

Many in Ctg not social distancing

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Even though social distancing is one of the best tools we have to avoid being exposed to coronavirus and slowing its spread locally and across the country, many in Chattogram are not following this important practice.

As a result the number of Covid-19 patients is on the rise in the district, said healthcare experts.

The first patient was detected in Chattogram on April 3; the number rose to 32 till April 15. So far, four have died. Some areas including Sagarika in the city and Satkania upazila emerged as clusters.

Among the patients, eight are from Satkania and five from Sagarika area, said Sheikh Fazle Rabbi, civil surgeon of Chattogram district. “We repeatedly request people not to go outside except for emergencies but many do not pay heed,” he told The Daily Star.

Due to unawareness, community transmission of the virus can start and people need to be more alert, cautioned medical experts.

“The situation in Chattogram is still under control but it may deteriorate drastically if we are not conscious and do not maintain physical distancing,” said the civil surgeon.

Rashed Ikbal, a lecturer at a college in port city, said many walk on roads without wearing masks and often engage in chit chat without a care. “They act as if nothing has happened...,” said the teacher. “Whenever they see law enforcers they disperse and regroup again as soon as police leave the area,” Rashed added.

Rita Dutta, a resident of Chawkbazar, said most people who are not maintaining social distancing fail to understand the consequence. “They need to be made aware... by any means,” she stressed.

Prof Dr Shakil Ahmed, in-charge of the laboratory at

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Dressed in protective clothing and carrying grocery packs on their motorcycles, activists of Sylhet's Sammilito Natya Parishad are delivering food to underprivileged and low-income people's doorsteps. They have helped out 3,000 families since March 25, collecting funds through donations.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

‘Help us get home’

Over 150 Bangladeshis stranded in Australia appeal for repatriation

MUNTAKIM SAAD

Sweetie Dhar, in her mid-30s, is a cancer patient and has been in Australia for treatment since September last year.

“I finished my chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery recently. It’s been a long and tough journey. My flight was booked on April 3 but it was cancelled, and the airline has not refunded me yet,” Sweetie said.

“My little girl cries for me everyday. I am desperately waiting to go back home” she told this correspondent helplessly.

She is one of the 150-plus Bangladeshis -- including tourists, students and temporary residents -- who have been stranded in Australia, made an appeal to the government to come back home.

The Australian government has already advised all temporary visa holders -- like students unable to support themselves and those on visitor visas lasting three months or less, to return to their home country as quickly as possible.

In such a situation, many students and temporary residents fell into financial hardships after losing jobs, while tourists are already in cash crunch.

The Bangladesh High Commission in Australia said they uploaded a needs assessment template on its website where persons of Bangladeshi origin in need in Australia are requested to register.

“As of now, 213 people have registered among which 159 would like to travel back to Bangladesh,” Mohammad Sufiur Rahman, high commissioner for Bangladesh to Australia, told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

The applicants include government employees, bankers, doctors and teachers, and those who came for cancer treatment or to attend conference.

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At the doorsteps of families in need

Sahamarmita Foundation reaching aid across country

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH, Savar

Sahamarmita Foundation, a voluntary organisation, is providing food assistance to people -- especially middle- and low-income families -- during the ongoing shutdown amid coronavirus pandemic.

The Savar-based group started helping people around 10 days ago with a target to provide essentials to 10,000 families across the country, said its members.

As of April 15, they distributed food to 850 families in Dhaka, Cumilla, Rajshahi and Chattogram, said Parvez Hasan, founder president of Sahamarmita.

“People in need contact us over the phone at numbers given on our Facebook group. Later, we reach those items to their doorsteps,” he said.

“We maintain the assistance seekers’ privacy,” Parvez added.

They are offering daily essentials in three packages -- one-week, two-week and one-month, said members, adding that the items include rice, lentils, potato, edible oil

and soap.

“We are prioritising the middle-income people. The group cannot seek help from others like the poor do, due to social stigma,” said foundation president Parvez Hasan.

More than half of the families who have received help belong to middle-income group, he said. “We have taken the initiative so that none has to starve.”

Parvez urged the country’s well-off individuals to stand by the poor and middle-income people during the crisis.

Sahamarmita Foundation was launched in January last year. It works for the welfare of poor children and destitute families. Currently, it has 2,000 members, mostly youths, across the country. They collect funds from their members, said Parvez.

Afzal Hossen, former principal of Ashulia School and College in Savar, told The Daily Star that other youngsters should get inspired by the foundation’s noble activities.

24,103 tonnes of VGF rice for 3 lakh fishermen allotted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday allocated 24,103 tonnes of rice to around 3 lakh families of fishermen who are now out of work amid a ban on catching fish fry.

Under vulnerable group feeding (VGF) programme, the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock on April 15 granted this food assistance to deputy commissioners of 20 districts.

The DCs were asked to withdraw and distribute the rice to fishermen concerned by May 7.

The ministry has approved the allotment under the second phase of humanitarian assistance during the ban, said an official of the ministry, adding that fishers of 96 upazilas will be brought under coverage in this phase.

In the first phase, 22,477 tonnes of rice was distributed among 22.28 lakh fishermen in February and March in the same areas.

According to government decision, fish fry catching, transportation, distribution, stocking, selling and purchasing is banned from November 1 to June 30.

Apart from this, catching hilsa and any other fishes are completely banned at five sanctuaries of the country from March 1 to April 30.

The government provides food assistance to the fishermen from February to May every year.

Newly-recruited pry teachers still unpaid

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

As the coronavirus outbreak unfolds, most of the 18,000 newly-recruited government primary teachers are yet to get salaries for March, and are uncertain whether they will receive the salary for the current month as all public offices are closed till April 25.

The teachers, who joined primary schools in the later part of February and early March, are still not entitled to get salaries as the amount is to be fixed by upazila primary education office. It would then require subsequent approval from the concerned Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh (CAG) office. Both steps are yet to be completed for most.

Without this process these teachers -- who are also government officials, will not be able to enrol into an online system, styled Integrated Budget and Accounting system (IBAS++), for getting salaries, said Primary and Mass Education Ministry officials.

“We are yet to get salaries although we are passing very difficult days amid this virus outbreak,” said a newly recruited teacher at

a school in Brahmanbaria district. He said work of his salary fixation was completed just before the first announcement of office closure on March 23.

“As the situation is worsening day by day I am really worried when we will get salaries,” said a teacher of Sirajganj district.

Another teacher from Naogaon said if the government gives this special attention and arranges their salary, it will be great help for them and their families.

Brahmanbaria district primary education officer Shazzad Hossain and Naogaon primary education officer Siddique Md Yousuf Reza both said usually salary of newly-recruited teachers get delayed due to different formalities in multiple offices.

“This time it is taking more time due to closure of offices during Covid-19 outbreak,” said Shazzad Hossain.

Around 270 new teachers joined different schools at Brahmanbaria while 278 teachers joined schools in Naogaon.

Primary and mass education Secretary Akram-Al-Hossain told The Daily Star that

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RELIEF MISAPPROPRIATION

ACC to expedite probe into cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) will expedite investigation of cases filed over misappropriation of government relief.

“We’ll file charge-sheets as soon as possible in the cases,” said ACC chief Iqbal Mahmood yesterday.

The ACC chairperson told media that their 22 intelligence units are monitoring relief activities, reads a press release.

ACC on Wednesday filed cases against two rice dealers -- Rafiqul Islam and Abu Bakar Siddiqui -- for misappropriating 4,876kg of rice worth about Tk 2.19 lakh.

On Tuesday, the anti-graft watchdog filed a case against Sekendar Mia, Nayanashiri union parishad member of Dhaka’s Nawabganj, for taking bribe to issue registration cards under a government food programme.

On Monday, ACC filed a case against rice dealer Moshirur Rahman of Bogura’s Shibganj, for adding names of 17 relief recipients twice or even thrice in a list of 538 names.

2YRS OF RAJIB’S DEATH

Neither justice, nor compensation

RAFIUL ISLAM

It has been exactly two years since college student Rajib Hossain died after losing a hand that got stuck between two buses racing in the city, but his family has neither got justice nor any compensation yet.

Investigation officer of the case in December last year submitted charge sheet to a Dhaka Court “secretly” under section 304 (B) of Bangladesh Penal Code, which grants imprisonment for three years if proven guilty, although a probe report earlier found that unholy competition between the buses led to his death.

The family filed a no-confidence petition against the charge sheet as they believe the drivers of the two buses -- BRTC and Sajan Paribahan -- should get life sentences.

While they are waiting for hearing of the petition, the drivers



-- who were arrested -- recently came out on bail.

Besides, the family is yet to get Tk 50 lakh as compensation, as per a High Court verdict. The matter was stalled as bus authorities filed two separate leave-to-appeal petitions with the Supreme Court, challenging the High Court verdict. The SC is yet to set any date for hearing the appeals.

“It was a murder. Rajib was killed due to the competition of the two buses... But we are in doubt of

getting justice as the investigation officer did not submit charge sheet properly,” Jahanara Begum, aunt of Rajib, told The Daily Star yesterday. Sub-inspector Idris Ali of Shabbagh Police Station submitted the charge sheet to a Dhaka Court on December 22 last year where he mentioned that he shared his findings with victim’s family.

But Jahanara said they came to know about the charge sheet submission in February this year.

Jahanara said their no-confidence petition was scheduled for hearing on April 1 but did not due to the closure of courts following the coronavirus outbreak.

The right hand of Rajib, a third-year student at Titumir Government College in the capital, got stuck between two speeding buses in Karwan Bazar. After being in coma for two weeks, Rajib died on April 17, 2018.

Family members said Rajib and

his two brothers were orphaned at an early age. He used to support his brothers with earnings from a part-time job and private tuition. Rajib’s brothers Mehedi Hasan Bappi -- a ninth grader -- and Abdulla Hridoy -- an eighth grader -- stay at a hostel of a madrasa in Mir Hazirbagh of Jatrabari.

The family is concerned about their future and believe they would get a little relief if they get the compensation.

Following a writ petition, the High Court on May 8, 2018, ordered the bus companies to pay Tk 1 crore to Rajib’s family. BRTC and Sajan Paribahan challenged the HC order and the Supreme Court on May 22 last year stayed the order and asked the HC to form an independent committee to assess the liabilities.

The committee, led by Prof Mizanur Rahman, director of Accident Research Institute at

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SCBA to provide interest-free loans to lawyers in need

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) has decided to provide interest-free loans to law professionals who are in need of financial support to keep up with the economic pressure stemming from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The decision was taken at a meeting of SCBA’s executive committee. The meeting was held at the association’s office on the Supreme Court premises on Wednesday afternoon. SCBA President Advocate AM Amin Uddin chaired the session.

“We have decided to provide interest-free loans for three years to those members who are not affluent enough to tackle the (economic) crisis caused by the coronavirus outbreak. We have already created a fund of Tk 50 lakh for this purpose,” SCBA Secretary Barrister Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal told The Daily Star.

He said the SCBA office invites applications till April 25, and the maximum loan amount will be decided later.

A little foresight, a little innovation

Police official sets up disinfection gate at hospital entrance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 2,500-3,000 people visit the capital’s Central Police Hospital every day, and with that comes the risk of Covid-19 transmission. To prevent the spread, hospital authorities have deployed additional police officers to work alongside hospital staff to spray visitors with disinfectants.

As the situation started deteriorating, authorities had to deploy more officers for the job. Unfortunately, officers often find it hard to properly spray visitors when a group enters together, according to hospital authorities.

That is when an officer came forward to solve the issue. After taking inspiration from a surprising source, he was set in his tracks to make the process more efficient than ever.

“After watching a YouTube video on a disinfection tunnel in Turkey, I started making a similar structure in front of the hospital gate last week,” Saif Shantu, additional superintendent of police (admin) of Central Police Hospital, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He knew going at this alone would not work, so he sought help from the plumber, mason and carpenters who were working in the hospital. He then went on to collect some wood, nozzles and pipes to build the structure, he said.

After discussing with hospital doctors about



This makeshift structure at Central Police Hospital, designed by ASP Saif Shantu, sprays entrants with disinfectant.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

the proper disinfection spray, he collected virucide solutions from the market.

Eye in the sky

Ctg police using drone to scope out shutdown violators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) is using a drone (unmanned aerial vehicles) in the port city’s Kotwali area to find people who are still going out from their residences without emergency.

Officials said they are resorting to the technology to monitor different lanes and areas more effectively, so that people stay indoors during what is estimated to be the peak time for the novel coronavirus’ spread. After going through the drone footage, police are taking action against the shutdown violators, they said.

According to health experts, social transmission of Covid-19 has started in the port city and in districts like Dhaka and Narayanganj.

So far, 32 people have contracted the virus in Chattogram, of whom five have died, said civil surgeon office sources.

On April 12, Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mohammed Mohsin posted a video message on social media for residents of Kotwali area, asking them to stay indoors. “The drone is flying and helping us see

you. (Footage of) those who are violating the government order and helping the infectious disease to spread through roaming or gathering outside without any reason are being captured by the drone. We are collecting evidence against you (the violators) to take legal action,” the OC said in the video.

Talking to The Daily Star, the official said, “We are working round the clock to make sure people stay at home, along with all our other duties. It is not possible for us to visit every remote lane or area to check people’s movement and whether they are maintaining social distance.”

“This is why we’ve deployed the drone, as it shows a wider view and helps us identify lockdown violators and take legal action,” he added.

“We have been doing this for the last four days,” he said.

The drone’s footage shows that people, especially in slums and crowded areas, are still gathering outside without emergencies, even if to only play ludo.

The idea was first introduced by Kerala police in India to detect shutdown violators in the state.