

Taposh takes over charge as DSCC mayor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka South City Corporation's new mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh yesterday pledged to take steps to combat Aedes mosquitoes, as he formally took charge of office.

Addressing an online press briefing from Nagar Bhaban, Taposh said June to September is the peak season of Aedes, carrier of dengue and chikungunya viruses.

The new mayor promised of ensuring five basic services out of 28 that he had mentioned in his election manifesto, within 90 days -- ensuring public health safety in this time of Covid-19 pandemic, mosquito menace control, better management of waste, road construction and repairing, and traffic jam control.

He also said good governance and checking corruption in the autonomous body was also his target.

Asked whether he supports the government's decision of reopening markets, he said he would not prefer livelihood over lives, but would take steps in coordination with the government.



A child drains water from a pot of cooked rice, a task far beyond her age, by the footpath in the capital's Segunbagicha, while a crow lurks nearby, possibly hoping to get a share of the food. Life is never been kind to thousands of people like her who do not have a roof over their heads, and the pandemic has exposed their vulnerabilities even more starkly.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Covid-19 outbreak in port city may be approaching peak

Experts suggest ramping up testing, isolation efforts

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

With the percentage of Covid-19 positive cases increasing at an alarming rate and the total number of positive cases reaching 641 from 89 in just 12 days as of Friday, experts opine that the outbreak may be approaching its peak in Chattogram.

They recommended more rigorous programmes -- rigorous testing, rigorous contract tracing and isolation efforts. Things will take a turn for the worse if these measures are not ensured strictly, the warned.

The first case of Covid-19 was detected in Chattogram on April 3. On May 4, after a month, the total number of positive cases reached 89. But it started increasing rapidly in the next 12 days with 551 positive cases, taking the total number to 641 as of May 15.

On April 24, 2 positive cases were detected out of 183 samples; on April 25, the number was again 2 out of 189 samples and on April 26, 10 positive cases were detected out of 101 samples.

A total of 14 cases were detected out of 473 samples in three days at a percentage of 2.95.

But things took a turn for the worse in May.

On May 13, 95 positive cases were detected out of 369 samples; on May 14, 60 cases out of 394 and on May 15, 68 cases out of 464 samples.

Altogether 219 cases were detected out of 1,227 samples at a percentage of 17.84.

"Pandemic has a trend to reach its peak through geometric progression... study shows that a Covid-19 infected person is likely to contaminate three others," said Prof Dr Shakeel Ahmed, in-charge of Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID) laboratory.

"But this progression has to be controlled or slowed down through intervention measures like social and

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'Ek Takar Dokan' brings relief to distressed in Savar



Chobighor has set up the mobile shop to help out those in need. PHOTO: COLLECTED

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

Legend says during the reign of Mughal Subahdar Shaista Khan, a singla taka would buy you eight maunds of rice.

Something of a throwback is occurring at Savar right now. "Chobighor", a Savar based youth organisation, have been selling essential food items such as rice, pulses, flour, sugar, baby foods and other items since first Ramadan -- all for Tk 1!

The initiative comes as many people in the area have become unemployed due to the Covid-19 shutdown. In light of this, twenty active members of "Chobighar" -- all university students -- decided to start running an aid programme for the unemployed people in dire need.

Every day from 10am to 12 noon, Chobighar's mobile shop, named "Ek Takar Dokan" moves around the streets of Savar on a van.

Additionally, the organisation also home delivers seven to fifteen days' worth of essential food items to poor families for

just one taka.

Members of the organisation say rather than making it free, they are running the shop for an exchange value of minimum one taka so that the poor and needy don't see the aid as handouts.

So far, around 400 people have bought items from the mobile shop, said Prince Ghosh, president of the organisation. In addition, another 100 families have been sold food items through home delivery.

On the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, the organisation will start selling new clothes from May 10, Prince told this correspondent.

Roksana Begum, a resident of Arapara, said she buys from "Ek Takar Dokan" as rickshaw-puller husband's income has faced devastation due to the shutdown. "This initiative has been the biggest help for us," Roksana said.

Prince said they have bigger plans. "We have started the mobile shop on a limited scale, but we plan to expand by collecting more funds."

Court holiday now till May 30

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday extended the ongoing holiday for all courts across the country, including the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court, till May 30 -- in line with the government's decision to extend shutdown of offices.

However, the ongoing virtual functions of the courts will continue amid the closure.

Supreme Court Registrar General Md Ali Akbar issued two separate circulars yesterday to this effect, asking all the court officials and employees not to leave their workplaces during the closure. It has been said in a circular that all the courts of the country will remain on holiday from May 17 to May 28 including the public holiday on May 24, 25 and 26 on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr in line with government decision.

The scheduled weekly holidays on May 29 and 30 will be included in the extended holiday, according to the circular issued yesterday.

Holiday for the courts across the country was first declared from March 26 to April 4 in light of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

This is the seventh extension of the holiday for seventh times as the pandemic was not over.

Comprehensive plan needed for returnee migrants: rights groups

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Migrant rights groups want a comprehensive plan and transparent mechanism to reintegrate migrants who are returning from abroad due to losing jobs as a fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

In a virtual discussion yesterday, they said the immediate task of the government now is to look into the welfare of migrants and their family. The government also needs to maintain a database of the returnee migrants, including their contacts and skill sets.

The discussion on "Migrants Budget 2020-2021 and the Protection of Migrants and Families" under Covid-19 was jointly organised by WARBE Development Foundation, Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Programme (OKUP) and Institute of Informatics and Development (IID).

Expatriates' Welfare Secretary Ahmed Munirur Saleheen said already 3,500 Bangladeshi migrants have returned home and many are apprehended to return.

Therefore, the government is reviewing the impacts of this return and taking actions -- immediate, mid-term and long-term. Tk 10 crore has been allocated for food assistance, while Tk 700 crore for providing soft loans to the returnee migrants so they can start a business.

"We will also plan how we can help re-migration in the changed labour market situation including by re-skilling them," Saleheen said.

In a presentation, OKUP Executive Director Shakirul Islam said allocation of Tk 700 crore for reintegration is welcomed, but at this moment many migrants abroad and their families need emergency food and cash assistance. Only loan is not enough for reintegration, but its related services, easy procedures, training on small businesses or the skills they demand, mental support and social integration are also important.

IID CEO Syeed Ahamed said, "There has to be transparency in the safety net programme."

Dr Nurul Islam, former director at the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training, said, "We need to look into the future job market scenario and re-skill the aspirant migrants accordingly."

Lawmaker Shameem Haider Patwary suggested that the government create a public limited company with 49 percent share of migrants and thus they can get benefits.

Brac Migration Programme Head Shariful Hasan endorsed his suggestion.

Hasan Imam Shaon, managing director at the Centre for Development Communication DEVCOM Ltd, said there can be a joint government-NGO taskforce to address the impacts of coronavirus pandemic on migrants.

Parliamentary Caucus on Migration and Development Chair Israfil Alam MP and its member Mahjabeen Khaled MP also spoke at the discussion, moderated by WARBE Development Foundation Chair Syed Saiful Haque.

Struck by tragedy twice in 3 days

Youth's father dies of Covid-19, brother with symptoms

DU CORRESPONDENT

Within a span of three days, a student of Dhaka University lost his father, who died after being diagnosed with Covid-19, and then his elder brother, who passed away after suffering from coronavirus-like symptoms.

With the agony of losing his father still fresh in his mind, Habibullah Rifat is now heading to his village home in Chandanaish upazila of Chattogram from their house in Halishahar area of the port city to bury his brother who passed away on Friday.

The rest of the family comprising him, his mother, brother and sister are now worried over what future awaits them.

