



Even in the bleakest of days, children can find joy in the mundane. These three were waiting for relief goods by the street at Chattogram city's CRB area last Friday, and they found a way to pass that time making goggles, rings and watches out of coconut tree leaves.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Rehab centres restrict admission of patients for Covid-19 outbreak

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

It was about 2am on April 15 when a helpless mother phoned the owner of a narcotics rehabilitation centre in Dhaka's Gulshan.

Breaking down in tears, she pleaded the owner to admit her drug addict son to his rehabilitation centre, but the owner refused.

"She was crying and pleading me to admit her son, as she could not control him," said the owner, on condition of anonymity.

"I didn't want to put my staff and other patients in coronavirus [infection] risk with admission of new patients. Instead I suggested her [the mother] to seek help from the Gulshan Police Station," he said, adding that his stock of of personal protection equipment (PPE) for his staff are limited.

To prevent spread of the novel coronavirus in the country, the government has enforced a shutdown and restricted public movement.

These measures have managed to reign in the illegal trade of narcotics to some extent.

"We are not allowing anyone to move, and have sealed all the narcotics spots. Even then, if anyone is found selling or using narcotics, we are taking lawful action against them," Mahmuda Afroz Lucky, additional deputy commissioner of

Mirpur division police, told The Daily Star recently.

On the flip side, this cessation in narcotics trading has taken a toll on families of drug users, who are now undergoing severe withdrawal symptoms, and often turning violent.

Two days after the countrywide shutdown was imposed on March 25, a 17-year-old boy stabbed his mother to death as she refused to give him money for drugs.

The mother, Suraiya, used to work as a domestic help at a Jatrabari neighbourhood. On the fateful day, the boy first locked into a heated argument over money. At one stage, he stabbed his mother in front of their home, police said quoting eyewitness.

Talking to the Daily Star, Mukti Das, who has been running Setu Drug Addicts Rehabilitation Center, said many drug users are becoming violent on their family members in want of drugs.

"Family members are the ultimate sufferers in the hand of drug abusers," Mukti said.

Besides the government drug addict treatment centres, there are about 324 private centres which have around 4,103 beds.

However, almost all of them have stopped admitting new patients since March 25.

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India sends second lot of medical supplies

DIPLMATIC CORRESPONDENT

India yesterday donated its second tranche of emergency medical supplies -- 1,00,000 Hydroxychloroquine tablets and 50,000 sterile surgical latex gloves -- to Bangladesh.

Indian High Commissioner Riva Ganguly Das handed over the supplies to the officials concerned of the Central Medical Stores Depot.

On March 25, India donated 30,000 surgical masks and 15,000 head-covers to Bangladesh.

The assistance is being given under the Saarc Covid-19 Emergency Fund, created following a video conference among the leaders of Saarc countries on March 15 initiated by Indian Prime Minister

Narendra Modi.

India has made an initial contribution of \$10 million, while Bangladesh announced a contribution of \$1.5 million; Afghanistan and Nepal pledged \$1 million each; Sri Lanka \$5 million; the Maldives and Bhutan pledged \$200,000 and \$100,000 respectively. After holding out for some time, Pakistan early this month pledged a contribution of \$3 million to the fund.

In a statement, Riva Ganguly said the assistance is part of India's "Neighborhood First" policy and with a view to taking a collaborative regional approach to containing the spread of Covid-19.

She said separate video conferences between health experts and trade

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Circular to keep 18 ministries, divisions open withdrawn

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The public administration ministry has withdrawn its earlier circular to keep 18 ministries and divisions, and their agencies open on a limited scale during the ongoing shutdown.

However, government offices, which are involved in emergency work and services, will remain open on a limited scale, the ministry said.

The development came at a time when several hundred garment factories in and around Dhaka and eight state-run jute mills in Khulna-Jashore industrial belt partially resumed activities yesterday, despite experts warning that doing so will increase the risk of virus transmission at a wider scale.

The ministry on April 23 extended the ongoing shutdown of most public and private offices till May 5 to slow the spread of novel coronavirus, according to a circular.

However, factories, including pharmaceuticals and export-oriented manufacturing units, can resume operation by ensuring health safety of workers, it said.

On the same day, the ministry issued a separate circular saying that 18 ministries and divisions, and their agencies will operate on a limited scale during the Covid-19 shutdown.

Those included the Prime Minister's Office, and the ministries of health and family welfare, agriculture, commerce, food, LGRD and co-operatives, and disaster management and relief.

Prime Minister Office, in a circular on April 23, said the office will reopen on April 26 and director generals, project directors, directors, deputy directors, assistant directors and all same rank officials were asked to attend office regularly.

The circular, which is available at PMO's website, however said presence of supporting staffers should not be more than 25 per cent.

