

Railway selling its tickets online-only

Half of capacity to be sold to ensure social distancing, says minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Railway (BR), set to resume train operations from today on a limited scale, started selling all tickets online from yesterday afternoon, to ensure health safety of passengers and staffers.

Besides, no food would be supplied inside trains, and passengers will have to arrive at the station one hour ahead of the schedule to help check body temperatures.

BR would sell 50 percent of the tickets for each train to ensure social distancing, and all trains would be operated following the existing schedule. Eight intercity trains would start operations from today while 11 more will be added from June 3.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan told reporters about the measures after holding a meeting with officials at Rail Bhaban yesterday.

The minister came up with the operation plan two days after the government announced to open public transport, rail and rivers on limited scale from today, over a two months after a shutdown enforced from March 26 to contain spread of Covid-19 in the country.

Usually, BR sold 50 percent tickets from counters and 50 percent online, but now all tickets would be sold online for health safety reasons, the minister said.

But, BR, as a government agency, would not increase train fares although it would carry limited passengers, he said.

Sujan, however, expressed apprehensions that railway may face huge pressure of passengers if the government increased bus fares as demanded the by bus owners.

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AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN... A few streetlights near Kamalapur Inland Container Depot (ICD) are precariously leaning over electric wires, as last weekend's heavy storm left a few casualties around town. The photo was taken on Friday afternoon.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

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IMPROVING COVID-19 FACILITIES

ADB provides \$231,178 grant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is providing a grant of \$231,178 to augment novel coronavirus disease related facilities in 134 urban primary health centres, called Nogar Swastho Kendro, across the country.

The health centres are providing primary healthcare services to the urban poor under the ADB-supported Urban Primary Health Care Services Delivery Project in nine city corporations and four municipalities, said a press release.

"We are pleased to provide this grant assistance to further strengthen the government's efforts in managing the Covid-19 pandemic and delivering related services to the people," said country director Manmohan Parkash.

"This initiative will be a model of providing both Covid and non-Covid related healthcare services for over 8 million urban poor through Nogar Swastho Kendro in Bangladesh. The programme will also create awareness about Covid-19 prevention and management and help the health workers and doctors detect and treat patients early," Parkash added.

The assistance will help set up hand

MITIGATING DHAKA'S WATERLOGGING

DNCC mayor inaugurates excavation of 1.8km canal



Mayor Atiqul Islam oversees canal excavation works yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) Mayor Atiqul Islam yesterday inaugurated excavation work of a 1.8km canal -- stretching from Ashkona Hajj camp to Banorupa Housing at Khilkhet -- to reduce waterlogging problem of adjoining areas.

The canal, which belongs to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), cannot flow smoothly due to obstacles at different points. This results in waterlogging at different areas including Ashkona, Prembagan and near Hajj camp, said officials.

"Residents [of those areas] blamed the city corporation for waterlogging. This portion of the city has been built in an unplanned way. People built houses here and there, without leaving options for rainwater to recede," the mayor said while inaugurating the work in the graveyard area of CAAB.

Different housing companies are also not following guidelines, he said.

"We are excavating the canal to help locals, even though we have a shortage of funds. It is the duty of CAAB to the job and they should do it properly," the mayor said.

Atiqul also said residents of some areas in Moghbazar are facing a waterlogging crisis due to unclean drains of Dhaka Wasa. But locals blame the city corporation, he said.

Mentioning CAAB and Wasa, the mayor said, "Either you take the responsibility to solve the problem or give us the fund to solve it."

The Tk 3 crore excavation project will finish within the next 3 weeks, he hoped.

In March 2019, the mayor initiated a drive to free Ashkona, Uttarkhan and Dakkhinkhan areas from waterlogging, caused mainly by landfill and sludge, through excavating a retention canal.

Multiple housing companies and some locals are responsible for such disastrous activities. But neither CAAB nor Wasa executed the decision to excavate the retention canal, thus putting locals in peril for the past 15 months.

A DNCC official said there is no drainage system in the above-mentioned areas.

Floodplains have been filled up by a housing company and others hindering natural flow of sewerage and stormwater up to the Balu river, he said.

"If we can connect the retention canal from the culvert at Ashkona with the AD-8 canal project, residents of the newly-included wards will be free from year-long waterlogging," he said. "We have to excavate 485 metres and remove 27,000 cubic metres of soil. We need to clean the sludge of the rest bypassing the CAAB graveyard," he added.

Another DNCC official said urban sprawl has taken place in the city's eastern fringe, filling up floodplains and obstructing the normal flow of water.

Such mindless acts at various points create waterlogging in the metropolis, he added.

18 High Court judges take oath

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eighteen High Court judges, whose services were confirmed recently, were sworn in yesterday.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain administered the oath through video conference in the afternoon from his Kakrail residence in Dhaka.

Judges of both the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court virtually attended the oath ceremony from their homes, SC sources said.

The judges are: Justice Md Abu Ahmed Jamadar, Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman, Justice Fatema Najib, Justice Md Kamrul Hossain Molla, Justice SM Kuddus Zaman, Justice Md Atoar Rahman, Justice SM Abdul Mobin, Justice Khizir Hayat, Justice Shashanka Shekhar Sarkar, Justice Mohammad Ali, Justice Mohi Uddin Shamim, Justice Md Riaz Uddin Khan, Justice Md Khairul Alam, Justice SM Moniruzzaman, Justice Ahmed Sohel, Justice Sardar Md Rashed Jahangir, Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman, and Justice KM Hafizul Alam.

President Md Abdul Hamid had appointed them on May 30, 2018 as additional judges of the HC for two years.

The law ministry on Friday issued a gazette notification, saying that the president regularised the appointment of the 18 HC judges in consultation with the chief justice as per the constitution of the republic. The confirmation will come into effect from the date of taking oath, according to the gazette notification.

HC, Appellate Division to continue virtual operations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain has decided to run the functions of both the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court virtually without physical presence (of lawyers) from today (May 31) till June 15, in light of the coronavirus situation.

The Supreme Court administration issued a circular to this effect, saying that the chief justice has taken the decision after discussing with the judges of the Appellate Division.

Meanwhile yesterday, the chief justice has constituted 11 High Court benches for holding hearing and disposing of the cases virtually till June 15.

The judges who have been assigned to conduct the HC benches are Justice Borhan Uddin, Justice Obaidul Hassan, Justice M Enayetur Rahim, Justice Jahangir Hossain, Justice Sheikh Md Zakir Hossain, Justice JBM Hassan, Justice Md Nazmul Islam Talukder, Justice Md Ashrafur Kamal, Justice Md Mojibur Rahman Miah, Justice

Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar and Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman, according to another notification issued by the Supreme Court administration.

Judicial functions of more than 300 subordinate courts across the country have been taking place virtually since May 11 amid the ongoing coronavirus spread.

About 21,000 people, who are accused of criminal cases, have already secured bail from those courts in last 10 working days.

The virtual court functions started on May 11 after a gap of 46 days in order to deal with the urgent cases.

The regular activities of courts across the country including Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court remained closed since March 26 due to ongoing coronavirus outbreak. The closures are scheduled to continue till yesterday (May 30).

On May 10, Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain issued some directives for the courts about dealing with urgent cases using information and communication technology during the ongoing closure.

UN issues stamps honouring peacekeepers, Bangabandhu

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

On the occasion of the "2020 International Day of the United Nations Peacekeepers (Peacekeepers Day)" on May 29, the UN Postal Administration, jointly with the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN in New York, issued a set of commemorative stamps as a tribute to the UN peacekeepers and marking the birth centenary of Father of the Nation of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The commemorative stamp folio features Bangladesh's flag, logo of MUJIB 100, portrait of Bangabandhu and images of UN peacekeeping services around the world.

The images include the iconic posture of two Bangladesh female helicopter pilots, first ever deployed in the UN history, said a statement of the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN yesterday.

Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN Ambassador Rabab Fatima said, "This is a humble, yet fitting tribute to Bangabandhu's visionary leadership and doctrine of peace which defines our foreign policy; to our commitment to UN peacekeeping; as also to our valiant and selfless



peacekeepers."

To observe Peacekeepers Day at the UNHQs in New York, UN Secretary-General António Guterres laid a wreath in honour of all fallen peacekeepers and paid tribute to those who carry their service in the cause of peace.

He subsequently held a virtual ceremony to award Dag Hammarskjöld Medals posthumously to 83 peacekeepers who lost their lives in 2019. Two Bangladesh peacekeepers, Constable Mohammad Omar Farouk and Sainik Atiqul Islam, who made supreme sacrifice in line of duty in 2019, were also given this posthumous award.

BracU to waive non-tuition fees for summer semester

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brac University has announced it will waive all non-tuition fees for Summer semester while giving out need-based financial aid to students affected by the coronavirus crisis.

The university will also provide special assistance to students who lack internet access, to help them attend online classes, said a university statement yesterday.

VC Prof Vincent Chang announced a Student Assistance Fund amounting to Tk 15 crores or 25 percent of total tuition and fees.

The assistance for the Summer 2020 semester will appear in four forms, which are as follows: (1) all non-tuition fees will be waived. This is generally equivalent to 10% or more in tuition and fees. (2) The installment plan will be broadened to include a much larger number of students. (3) Need-based financial aid will be given to students in particular financial distress. (4) Special assistance to facilitate internet access for students who lack it.

PADMA BRIDGE

30th span installed; 4.5km now visible

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 30th span of the much-anticipated Padma Bridge was installed yesterday, bringing 4.5 kilometres of the structure into view.

The span, linking 26th and 27th piers, was installed at Janjira end, Dewan Md Abdul Kader, project manager (main bridge), told The Daily Star. The 6.15km bridge will have a total 41 spans.

Project authorities have installed four spans amid the shutdown.

Still, the project authorities are working with 70 percent local manpower. All Chinese nationals involved with the important project are working now.

"We are hopeful about resuming full fledged work within two weeks. Most local workers already returned to the construction site after Eid. But they are now in 14-day quarantine," Kader said.

The uncertainty over two spans, which construction work in China got stuck by Covid-19 pandemic, is nearly over as ships with those materials already left China and expected to reach Mongla port within June 15. The overall progress of the project is 79 percent as of April this year, he said.

The physical progress of the main bridge and river training were 87 percent and 71 percent respectively until April, he added.



Wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing, senior leaders of BNP lay wreath at the grave of party founder and former president Ziaur Rahman at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the capital yesterday, marking his 39th death anniversary.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Prosecute traffickers, ensure stern punishment

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants demands following massacre in Libya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM) yesterday expressed deep concern on the recent killing of 26 Bangladeshis in Mizdah, a town close to Libya's capital Tripoli.

"We demand strong follow-up from Bangladeshi embassy on the prosecution of the perpetrators and mete out stern punishment," read a press release of the organisation signed by its Chairman Dr C R Abrar and Co-chairman Syed Saiful Haque.

BCSM notes with deep regret that for quite a long time, international human smugglers and traffickers and their Bangladeshi counterparts have been very active in recruiting aspirant migrants to Europe with the promise of facilitating their movement through the North African coast.

"We demand that the home ministry, particularly the immigration police and other law enforcement agencies be more vigilant and accountable. They need to establish a system of rigorous scrutiny of those who depart for north African countries with travel visa and do not have prior travel record," they said.

Bangladeshis working in the Gulf who fear deportation due to Covid-19 are their recent targets. Over the last couple of months more than 700 Bangladeshis have been apprehended by the Libyan coastguards and sent to detention camps where they are subjected to torture and abuse, the press release said.

The organisation recommended to ensure repatriation of Bangladeshis who have been apprehended and detained in camps soon after flights resume and also press Libyan government to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The District Legal Aid Associations in collaboration with the civil society should ensure legal support to the aggrieved migrants, BCSM said in the release.