The student of management and information systems went back home from Dhaka after the countrywide shutdown was enforced.

After his father became sick, the youth on May 12 wrote on his Facebook profile about the delay in testing as his father started showing Covid-19 like symptoms.

"I have been going to hospitals one after another since morning. My father's condition requires him to be admitted to a hospital. But no one is admitting him saying that coronavirus test report is necessary prior to ICU admission. But sample will be collected tomorrow morning and it will take some days to get the result," he said in the post.

His father died the next day, and later his sample tested positive for Covid-19. Three days later, tragedy struck the family again.

"Rifat's father died on May 13 with coronavirus symptoms and tested positive posthumously," Rafiqul Islam, office-in-charge of Halishahar Police Station, told The Daily Star yesterday quoting Rifat.

"His brother died yesterday [Friday] night with coronavirus-like symptoms. His sample has been collected for testing," he added.

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Grameen Telecom keeps up support to health workers

CITY DESK

Since the start of the Covid-19 outbreak, Grameen Fabrics and Fashions has been producing PPE gowns for health workers, with financial support from Grameen Telecom, said a press release.

Grameen Telecom is distributing KN-95 masks, gloves and goggles to a number of hospitals. It distributed 5,500 high-quality PPE gowns, 16,500 KN-95 masks, 11,000 hand gloves and 990 protective goggles at Chittagong General Hospital; BITID, Chittagong; Khulna Medical College and Hospital; Khulna Diabetic Hospital; Mymensingh Medical College and Hospital; SK Hospital Mymensingh; Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital; Rajshahi Infections Hospital; and dedicated Covid-19 Hospital, Rangpur, among others.

Japan provides 2,000 PPE to Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As part of Japan's initiative to support Bangladesh contain the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, Embassy of Japan in Dhaka and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) jointly handed over high quality personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, gowns and goggles to the government of Bangladesh.

Ito Naoki, Japanese ambassador to Bangladesh, handed over 2,000 sets of PPE to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare at the secretariat recently.

"The Government of Japan and JICA will continue to support measures taken by the Government of Bangladesh and take a leading and active approach in this global crisis," Naoki said, according to a statement by JICA.

Hiarata Hitoshi, chief representative of JICA Bangladesh, was also present during the handover. Md Asadul Islam, secretary of health services division (HSD) received the PPE on Bangladesh's behalf.

"It is a great honor to receive this much needed equipment. With Japan's support, we can strengthen our efforts to combat Covid-19," Asadul said.

The PPEs will be distributed to frontline health workers in technical cooperation project of Strengthening Health Systems through Organizing Communities (SHASTO) in Narsingdi, Cox's Bazaar, and Dhaka City North.

Another 2,000 sets of PPE will be distributed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), Kurmitola General Hospital, and Kuwait Maitree Hospital through the programme "Capacity Building for Nursing Services", implemented in partnership with the Directorate General of Nursing and Midwifery.

To ensure the quality of PPE distributed in Bangladesh, JICA has also secured technical assistance for developing a testing system and has been working with the Directorate General of Drug Administration, WHO and other development partners.



A physician, who is a Covid-19 survivor, donates plasma at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday for the trial of Convalescent Plasma Therapy aimed at treating coronavirus patients.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Don't go to village home for Eid: Quader

UNB, Dhaka

Road, Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said people's tendency to go homes from cities to villages ahead of Eid may worsen the coronavirus situation.

He made this remark while speaking at a videoconference from Awami League central office on Bangabandhu Avenue.

Quader, also the ruling Awami League general secretary, urged the people to avoid gatherings at shopping malls, ferry terminals and other places. "Violating health directives might bring further damage to yourself and others and if it continues, we'll have to wait further for deliverance from this disaster," he added.

Quader also urged his party men to make a list of homeless people and provide them relief materials before Eid-ul-Fitr.

He also warned against any kind of irregularities in relief distribution.