

164 stranded Bangladeshis return home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The first batch of 164 Bangladeshis who were stranded in India for over a month, came home yesterday.

A special charter flight of US-Bangla Airlines carrying them landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 3:48pm from Chennai, Kamrul Islam, a general manager of the airlines, told The Daily Star.

All were going through health screening at the airport, an official at the airport health desk told this correspondent at 8pm.

US-Bangla is scheduled to operate five more special flights till April 25 from Kolkata and Chennai to bring back other Bangladeshis.

The move came following understanding between the two governments, as several thousand Bangladeshis are stranded in India for over a month. Most of them went there for treatment.



Even though Barisal's International Abdur Rab Serniabat Stadium has remained closed due to the coronavirus outbreak, that didn't stop these boys from finding a way to get in. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

M'SINGH MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL ICU among three units locked down

Two patients who concealed Covid-19 symptoms test positive

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The authorities of Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) locked down three of its units including the intensive care unit (ICU) on Sunday for a week as two patients tested Covid-19 positive.

Doctors said the patients concealed information about their symptoms.

Hospital sources said a pregnant woman from Jhenigati upazila in Sherpur was admitted to the hospital on Saturday morning and she had caesarean section immediately.

After delivery, the woman started suffering from breathing problems and she was shifted to the lone 10-bed ICU unit of the hospital, the sources said.

Dr Md Saiful Islam, assistant director of MMCH, told The Daily Star yesterday, "In the afternoon, we found out from different sources that there were Covid-19 positive people in her area and we initiated to collect her sample on Saturday afternoon."

"Later on Sunday, the result came from the hospital lab showed that she was infected with coronavirus," said the assistant director.

Against the backdrop, the ICU ward and a unit of labour ward and the operation theatre were locked down, said Dr Saiful Islam, also focal person of Coronavirus Control and Treatment Committee at MMCH.

"The newborn is safe," the doctor said. Earlier on Friday, a 50-year-old man from Hossainpur

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

First field hospital ready to fight the coronavirus

The 60-bed centre has 10 ICU beds, 4 ventilators

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Ctg

Bangladesh's first field hospital dedicated for Covid-19 patients is set to be inaugurated today in Chattogram's Sitakunda.

Set up at a two-storey building given by Navana Group, the 60-bed hospital in Faujdarhat has 6,500 square feet of space.

A field hospital is a temporary hospital or mobile medical unit that takes care of casualties on-site before they can be safely transported to more permanent facilities.

The site was selected because of its proximity to Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID), the only lab in Chattogram that can test for coronavirus, said Hasan Shahriar Kabir, divisional director of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Dr Biddut Barua, assistant professor of public health at American International

University Bangladesh, in cooperation with Sajedul Islam, vice chairperson of Navana Group, steered the initiative.

"It's our mission to serve people in a time of crisis. Here, they will be treated not only with medical facilities but also with love and care," said Dr Barua.

The hospital has 10 ICU beds while 10 doctors and 10 nurses will be engaged alongside 25 volunteers.

The volunteers have already received training on how to handle patients and protect themselves, said officials.

The divisional director of DGHS said the hospital was set up ahead of time. "It will start functioning with 60 beds primarily. All staff members are working voluntarily."

Sajid Kabir Saji, one of the volunteers, told The Daily Star he applied at the hospital after learning about the initiative.

COX'S BAZAR

WFP distributing food to vulnerable families

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

World Food Programme (WFP) has started distributing food to the most vulnerable families in Cox's Bazar impacted by the shutdown due to Covid-19.

Alongside making changes in the food distribution process in the Rohingya camps to mitigate the risk, WFP is working with local government authorities to provide support to the host communities as needed, the UN Food Agency said in a statement yesterday.

"WFP is also supplying food to patients in the government and humanitarian-managed quarantine and isolation facilities in Cox's Bazar," it said.

The supplies include dry food rations for up to 1,500 patients in the isolation facilities and hot meals for up to 3,000 people in the government quarantine centre. These distributions are complementing the ongoing food assistance provided by the government.

"It is great that WFP stands together in solidarity with the people of Cox's Bazar during this critical time," said Deputy Commissioner Md Kamal Hossain.

"The district administration highlights the importance

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

160 new isolation beds for Covid-19 patients in Ctg

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

With two new hospitals set to start treating covid-19 patients this month, a total of 160 new isolation beds will be added to the existing 150 beds in Chattogram for treating coronavirus positive patients.

Of the two new hospitals, Chattogram Field Hospital -- situated at Faujdarhat of Sitakunda upazila, is all set to go on operation today.

Dr Biddut Barua, an assistant professor of Department of Public Health at American International University Bangladesh, in assistance with Navana Group steered the initiative.

"We are all set to go for operation on Tuesday. We have got permission from the Ministry of Health," he told this newspaper.

"It will be a 60-bed hospital equipped with five ventilators initially," he said, adding, "Number of beds and accordingly ventilators will be increased in future."

The significance of this hospital is the contribution of common people.

"Many contributed to raise fund... even a rickshaw-puller contributed Tk 20 for the hospital. I salute them all," he said, "It is going to be a common people's hospital."

Meanwhile, Chattogram Private Clinics Owners' Association is going to open another 100-bed hospital in the city for treating covid-19 patients.

