



STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE THE PANDEMIC

This three-storey threadbare structure in Old Dhaka's Islambagh area is still home to at least 30 families, where life, no matter how hard and risky, used to go on amid dreams of better days. But the pandemic has changed everything. Before, men and women worked at nearby factories, paid Tk 3,000 rent a month for each room and put food on the plate for children. Things are different now. Not only had they been out of work for last three months, they also did not receive any relief from the government or private organisations. For them, every day has become a struggle to survive. With the shutdown being eased, as soon as the dawn breaks, men now head out in search for work, women desperately look for food and cook whatever they can manage, while children stare blankly at a life that has become joyless and desolate.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Stop tax collection during pandemic

BNP urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP yesterday alleged that the government is collecting tax from people pushing them towards extreme sufferings.

"In the prevailing crisis, electricity bill, income tax, advance income tax, municipality tax and other tax collections should be suspended as people's sufferings are already huge," said party Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir.

Addressing a virtual press conference, the BNP leader said during this pandemic "ghost" electricity bill is being prepared.

Fakhru said a total of 73 party leaders died from Covid-19 across the country and 284 got infected.

"There might be many other infected leaders and activists beyond list," he added.

He said his party gave financial and other assistance to 54,12,416 families from March 20 to June 24.

Apart from BNP, its associate bodies distributed masks, hand sanitisers and safety gears among people across the country.

The BNP leader said many lost their lives and it is not possible for the government alone to overcome the situation.

"To face this crisis, the government did not behave responsibly, cordially and in coordinated way," he said.

If the government was elected and democratic, it would be able to solve the problem.

Turning to the issue of party Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Fakhru said although she was not infected with coronavirus, her treatment for other problems are being hampered due to this pandemic.

CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS

Study hours reduced by 80 percent: BIGD

5,000 students surveyed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Study hours of students in the country have declined by 80 percent due to school closure, said a survey report of Brac Institute of Governance and Development.

Since schools closed, the total time students spend studying reduced from 10 hours to 2 hours a day, said BIGD, an affiliated body of Brac University.

BIGD presented the survey outcomes in a webinar yesterday, said a press release.

A team of researchers surveyed over 5,000 students from urban slums and rural areas across Bangladesh to learn how children are coping with school closure and if "remedial measures" of virtual learning are working, said the release.

The education system in Bangladesh lacks quality education for 40 million children enrolled in schools, BIGD said in the release.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated this learning crisis as all educational institutions have been closed for over two months with no immediate plans for reopening, it said.

The study showed only 16 percent students watched educational programmes like "Ghore Boshe Shikhi" and "Amar Ghorey Amar School" on television.

Of the students who watch the programmes on TV, majority did not find them helpful. Besides, only one percent students watched educational programmes on the internet.

Findings suggest that after schools shut down, the percentage of children who spend more than two hours a day working for the family's economic needs has increased from 4 percent to 16 percent, it added.

In addition, the percentage of children who work two hours or more a day doing household chores has also increased from 1 to 13, BIGD said, adding that though these findings are primarily from rural areas, students in urban slums also present a similar picture.

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Govt to extend pre-primary education

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to extend pre-primary education to two years from the existing one year.

Primary and mass education secretary Akram-Al-Hossain said they received approval from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the extension yesterday.

He said with the decision, pre-primary learning would start at the age of four rather than five.

Primary and mass education ministry officials said the government took the decision to achieve target 4.2 of Sustainable Development Goal, that calls for ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education by 2030.

The ruling party, before the last general election, promised in its election manifesto to extend pre-primary education to two years.

Director General of the Directorate of Primary Education Md Fashiullah said pre-primary education was introduced in 2010 and now, all primary educational institutions, both government, non-government, and kindergartens offer one year of pre-primary education.

He said they would have a pilot programme from next January to introduce two-year long primary education, and after reviewing the results, they would expand it to all primary schools.

Primary and mass education ministry officials said they plan to introduce the two-year pre-primary education at 2,583 institutions withing the next two years, and it can be expanded to all government schools by the next four years.

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CTG PORT AUTHORITY APPOINTMENT

Five held for forging letters, seeking bribe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police on Wednesday arrested five persons who defrauded people by providing fake job appointment letters of Chattogram Port Authority (CPA).

Law enforcers arrested them from a residential hotel at port city's Agrabad area. The arrestees are gang leader Ratan, Rezaul, and three associates, said police.

During the arrest, police also found a youth, Sohel Mia (22) of Panchagarh's Sadar upazila, who was lured from the district after the syndicate offered him a job in exchange for Tk 5.5 lakh bribe.

With help from Chattogram District Administration Executive Magistrate (NDC) Sohel Rana, officers from Double Mooring Police Station conducted the drive.

Magistrate Rana told The Daily Star that promising a job, the gang demanded bribe from Sohel, who then paid them Tk 50,000 in advance.

Sohel travelled to Chattogram with the fraudsters few days ago, where they gave him an appointment letter with seal and signature of CPA Port Director (Administration) Md Mominur Rashid. They told Sohel to pay the remaining amount on Wednesday, he said, adding, "After receiving a call from Sohel's relative, I contacted the port director, and found that the document is fake."

"Later, I collected Sohel's phone number, determined his current location and informed police," the magistrate said.

Sub-inspector (SI) Arnab Barua of Double Mooring Police Station, who led the drive, said police raided the hotel, caught the fraudsters and rescued the victim away.

He said during primary interrogation, the arrestees said some CPA employees were involved with the gang.

Contacted, Director Mominur said they are aware about the matter. They will help with investigation and take departmental action if necessary, he added.

"The fake appointment letter was issued on June 24, with genuine-looking seal and signature. The gang also arranged a viva exam for Sohel to make it seem believable," the SI said.

"A case was lodged, and the arrestees will be quizzed in remand," he added.

Magistrate Rana said Sohel is now in custody, and authorities are arranging to send him back to his family.

Buet gets new VC, DU gets pro-VC

DU CORRESPONDENT

Prof Satya Prasad Majumder has been appointed the vice chancellor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) while Prof ASM Maksud Kamal the pro-VC (education) of Dhaka University.

Two separate gazettes were issued by the education ministry yesterday in these regards. They replaced Prof Dr Saiful Islam and Prof Nasreen Ahmad respectively.

President Abdul Hamid, the chancellor of the universities, made the appointments as per the ordinances of the respective universities.

Dr Prasad, a professor at the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, will serve the post for four years. He joined Buet in 1981 and served in various positions.

Meanwhile, Prof Kamal of Disaster Science and Management department, will remain in the post for four years. Prof Kamal, elected dean of Earth and Environmental Sciences Faculty in 2012, was elected president of Dhaka University Teachers Association for four consecutive times.

Rally demands more ICU beds at SBMCH

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) rallied in Barishal city yesterday, to press home its eight-point demand including turning the 18-bed ICU unit to a 100-bed one at the coronavirus unit of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Its other demands include Covid-19 test facility in every district in Barishal region, sample collection from door to door and quick delivery of the test report.

BSD leaders and activists blocked Sadar Road in the city's Ashini Kumar Hall area to organise the programme, disrupting traffic from 12pm to 1pm.

Party member secretary Dr Manisha Chakrabarty said people are facing problems due to delay in delivering coronavirus test report. Many are being deprived of testing facility and subsequent treatment.

She said Barishal division has only one PCR lab at SBMCH for Covid-19 test. "So, this facility should be introduced in every district here," she added.

Imran Habib Rumon, convener of BSD Barishal city unit, said the district administration, civil surgeon's office and Barishal City Corporation do not coordinate in preventing the deadly virus.

They also demanded that the employees and workers suspended by different industrial and commercial units during this pandemic be reinstated.

No workers should be terminated and no factories should be closed until their workers are paid their due wages, they said.



Pragatisheel Chhatra Jote, an alliance of left-leaning student organisations, burns an effigy of the health minister at Dhaka University campus yesterday, demanding his resignation. It also held a rally at Raju Memorial Sculpture and moved towards the health ministry in a procession, where they demanded an end to corruption in the health sector, healthcare for all, and at least 20 per cent budget allocation in the sector.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Unilever says it is rebranding Fair & Lovely

CITY DESK

Leading consumer product conglomerate Unilever Bangladesh Limited has announced of rebranding its flagship brand 'Fair & Lovely' yesterday, says a press release.

Reiterating its commitment to a more inclusive vision of beauty, the company said it will stop using 'Fair' in the brand name.

The new name is awaiting approval and will be finalised in the next two months, a release said citing Unilever Bangladesh Managing Director and CEO Kedar Lele.

"In addition to the changes to Fair & Lovely, the rest of our skincare portfolio will also reflect the new vision of positive beauty," the press document said.

FAIR AND LOVELY FOUNDATION
Aimed at inspiring women to challenge unfair expectations of society, Unilever Bangladesh established the Fair and Lovely Foundation in 2003, dedicated to empowerment and progress of women in the country.

In 2019, the foundation launched an online platform for career and education -- www.fairandlovelyfoundation.com.bd. Till date, over 45,000 individuals have registered to access training and skills through the platform.

As with the rebranding of Fair & Lovely, the company will also announce a new name for the Fair & Lovely Foundation, the press release said.