

Atiqul takes charge as DNCC mayor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) mayor Atiqul Islam yesterday said they will start a massive drive from Saturday to destroy Aedes larvae and breeding grounds.

Addressing at an online press conference after taking charge as mayor, he said their mobile courts are also conducting drives at residences and under-construction buildings since May 10.

Atiqul said they have introduced free dengue testing facilities from May 11 at five maternity clinics and 22 health centres in DNCC. Regarding coronavirus, he said they would facilitate eight sample collection booths with help of Brac, set up at eight DNCC community centres.

They have already handed over Mohakhali kitchen market building to DGHS to turn it to a coronavirus treatment hospital and isolation centre, he said.

About distribution of relief, the mayor said they are planning to introduce QR code system to monitor distribution properly. He said DNCC has distributed food assistance to 3 lakh families and will continue during this lockdown.

"I will host Facebook live once a month to know about problems of residents and will try to solve it," the mayor said.



A woman stops her rickshaw and buys a plant from a mobile nursery in the capital's Kakrail. Gardening has gained popularity during the quarantine, with people having more leisure time and keen to bring bits of nature indoors and on their rooftops. Nursery owners have taken the opportunity to take their business on the road to meet the rising demand for plants and seedlings.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

COVID-19 TESTING

Brac to set up 100 walk-in kiosks across country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brac is going to set up 100 walk-in kiosks across 19 risky regions of the country, to expedite the government's initiative of scaling up testing capacity for the novel coronavirus.

Of these, at least 50 will be installed in Dhaka by next week, while fifty more kiosks will be set up across the country soon, the world's top NGO said in a statement yesterday.

Initially, Brac installed kiosks at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital on a pilot basis. Later, more kiosks were set up at Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Memorial KPI Specialized Hospital & Nursing College, and in Narayanganj, in line with the directive from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

"We have also identified several spots to install kiosks in consultation with two Dhaka city mayors," said Morseda Chowdhury, associate director of Brac's Health, Nutrition and Population Programme in a statement.

As of May 11, she said, 17 kiosks have been installed at 14 spots in Dhaka as per DGHS directive, and work on installing more booths is in progress.

"Brac is yet to receive any new funds in this regard. However, the organisation is diverting some of its funds from the Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK government to continue its proceedings," Chowdhury said.

While kiosks set up at hospitals will be operated by respective hospital staff, two trained medical technologists from Brac will collect samples at the kiosks set up elsewhere from suspected Covid-19 patients from 9am to noon Saturday through Thursday.

Once collected, the samples will be sent to testing facilities designated by DGHS, and patients will be informed results via text messages.

UNDISCLOSED WEALTH Ex-DIG prisons Bazlur Rashid denied bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday again denied bail to suspended deputy inspector general of prisons Bazlur Rashid in a case over amassing Tk 3.08 crore beyond the known source of his income.

The HC bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim passed the order after holding a virtual hearing on a petition filed by Bazlur on May 11.

Advocate Mesbail Islam appeared for Bazlur Rashid at the hearing, while Attorney General Mahbubey Alam opposed the bail petition.

On January 29 this year another HC bench led by Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder refused to grant bail to Bazlur Rashid in the same case.

Stymied by the traffic shutdown

Over 3 lakh people working at automobile workshops struggling to make ends meet

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

No cacophony of metals clinking, no yelling of experts to apprentice mechanics, only skeletons of under-repair vehicles parked by the roadside testifies that there used to be automobile workshops on Motiheel's Culvert Road. These days, an eerie silence pervades the area.

Ever since the government's stay-home order, the scenario of Culvert Road's workshop hub has changed immensely, along with the fate of motor mechanics who worked there.

These workers -- who help keep the wheels of the transport sector moving -- are now struggling to take care of their families.

According to Bangladesh Automobile Workshop Malik Samity (BAWMS), about three lakh people living on automobile workshop earnings are facing hardship during the shutdown.

Not only them, the backward linkage industries that gear the transport sector are also feeling the pinch of the economic debilitation

caused by the novel coronavirus.

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), vehicles and parts worth around Tk 1,147 crore were imported only in January this year, from which the government earned a huge revenue.

The government also collects a lot of revenue from automobile workshops. However, when traders and workers find themselves in trouble, the government is nowhere to be seen, union leaders alleged.

"We pay tax and VAT worth nearly Tk 1,000 crore to the government each year. But during this time of crisis, they're indifferent to our plight," said BAWMS Secretary General Jahangir Alam. The organisation represents 20,000 workshops around the country.

In Jashore municipality, several hundred automobile workshop workers demonstrated for relief in the last week of April, sources said.

Most motor mechanics get paid on a weekly basis. As the closure has prolonged, they have already finished their meager savings, said

Shahin Kabir, general secretary of BAWMS Jashore unit. The unit has nearly 1,000 registered workshops where over 3,000 people work.

Shahin said he sought help from district administration, municipality and three large private transport manufacturers on the last week of April.

Unable to pay salaries, workshop owners have turned to banks, but to no avail. "Banks have denied giving us loans," Jahangir said. "We need the money to pay our staff and keep the industry alive."

TOUGH TIME FOR LINKAGE INDUSTRIES

Besides the workshops, people involved in the motor parts business are also going through tough times.

Bangladesh Auto Spare Parts Merchants and Manufacturers Association has 20,000 registered members across the country, its treasurer Abul Kashem Azad Bepari told The Daily Star.

Many of these small entrepreneurs have limited income. "When the lockdown started, many

went home with Tk 10,000 to Tk 20,000 of savings. After so many days of closure, they are now knee-deep in debt, he said.

Saleh Ahmed, owner of Siam Motors in Sayedabad Bus Terminal area, said his earning is Tk 1 lakh to Tk 2 lakh per month during normal times.

"I shut my shop on March 24. Since then I'm bearing my family expenditure and staff salaries from my savings," he said. Ahmed sells all sorts of parts and tyres of bus, mini-bus, SUVs and sedans.

Contacted, Bangladesh Motor Parts and Tyre Tube Merchants Association Secretary Md Aslam said, "We'll incur at least Tk 3,000 crore loss during the crisis."

The association has 3,000 members and over 20,000 staff working in the industry.

Aslam, however, said they are still willing to extend their support to the government. "If the closure is extended, we'll keep our shops shut for the sake of public safety," he added.

HC rejects Sangram editor's bail plea

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday refused to grant bail to Abul Asad, editor of Bangladesh daily Sangram, in a case filed under Digital Security Act on charges of "circulating provocative report and sedition".

The bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim passed the order following a virtual hearing on a bail petition by Asad.

It said lawyers for the accused may place the petition before it after regular functions of the court resume.

Asad is now in Kashimpur jail. A Dhaka court sent him to jail on December 14, said his lawyer Shishir Manir.

During the hearing, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam vehemently opposed the bail petition, saying that the accused has committed a serious offence by terming convicted war criminal Abdul Quader Molla a martyr in his newspaper.

Asad's lawyer Advocate Khandker Mahbub Hossain prayed to the HC to grant his client bail, saying that he is 80 and suffering in jail for five months with asthma and eye problems.

Azfar Hossain, a freedom fighter, filed the case with Hatirjheel Police Station. Police detained Asad on December 13 after mob vandalised the daily's office, over publishing a report that termed Quader Molla a "martyr".

Molla, former assistant secretary general of Jamaat and known infamously as "The butcher of Mirpur" during the Liberation War, was hanged in 2013 after being convicted in a case for committing crimes against humanity during the war by the Supreme Court on September 17 that year.

Unilever, 2030 Water Resources, BDRCS join hands

CITY DESK

Unilever Bangladesh, Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and 2030 Water Resources Group are collaborating to prevent spread of Covid-19 at deputy commissioners' (DC) offices that are still operating amid the pandemic.

Unilever Bangladesh has already pledged Tk 200 million to help fight against Covid-19. The commitment includes product donations, creating awareness, improving health infrastructure, and protecting people and livelihoods.

Under this collaboration, the overall water, sanitation and hygiene spectrum will be improved by installing hand-washing stations at entrance of each DC office, with added support for disinfection of office compounds, improved sanitation and safe drinking water facility.

BDRCS will lead the implementation across 64 districts. DC office employees will be trained on how to run regular disinfection activities and inform office visitors on hygienic protocols.

This initiative will help raise awareness and disseminate messages designed by Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research and World Health Organization.

Unused Biman tickets will be valid till March 2021

Qatar Airways announces ticket giveaway for healthcare professionals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As air travel remains suspended during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the airlines industry is taking steps to keep their customers satisfied. National airliner Biman Bangladesh Airlines and popular international airlines Qatar Airways have made special announcements pertaining to the pandemic over the last few days.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines announced yesterday that passengers will be able to avail their unused tickets until March 14, 2021. In a WhatsApp message, Biman managing director and CEO M Mohabbir Hossain said no surcharge will be added for this.

Passengers will also be able to take refunds during this time, the Biman boss said.

Meanwhile, Qatar Airways has announced to give away 100,000 free tickets to frontline healthcare professionals as a token of gratitude for their heroic work in taking care of people during the pandemic. Healthcare professionals from every country in the world will be eligible for tickets.

The giveaway opened from May 12 and will run till May 18. Healthcare professionals can register for this exclusive offer on the airways' website by submitting a form. They will receive a unique promotion code, offered on a first come, first served basis, the airlines said in a press release.

Each country will receive a daily allocation of tickets, depending on population size, the airlines said.

Healthcare professionals who receive the promotion code can book up to two complimentary economy class return tickets on Qatar Airways operated flights -- one for themselves and one for a companion -- to anywhere on the airline's global network, added the release.

Tickets must be booked before November 26, with travel valid until December 10, 2020.



Sohag (behind), who runs a few local buses, has been out of work ever since the suspension of public transport in the capital. After his buses remained stationary week after week, getting soaked in rain then scorched in the sun, he noticed something: their outer bodies began to rust. To save a bus of his, he and his worker opened cans of paint and brushed the whole vehicle in blue. This photo was taken recently from Mirpur.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Countrymen on their minds US-based Agami Education Foundation helping feed the underprivileged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A US-based charity organisation run by Bangladeshi expatriates has extended support to underprivileged families hit by the Covid-19 shutdown.

Agami Education Foundation, a sister organisation of Agami Inc USA, has already distributed more than 3000 food packs to underprivileged families who were affected by the ongoing shutdown.

A total of 3,241 families in Dhaka, Gazipur, Comilla, Sylhet, Habiganj, Chittagong, Rangamati, and Jhenaidah have already received relief packets containing 12kg rice, 8kg potato, 2 litre Soybean oil, 2kg salt, 2kg lentil, four Dettol soaps and other necessary commodities, said Tahsin Rouf, who is leading the Covid-19 response for Agami.

"We run 13 schools across the country where around 3,000 students are enrolled. Families of those students are underprivileged. So we stand beside those families. We shall continue to stand by them and do what is necessary to keep them safe," Rouf told The Daily Star.

Shirin Akter, a teacher from Agami-supported school PSD Nandipara at Khilgaon, thanked AEF for taking the initiative.

She said the school's students' families are mostly day labourers and they are struggling during the shutdown. "There is a scarcity of food, and Agami Foundation's aid will be very helpful for them," she added.

Nafisa Khanam, AEF executive director, said the relief distribution work started on March 28.

Agami is hosting a fundraising event to support and continue their campaign. Details can be found on their web site -- www.agami.org -- and their Facebook page.

One can also donate to AEF's bank account in Dhaka or through bKash.

MOSQUITO MENACE IN SYLHET CITY

Drive resumes as Aedes larvae found in 5 spots

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

An entomological survey team supporting Sylhet City Corporation's (SCC) anti-mosquito drive found Aedes larvae at five locations of two wards in the city, as the drive resumed after being disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic.

After surveying seven wards, the team found traces in wards 25 and 26 -- mostly in stagnant water, inside tyres and sanitary materials kept in stores, said Dr Md Jahidul Islam, chief health officer of SCC.

SCC started the drive on February 23. As the mosquito menace was escalating, the corporation resumed the drive from Saturday and initiated entomological surveying.

"The survey was carried out with help from the civil surgeon's office. After finding traces of Aedes, we have taken initiatives to destroy them and ordered store owners to be vigilant," Dr Jahidul said.

The SCC health official said, "In June, we

will conduct another entomological survey covering all city wards and will also try to survey door-to-door."

He claims there is no shortage of larvicide and adulticide.

Many residents are complaining about mosquitoes everywhere despite spraying and fogging, Dr Jahidul said, "Most city canals and drains are clogged, and so, they become mosquito breeding zones. No matter how much we spray and fog, mosquitoes will remain until these are cleaned."

On March 11, a massive cleaning drive under "Clean Village, Clean City" project was initiated by the corporation but was halted due to the countrywide shutdown.

SCC Mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury said, "As we resumed the anti-mosquito drive and have already sprayed larvicide and adulticide in six wards, I am hopeful that we will be able to control the mosquito menace and prevent any possible dengue outbreak."

Stipends for 1.37cr pry students restart today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Distribution of stipends for some 1.37 crore primary level students resume today, with the beneficiaries set to get the money of October to November 2019 quarter.

The stipend was halted for over seven months as Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP) did not get extension on the time due to the coronavirus crisis. On May 4, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina approved the project extension, officials said.

"We have deposited the money to bank on Tuesday and it would be disbursed to the all beneficiaries on Thursday," Yusuf Ali, project director of PESP's third phase, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Project officials send the money to students' mothers through mobile banking services. They disburse the money four times a year -- in April, July, October and January.

Students will get the stipend today for October instalment, Yusuf said. Yusuf said for October instalment each student fulfilling required criteria got Tk 100 per month, as a single beneficiary of a family. Similarly, two children from the same family received Tk 200 per month, whereas in case of three and four children, the stipend was Tk 250 and Tk 300 per month, respectively.

He said they will disburse instalments of January and April before Eid. He said after PM's approval, from January instalment, the amount of stipend will increase by 50 percent, and each primary student will receive a yearly amount of Tk 1,000 for buying school supplies.

From January instalment each student will receive Tk 150. Two children from the same family will get Tk 300, and three and four children will receive Tk 400 and Tk 500, respectively.