart problems, the 83-year-old writer has been suffering from kidney and lung complications, and respiratory problems, according to his son Ananda Zaman.

"My father's health condition is going from concerning to critical level. Doctors said they were expecting better response from the treatment, but that's not happening," Ananda said after visiting his father at the hospital yesterday.

Earlier in the noon, Ananda said Prof Anisuzzaman's condition was not stable. "Doctors are saying that his condition

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Activists fighting for rights of farmers yesterday organised a unique human chain that is devoid of humans, at the capital's Jatiya Press Club. They used balloons with faces sketched on them and fabric to emulate individuals holding hands together, probably as a measure to maintain social distancing. Unfortunately, police personnel wearing protective gear in the back seem to have forgotten about this important measure, as they are huddled together, putting themselves at risk of getting infected.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Ctg running out of isolation beds

Only 315 allocated; experts urge for more dedicated hospitals

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

With the number of Covid-19 patients increasing everyday, the beds dedicated for them in Chattogram are going to be filled up soon; so the authorities must take immediate steps, said health experts and concerned citizens.

According to the civil surgeon's office, the number of dedicated beds for Covid-19 patients is 315 in Chattogram. Till Saturday, the number of people infected with coronavirus was 219.

A total of 64 patients have been discharged by this time, and 125 are undergoing treatment in the hospitals. Eighteen persons have died so far.

If the number of patients in isolation is taken into account, the figure will be much higher as according to the civil surgeon's office, a total of 219 patients were in isolation till Saturday. Many of them were admitted to hospitals and many were in home isolation.

Only two government hospitals have been dedicated for treating Covid-19 patients. Chattogram General Hospital has 100 isolation beds and 10 ICU beds while Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases has 50 isolation beds. The rest 165 are at 14 upazila health complexes.

Besides, privately-initiated Chattogram Field Hospital is treating both Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 patients with a capacity of 60 beds.

"We have 100 isolation beds and 62 patients are admitted to the isolation ward," Dr Abdur Rob, senior consultant of medicine at CGH, said yesterday. "Number of positive cases is increasing day by day," he said.

Under this circumstance, concerned citizens and health experts urged the government to take immediate steps to increase the number of isolation beds and dedicated hospitals.

"If the government does not take immediate steps to increase the number of dedicated Covid-19 hospitals, patients will suffer," said SM Nazer Hossain, central vice president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh.

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Action against those misusing the Digital Security Act: Quader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Action will be taken against those who will misuse the Digital Security Act, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said yesterday.

He also said the home ministry will remain careful so that the law is not being misused.

Quader, also general secretary of ruling Awami League, said this while was addressing reporters at a briefing at his official residence, said a press release.

Criticising BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir's remarks, Quader said the BNP leader's comment was an "ill-attempt to create confusion in the country's political arena".

He said BNP has resorted to an "ill tactic" to materialise its political agenda in the name of criticising the government.

On Saturday, Fakhrul demanded repeal of the DSA and alleged that the law is being misused rampantly during the crisis period of coronavirus outbreak across the country.

On government's relief efforts, Quader said, "Anyone can uphold the truth if something ambiguous regarding relief distribution takes place. However, twisting the effort and spreading it as political propaganda is an offense."

"Anyone has scope to agree or disagree on any [government] effort," he added.

Quader said the government is respectful to people's democratic rights. However, ill attempts to spread confusion among people's minds without verifying the truth is not tolerable at all, he said.

He said gross allegation of rice theft against public representatives was not true, mentioning that there are 61,569 public representatives at different levels in the country.

Allegations have not been raised against all of them, he said, adding the government has taken punitive action immediately against those who were found guilty.

"Action has been taken even against those who were party men. So, gross allegation of relief goods embezzlement is not right," he added.

72 police personnel recover from Covid-19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 72 police personnel who were tested Covid-19 positive earlier made a recovery yesterday.

The police personnel were released from Central Police Hospital after they were tested negative in two consecutive tests, said Soheli Rana, assistant inspector general (media) of Police Headquarters (PHQ).

With this, a total of 147 police personnel have so far recovered from the infection.

According to a tally by the Police Headquarters, around 1,594 police personnel were so far infected till yesterday noon. Of them, 745 are of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

Seven police personnel have died from infection while around 4,000 are in isolation or in quarantine, according to the PHQ..

As the Central Police Hospital is struggling to deal with the huge number of patients, police authorities have booked a private hospital to treat its members.

VIRTUAL HEARING OF URGENT CASES

Chief justice forms SC, HC benches

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday constituted three single-judge benches of the High Court for holding virtual hearing and disposing of urgent cases through digital services during the ongoing closure.

The three HC judges are Justice Obaidul Hassan, Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim and Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar.

He also formed a bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court with Justice Md Nuruzzaman for virtual hearing.

The chief justice took the decision in a full court meeting with the judges of the SC's Appellate and High Court Divisions through videoconference.

Meeting sources said he also decided to issue necessary directives for the lower courts for holding trial proceedings of urgent cases through using information and communication technology during the ongoing closure. He will issue necessary directives in line with the ordinance issued by President Abdul Hamid on Saturday.

Regular activities of all courts are closed since March 26. The closure is scheduled to stay till May 16.

Several lawyers have requested the chief justice to allow virtual court functions during the ongoing closure.

Syed Mahmud Hossain at a full court meeting with the judges recently decided to request the government to take necessary steps in this regard and subsequently, the cabinet on May 7 approved an ordinance.

Following the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam told a news briefing at his secretariat office, "It is necessary to formulate a legal framework to continue the trial process in courts digitally or through videoconferencing, since the backlog of cases is increasing."

"So, the cabinet has finally approved the Information Technology Usage Ordinance by the Court, 2020," he said. Once the ordinance comes into force, trials can be held digitally without the physical presence of lawyers and their clients in courts.

Unpaid pvt university teachers in a tight spot

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

All educational institutions in the country have remained closed since March 17 to contain the spread of Covid-19. As the situation shows no signs of relenting, the government has now extended the closure till May 16.

Amidst this virtual lockdown, almost all private sector industries are bearing the brunt of a faltering economy, and private universities are no different.

As the shutdown continues, many private universities are failing to pay faculty and staff their salaries, both fully and partially. This is pushing university employees and their families into great economic and psychological distress.

"I am not sure what is waiting for us in the future. I did not get paid for two months [March and April]. I have already started borrowing from my well-wishers and friends. But they can only help me for so long," a teacher of University of Development Alternative (UODA) told The Daily Star recently, preferring not to be named.

"If this continues, I will be left with no option but to leave the profession," he added.

During March and April, several universities have reportedly paid half or less than half of teachers' and staff's salaries, while several others have not made any payments yet. Talking to this correspondent, authority figures of several universities confirmed this.

University authorities say the complication is arising from their failure to collect tuition fees from students.

UODA registrar Dr Iffat Quaes

Chowdhury said they cannot pay everyone's salaries as students cannot be reached for semester fees due to the closure of their campuses.

"We will try to clear all dues before Eid-ul-Fitr (expected to be observed on May 24 or 25)," he assured.

Similar sentiments were echoed all across the board.

Metropolitan University, Sylhet pro-VC Prof Shiba Prasad Sen confirmed that they have not paid salaries for March and April but all dues will be cleared within this month.

Cox's Bazar International University trustee board secretary Mujibur Rahman said salaries of March have been deposited to the bank (as of this report's filing) and it will be disbursed soon.

Stamford University treasurer Lutfor Rahman said 30 percent of March's salaries have been paid, although all payments for April are outstanding.

Asked if the university can pay the staff from savings, Lutfor said they do not have any savings due not having as many students as it used to.

Sylhet International University VC Prof Shahid Ullah Talukder said they have given festival allowance for Eid-ul-Fitr, equivalent to a month's basic salary.

"We cannot pay the salaries for April. We know many families are in hardship, and we are trying our best," he said.

Daffodil International University paid 50-70 percent salaries for March. They are yet to pay salaries for April, pro-vice chancellor SM Mahbub Ul Haque Majumder said.

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32 fishermen jailed by mobile court in Barishal

They were trying to catch shrimp spawn

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A mobile court jailed 32 fishermen for attempting to catch shrimp spawn in the river Meghna in Hijla upazila of Barishal early yesterday.

Of them, 31 were sentenced to one month and another to one year imprisonments by the court led by Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Md Aminul Islam, said river police.

Catching of such shrimp spawn is illegal, said Sanjoy Mandal, sub-inspector and in-charge of MV Parijat Temporary River Police Camp.

The fishermen in a trawler were preparing to catch spawn in the river near Hijla launch ghat, he said.

The fishers confessed to the offence, the police official added.

The court also seized the trawler and 25 pots used for storing spawn, said the police officer, who was in the drive.

All the convicts are from Chunarchar village in Mehendiganj upazila, said the SI.

240 Bangladeshis return from India

154 UK nationals leave Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

240 more Bangladeshi citizens returned home from India by two separate special flights yesterday.

Of the total, 74 returned from Kolkata by a chartered flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines while 166 returned from Chennai by a special flight of US-Bangla Airlines, sources at Biman and the Dhaka airport, said.

"The special flight of Biman landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) at 3:50pm," Tahera Khandaker, deputy general manager, public relations, Biman, told The Daily Star.

On the other hand, the US-Bangla Airlines' flight landed at 2:45pm, said an official of Aviation Security, HSIA.

With yesterday's returnees, around 2,567 Bangladeshi nationals stuck in the neighbouring country due to suspension of passenger flights returned to the country, sources at HSIA said.

Most of the Bangladeshis stranded in India went there for treatment purpose.

After yesterday's flights, Biman is scheduled to operate four more: one from Mumbai on May 12, from Bengaluru on May 13, 15 and from Delhi on May 14.

US-Bangla Airlines, will operate two more special flights, both from Chennai, on May 13 and 14, the Bangladesh High Commission in India said in a release.

154 UK CITIZENS LEAVE DHAKA

Meanwhile, another 154 British citizens stranded in Bangladesh left Dhaka for London by a special flight of Biman yesterday.

The chartered flight left HSIA around 12:09pm, HSIA Director Group Captain AHM Touhid-ul Ahsan told media through a WhatsApp message.

Bangladesh Airforce Welfare Trust, with support from the foreign ministry, took initiative to operate the special flight.

Bangladesh government has sent various medical items -- including personal protective equipment, hand sanitiser,

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The two doyls of this famous Dhaka landmark stand in perfect contrast with the greenery behind them. The sculpture is cleaner while the trees are greener, as the city's air has been less dusty during the shutdown. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