Public Administration Secretary Shaikh Yusuf Harun yesterday said that they have already withdrawn the circular centring reopening 18 ministries and divisions, and it was

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'Stand by Bangladesh'

TIB urges development partners to continue their support in tackling Covid-19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday called upon Bangladesh's development partners to ensure "unprecedented level of support" to the country in its efforts to the Covid-19 crisis and recovery.

At the same time, it urged the donor organisations to ensure the highest standards of anti-corruption, transparency and accountability at all levels.

In a statement issued to the media, TIB said no country was fully prepared nor had the perfect capacity to cope with the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Bangladesh could not be any exception, it said.

In spite of commendable economic performance in gross domestic product (GDP) growth and many other socio-economic indicators as well as globally acknowledged disaster management experience, the crisis has exposed Bangladesh to worst ever challenges of sustaining the progresses achieved in the health sector and beyond, the statement added.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "While full consequences of the crisis remain unpredictable to be assessed in concrete terms at this stage, it is clear that Bangladesh will certainly require substantial donor support."

"Hence, our call to development partners as trusted partners of shared interest, for deeper and wider support to Bangladesh than ever before," he said.

TIB said it considers the development partners as valued partners in Bangladesh's "compulsions to prevent and control corruption by promoting transparency and

accountability".

"We, therefore, urge upon them to ensure that anti-corruption principles and practices are specifically ensured in all initiatives or projects at all levels of decisions, designs and implementation," TIB said.

In management and recovery from mega crises like this, funding decisions and project implementation processes may often genuinely need to be fast-tracked, it said.

"However, nothing justifies any compromise of proactive and on-demand disclosure of information including unrestricted reporting by the media and civil society including freedom of opinion," the statement added.

"Public procurement, as rushed as it may often require to be in crisis situations, must be subjected to transparency and accountability. All kinds of procurement risks like collusion, political bias, conflict of interest and over-pricing must be prevented by ensuring compliance and accountability without favour or fear.

"Improved transparency and accountability will boost public trust and credibility of the government as well as donors. Lack of openness will create greater opportunities for abuse of power and discretion as well as collusive corruption and rent-seeking," said the TIB executive director.

The Covid-19 crisis has overwhelmed the world by unprecedented challenges. At the same time, it also calls attention of all stakeholders to be more vigilant to ensure integrity, in which strategically designed contributions of development partners can add great value, said TIB in the statement.

DHAKA-LONDON UK to operate 5 more flights

DIPLMATIC CORRESPONDENT

British High Commissioner Robert Chatterton Dickson yesterday announced five more charter flights from Dhaka to London for British tourists, short term visitors and their direct dependents to return to the UK.

In a video message, he said the flights are scheduled for April 29 and May 1, 3, 5 and 7.

"If you're currently in Sylhet, you will also have the option of booking a domestic transfer from Sylhet to Dhaka ahead of the flights on Wednesday 29 April, Friday 1 May, Tuesday 5 May and Thursday 7 May. There will be no domestic transfer option available ahead of the flight to the UK on Sunday 3 May," the high commissioner said.

"These flights cost £600 per person, whether you are departing from Sylhet or Dhaka," he said.

"To be eligible to take these flights, the UK nationals must be normally resident in the UK," he said, adding, "Their eligibility will be checked before your tickets are issued."

So far, the UK high commission has arranged four special flights to fly UK nationals from Bangladesh.

Chief justice to seek president's approval for 'virtual' hearing of urgent cases

Closure of all courts extended till May 5

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday decided to keep the court functions closed till May 5 to contain the spread of coronavirus.

He took the decision at a full court meeting with the judges of both the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court. The meeting was held through video conference.

The meeting decided to amend the rules for holding virtual hearing of very urgent cases through online and video conference.

The SC judges also decided that the chief justice will request President Abdul Hamid to issue an ordinance so that the subordinate courts can hold virtual hearing of the urgent cases, SC sources said.

The chief justice may constitute a committee for amending the rules with necessary provisions and guidelines. He also decided to suspend the limited court functions till May 3.

The judges and lawyers will be given training through the United Nations Development Programme for holding virtual hearing and disposing of the cases through digital services.

The magistrates concerned will hear the urgent cases as usual during the ongoing closure of courts, sources said.

The chief justice on April 23 decided to operate functions of courts on a limited scale following demands from some lawyers, in order to hear and dispose of very urgent cases. This decision then was suspended till April 27. Supreme Court Registrar General Md Ali Akbar issued two separate circulars to this effect, citing unavoidable reasons.

The CJ however convened a full court meeting with judges of Appellate and High Court Divisions yesterday and decided to keep the court functions closed till May 5.



Krishnachura trees are starting to show their vibrant hues to anyone who wishes to marvel at their beauty. But sadly, not many will get to stand under their branches and appreciate this year's bloom. This photo was taken recently from Chandrima Udyan in the capital.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS