

VIRTUAL COURT

Three petitions filed on first day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After a break of 46 days, lawyers yesterday started filing cases with the High Court for virtual hearing and disposal, amid the ongoing closure stemmed out of coronavirus outbreak.

A total of three petitions were submitted through email to the HC bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim, mentioning the reasons for their urgent hearing.

The officer concerned of the HC bench will now inform the lawyers through email and cellphone when the judge will hold hearing of the petitions, SC sources said.

No case was filed with other two HC benches yesterday.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain on Sunday 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 also issued some directives for the courts about dealing with urgent cases through using technology. He issued the "practice directives" in line with the ordinance issued by President Abdul Hamid on Saturday.

The Appellate Division bench will start dealing with cases from May 14.

Meanwhile yesterday, the Dhaka Metropolitan Session Judge's Court started its virtual court proceedings through videoconferencing.

An official of the court told The Daily Star they have issued a notice in this regard and passed it to the Dhaka Bar Association along with the directives the Supreme Court mentioned for virtual courts.

The court asked for applications from lawyers so that the virtual hearings can be prioritised case by case, with the hearing of bail petitions of those accused -- who are now in jail -- taking top priority.

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Members of Pragatisheel Chhatra Jote, a progressive students' alliance, formed a human chain yesterday in front of Jatiya Press Club demanding that Digital Security Act be repealed. A number of cases have been filed in recent weeks under the controversial law, drawing criticism from various quarters.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Doctors hopeful about condition of nat'l professor Anisuzzaman

Says his family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Doctors are cautiously optimistic that the health condition of National Professor Anisuzzaman, being treated at Combined Military Hospital (CMH), will be stabilised, said his family yesterday.

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

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

"They [doctors] are still hopeful about further development but looking forward to a sustainable one, as the situation is still at a concerning level. They want us to wait till tomorrow [Tuesday] evening to give us a complete update," he said yesterday afternoon.

Prof Anisuzzaman, one of the most prolific essayists and scholars of the country, was previously

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COVID-19 TESTING IN CTG

Contrasting results a cause for concern

ARUN BIKASH DEY, CTG

A quizzical rate of positive results of Covid-19 test results at Chattogram Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (CVASU) has caused some alarm, after 53 out of 97 samples showed positive on Sunday, and 40 out of 61 samples showed positive on Thursday.

In stark contrast, at another testing facility in the port city -- Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID), 22 samples were tested positive out of 217 on Sunday, while 18 positive cases were detected out of 198 samples on Thursday.

The civil surgeon's office officially announced the results.

Health experts at BITID said there may be some weaknesses in the testing process at CVASU, since most of their lab technicians are not experts and there has been a previous case of mistake there as well.

CVASU, on the other hand, claimed that the percentage of positive cases were much higher as many samples were taken from Covid-19 positive patients for the second time and they who were undergoing treatment at hospitals.

Testing at BITID started on March 25, while CVASU started testing nearly a month later, on April 23. However, CVASU does not collect samples; BITID collects and sends those for test.

Chittagong Medical College also started Covid-19 testing from Saturday. Till Sunday, results of all nine samples tested there were negative.

WHAT AUTHORITIES SAY

Dr Hasan Shahriar Kabir, Chattogram divisional director of Directorate General of Health Services, said Thursday's results were declared on Friday after collecting details of patients. "There is no scope for controversy or confusion over the result," he told The Daily Star.

Asked about the high percentage of positive cases, he said most Covid-19 positive patients were undergoing treatment in hospitals with symptoms of fever and coughing. "The more you collect samples from symptomatic patients, the more the result will likely be positive," he said.

Contacted, Chattogram Civil Surgeon Dr Sheikh Fazle Rabbi said they too were surprised to see the results. "We declared the results after verifying it," he added.

'A MATTER OF WORRY'

Prof Dr Shakeel Ahmed, in-charge of the BITID laboratory, said, "When I came to know about the Thursday's results [at CVASU], I was surprised and worried."

This is not the first time that samples from CVASU raised questions, he said.

Prof Shakeel said around a week ago, they found some anomalies in results while re-testing those. He did not elaborate any further.

He also informed that the lab technicians at CVASU were trained by them. "Usually, students perform the tests there, and they are working amid pressure. So there is some weakness there, which may affect quality," he told this newspaper.

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114 Bangladeshis return from UK

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 114 Bangladeshi nationals stranded in the UK returned home yesterday by a charter flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines amid flight suspension due to Covid-19 pandemic.

The flight landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport from London at 9:40am, Biman Deputy General Manager (Public Relation) Tahera Khondokar told the media through WhatsApp.

Meanwhile, a press release issued by Bangladesh High Commission in London said the Bangladesh government's special flight, BG 4041, departed London at 7:45pm London local time on Sunday for Dhaka carrying the Bangladeshis. Most of the returnees are students, it added.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to the UK Saida Muna Tasneem saw them off at the Heathrow Airport.

As per the Bangladesh government decision, all returnees would have to be sent to a 14-day institutional quarantine if they fail to show medical certificate.

Apart from the UK, Bangladesh has so far brought back stranded Bangladeshis from India, Australia, Thailand, Singapore, Myanmar and Malaysia while charter flights have also been planned to bring nationals back from USA and Malaysia.

On May 5, Bangladesh extended the ongoing ban on scheduled passenger flight operation for the fifth consecutive time till May 16 with all countries except for China.

Different countries, including the USA, the UK, Canada, Turkey, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Bhutan, Myanmar, Germany and different European countries so far operated several special charter flights amid the flight suspension to take their citizens back from Bangladesh.

Beyond the line of duty

DMP launches mobile shop to deliver essentials to Dhaka residents for free

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

To reduce exposure to Covid-19 infection, police have introduced an app and mobile shop to reach daily commodities to the doorsteps of Dhaka residents.

Alongside the initiative, the law enforcement agency has also opened a page in social media to support the needy and middle class families, according to Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

The Tejgaon division of DMP has launched the app -- wevbd.com -- last week to deliver essential products to the doorsteps of people so that they do not need to come out of home.

"We have started a test-run, through which people living in Tejgaon division will be able to place orders for essentials. Police with the assistance of young volunteers will deliver the products free of charge," Biplob Bijoy Talukder, deputy commissioner of Tejgaon division, told The Daily Star recently.

He said many areas have been locked down now due to coronavirus, that's why they launched the app to help people in need.

A huge number of people started calling the official phone numbers of six police stations -- Tejgaon, Mohammadpur, Adabao, Sher-e-Banglanagar, Hatirjheel and Tejgaon Industrial -- under the division for support and police provided them with daily essentials, said the official.

With an aim to make the process easier, police sought support from area-based young volunteers and then designed the app, said the deputy commissioner.

HOW THE APP WORKS

Officials said people will be able to order rice, lentil, sugar, salt, flour, potato, onion, oil, garlic, ginger, different types of spices, baby food and medicine through the app.

To place an order, one has to visit -- wevbd.com

-- then select respective police station and complete registration by providing details such as delivery address.

Once the grocery items are selected and finalised, the order will be delivered to a person's doorsteps, they said.

The application has three sections -- users, admin and volunteers, said Hafiz Al Faruk, additional deputy commissioner of Tejgaon Division.

"We have selected some grocery and medicine shops so volunteers can collect products from there at actual price. Once an order is placed, a nearby volunteer will collect the order and deliver those to the address with a bill and collect the money," he said.

Faruk said they have planned to continue the support even after the situation becomes normal. "We will then provide the service to the elderly and people with disabilities," he said.

OTHER INITIATIVES

The Gulshan division of DMP has already launched a new service in apartment buildings with the help of a volunteer group "Hello Shop". Customers can collect essential items (with price tags) from a shelf set up downstairs and leave the money in a cash box next to it, Sudip Chakraborty, deputy commissioner of the division, told The Daily Star.

"We are planning to set up such shops at all large apartments in the division but it will take some time as we need to take care of the logistics first," he said.

The Gulshan division also has home delivery options and a volunteer group -- "Swapno Chaka" -- is helping them in this regard, added DC Sudip.

Meanwhile, the Mirpur division of DMP has launched a platform called "Khoj Niyechen" to stand beside the needy by providing them with food support.

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Petition seeks protection of Halda dolphins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Supreme Court lawyer yesterday filed a writ petition seeking its directive on the authorities concerned of the government to immediately take necessary steps to prevent killing dolphins in Halda river in Chattogram and to protect them.

Barrister Abdul Qaium Litan submitted the petition as a public interest litigation through email for a virtual hearing.

In the petition, the lawyer prayed to the High Court to issue a rule asking the authorities concerned to explain why their failure to prevent killing dolphins in Halda river should not be declared illegal.

Abdul Qaium said in the writ petition that total 24 dolphins in Halda river were killed since 2017 till date, endangering the environment and ecology, according to a report published on The Daily Star online on May 8.

Barrister Qaium told The Daily Star that the High Court is yet to set a date for hearing on the writ petition.



Residents of the capital are not the only ones in a frenzy to shop for Eid. After markets reopened on Sunday, Rangpur city saw huge traffic congestions throughout the day, creating long tailbacks amid the pandemic. This photo was taken yesterday from the city's Jahaz Company intersection.

PHOTO: STAR

'Use reserve funds to pay our salaries'

Univ teachers issue statement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 829 public and private university teachers yesterday in a joint statement said private university authorities can pay salaries to their teachers and staff using their reserve funds.

According to Private University Act 2010, it is mandatory for each private university to have a reserve fund. They can use that fund to bear expenses in times of crisis, said the statement signed by Kamrul Hassan Khan, chief coordinator of Bangladesh Biswabidyalaya Shikkhak Forum, an association of public and private university teachers.

They urged the education ministry and University Grants Commission (UGC) to resolve the issue by sitting with university trustee boards as soon as possible, the statement said.

According to the law, each private university in Dhaka and Chattogram has a reserve fund of Tk 5 crore, each university in other metropolitan cities has Tk 3 crore, and each university in other places has Tk 1.5 crore.

UGC Private University Division Director Fakhruul Islam said universities cannot use the fund without UGC approval. Asked, UGC Chairperson Prof Kazi Shahidullah appealed to all private universities to pay salaries. "If they send us proposals for using the funds and repaying the amount later, we will study their proposal to come up with a solution," he told this newspaper.

Kamrul said many private universities are failing to pay salaries, both fully and partially. "This is inhumane and unprecedented."

"Our private universities are more like industries, and this is not at all a sign of a healthy nation," Kamrul told The Daily Star.

To contain coronavirus spread, all educational institutions have been closed since March 17. The number of infections is still rising, showing no sign of slowing down. As a result, the government extended the closure till May 16.