Holy Crescent Hospital in Khulshi area is being renovated for this purpose.

A committee has been formed in this regard with mayor of Chattogram City Corporation AJM Nasir Uddin as convener.

Contacted, Dr Liakat Ali, general secretary of Chattogram Private Clinics Owners' Association and member secretary of the committee, said they were expecting to open the hospital on April 25.

"The civil works are almost complete and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



A mother dog pleadingly stands in front of a shop at Kamalapur, in hope of some food. As the streets of Dhaka remain mostly deserted, animals are going hungry. They can no longer scavenge for food from leftovers, and are more dependent than ever on the kindness of people. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Create fund for migrant workers, hard-hit families

16 organisations appeal to PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sixteen migrant rights bodies and civil society organisations have appealed to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to create a fund for the distressed migrants and their left-behind families affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

In a letter issued yesterday, they called for the government to increase incentives to stop the downward trend in remittance flow, as well as take measures to make sure that migrants are treated with dignity and there is no negative mindset about them.

The letter signed by Dr Tasneem Siddiqui, chair of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) of Dhaka University, appreciated the government's Tk 72,000-crore stimulus package to support export-oriented industries, Tk 5,000-crore fund for agriculture and Tk 100-crore insurance scheme for the health workers.

"Like all the above groups, migrants working in the Gulf, South-East Asian countries, Europe and America are also your sons and daughters... Migrants are anxiously waiting for your words about them. Us 16 organisations are conveying their plight and expectations to you."

The letter noted that migrants working under "free visa", undocumented ones, small entrepreneurs, service sector employees in the Middle East as well as a large section of those working in Europe are now mostly jobless and without income.

"Migrants are pleading to you for creating a fund for distressed migrants and their left-behind family members," the letter said.

The government has disbursed funds for assisting migrants both in European as well as in Middle-Eastern countries, while also announcing creation of a Tk 200 crore fund, which is appreciable, it added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

ASSAULTING JOURNO

Barishal additional director of DNC, 25 others transferred

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Twenty-six officials and staffers of Department of Narcotics (DNC) in Barishal division, including its additional director, have been transferred for violation of discipline and administrative practices.

DNC Deputy Director (Administration) Md Mamun signed the transfer order on behalf of DNC's director general on Sunday.

The transfer order, which was published on the department's website, stated that Hafizur Rahman, additional director of DNC in Barishal; three police inspectors, four deputy inspectors, five assistant inspectors, and six constables; one accountant, two office assistants, two drivers, one office support staffer and one wireless operator were to be transferred.

Hafizur, acknowledging the facts, said the order was passed in connection with the incident where a journalist was assaulted on Saturday.

After receiving a complaint, DNC in Barishal temporarily suspended involved staffers, gave them show cause notice, and sent a letter to the head office for taking

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

AIIB okays \$170m loan to improve sanitation facilities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has approved a US\$ 170 million loan to improve Bangladesh's sanitation infrastructure, according to a statement.

About 1.5 million residents in Dhaka will benefit from improved sanitation services following the approval of the loan by the AIIB board of directors, says the statement available on Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) website.

The Dhaka Sanitation Improvement project, co-financed with the World Bank, will support government investments in sanitation infrastructure comprising sewerage systems, sewage treatment, and pilot measures for hard-to-reach areas in the Pagla catchment, one of the most densely populated areas of the city.

Children below the age of five and vulnerable households bear the highest burden of poor sanitation through morbidity and the loss of productivity due to water-borne illnesses, it added.

"AIIB is committed to ensuring that its projects improve quality of life for the most vulnerable communities," said AIIB VP (Investment Operations) DJ Pandian.

Ensure loan support for farmers: rights group

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A consumer rights network yesterday called upon the government to ensure that the country's marginal farmers and pure tenants (those who do not own the land they use) are getting loan support under the stimulus package announced for the agriculture sector to fight the Covid-19 fallout.

On April 12, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced the stimulus package of Tk 5,000 crore for small and medium farmers.

As per the government's existing farm loan policy, there is almost no chance for the pure tenants to get loans under the stimulus package. Right to Food Bangladesh (RtFB), a network of different local, national and international NGOs, said in a statement.

Under the farm loan policy, those farmers who do not own arable land will get loan if they can submit an "agreement paper" of their leased land, RtFB said. However, the reality is the country's marginal farmers do not take lease of arable land with making written agreement.

Besides, non-farmer owners of arable land also do not lease out land under written agreement, it added.

The pure tenants are not to blame for this because if owners lease out their arable land under written agreement they have to pay a fee to the government, which the land owners never want, it further said.

RtFB demanded to ensure loan support for marginal farmers and pure tenants under the stimulus package after necessary scrutiny and considering their capacity instead of "written agreement".

Referring to a Bangladesh Bank circular, it said intermediaries in the farm sector will get a comparatively high loan opportunity under the stimulus package, which the rights group termed "unequal and unfair".

Considering the current lockdown situation, it urged the government

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



A family of three goes towards Rampura from Rajarbagh Police Line yesterday, while movement is restricted amid the nationwide shutdown. Not only does the motorbike lack a license plate, but the child is also sitting precariously on her mother's lap, with no face mask on.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS