



WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE? A vendor in the capital's Shahbagh gathers up his stock of bright yellow marigold, ready to close up shop as the skies turned ominously grey yesterday. While celebrations and occasions where flowers would be a mainstay have been far from most people's minds amid the pandemic, many traders like him have to keep the business running, however slow, to earn their daily bread.

Patients in Ctg stuck in a coronavirus Catch-22

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

When Jamshed Haider, a banker and a resident of port city's Ameerbagh Residential Area, started to have breathing difficulties on the morning of May 11, his family took him to Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (BITID), a government hospital dedicated for treating Covid-19 patients in Chattogram.

But without admitting the patient, doctors at BITID referred him to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), saying that he was a cardiac patient, alleged family members.

Jamshed died on the way to CMCH. "The doctors at BITID did not admit my brother. They did not even provide him with primary treatment," said Zia Haider, brother of Jamshed. "If they had given him oxygen support, he would have survived," he added.

Jamshed's health condition became more critical while being taken to CMCH, said Quamrul Morshed, a colleague of Jamshed.

This is not just a random case. In Chattogram, many critical patients are not being able to get admitted to hospitals and being deprived of treatment as the hospitals dedicated for treating Covid-19 patients suspect them as non-Covid-19 patients while the general hospitals suspect them as Covid-19 patients.

Besides, the private hospitals in most cases are not admitting any patient unless they can show test reports that say they are not Covid-19 patients. Many patients eventually lose the battle for life, deprived

of treatment.

Meanwhile, many hospitals are running out of isolation and ICU beds thus being unable to admit patients as well. According to sources, all the 100 isolation beds and 10 ICU beds in Chattogram General Hospital filled up on May 16 and patients with Covid-19 symptoms are not being admitted there. The hospital added 50 more beds yesterday to cope up with the situation.

Amid such circumstances, incidents of patients being denied treatment continue to take place.

Rights organisations have also expressed concerns over the matter.

Amnesty International in a statement on May 14 said it has found that hospitals are refusing to admit people with the symptoms, despite having the capacity to diagnose and treat them.

Calling upon authorities to investigate the allegations, it said, "The shortage of necessary medical equipment has not only made the frontline health workers' job difficult, it in fact puts them at the greatest risk of being exposed to Covid-19."

Not just Amnesty, Ain O Salish Kendra also expressed similar concerns. Citing media reports, the rights body said several patients had died after failing to get admitted to different hospitals.

This was not only the case for patients suffering from fevers, cold-coughs and respiratory problems, but also those without such symptoms were being deprived of treatment at private and government hospitals, said its recent statement.

Meantime, this correspondent spoke

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Healthcare in Gazipur taking a huge hit: study

Care Bangladesh finds massive drop in child delivery, neonatal services

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Covid-19 outbreak caused a 10 percent decline in the government's Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) coverage in Gazipur and its adjacent urban areas in March compared to February, said a Care Bangladesh report.

The programme covered 98.4 percent children in February while coverage reduced to 88.3 percent in March, said the report.

The outbreak also caused 35 percent reduction in TT vaccination services. There was a whopping 91 percent drop in child delivery services, and 66 percent and 87 percent reduction in antenatal care and postnatal care services respectively, it added.

The report "Rapid Assessment Findings on Covid-19 Effects on Urban Health" was shared during an online discussion arranged jointly by Care Bangladesh and The Daily Star yesterday.

"Covid-19 has had a massive impact on the overall health system in general, and on health and family planning services in particular," according to the report.

It was prepared based on interviews taken via telephone and in person with 141 respondents (80 female, 61 male) between April 23-26 in Gazipur city, Savar, and Bhaluka municipality of Mymensingh.

It said there was a 50 percent decline in number of patients in March from the reported number in February at Gazipur's four upazila health complexes.

The number of general patients in February was 1,26,725 which reduced to 65,220 in March.

Due to the unavailability of doctors and routine health services in the upazila health complexes, patient flow increased in community clinics, family welfare centres, and union sub centres, the report added.

In Gazipur, 24 percent of doctors, 15 percent nurses and six percent frontline health workers were tested Covid-19

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Tenants in capital struggle to pay rent

Home and shop owners not faring much better

HELEMI ALAM and SHAHEEN MOLLH

For the last three months, Belal Hossain (30) failed to pay his house or shop rent as the salon owner's livelihood has been seriously hampered since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak in the country in March.

The resident of Bauniabadh in the capital is now struggling to make ends meet as his income has dropped to Tk 70-100 a day from Tk 1,000-1,200 per day.

"It's getting very tough to run my six member family... I also have to help my workers as they are without work as well," he said.

"At times, I feel lost as I don't know what to do. I owe over Tk 20,000 to the landlords already," said Bilal. "They are offering me Tk 500 concession each on monthly rents but even with that I am unable to pay them," he added.

Not just Belal, a large number of tenants across the country are facing difficulties in paying their rents due to the ongoing lockdown.

Md Sohel, an employee of a buying house at Madarbari in Uttara, said he could not pay rent for two months.

His problems, however, did not just end there. "I used to send Tk 5,000 to my parents every month but I could send only Tk 1,000 this month," said Sohel.

He said he got Tk 7,000 in March, Tk 2,000 in April and Tk 1,000 in May from his office, which is closed now. He said he used to earn around Tk 20,000 every month.

The shutdown is not only putting the tenants in a tight spot, many homeowners who run their families with the rent money are also being affected.

Ruhul Amin, a homeowner in Uttara, said this was his only source of income. "I used to get around Tk 70,000 a month from rent. But I'm getting Tk 18,000-19,000 a month due to the crisis. I am struggling to maintain my family as most tenants

are not paying rent."

Though there is a clear instruction from the government not to force a tenant to leave in this crisis time, sometimes such incidents are taking place.

In Sylhet, a mother along with her two children was forced to leave from her rented house in Shaplabagh Residential Area on May 13 as she failed to pay Tk 700 rent to the owner.

Desperate, she took shelter on a footpath opposite Sreemangal Police Station that night. The incident became viral on social media.

Police took notice of it and took them to the house around 4 in the morning and asked the landlord not to oust them in this crisis period.

"We also gave food assistance to the family," said Alamgir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Sreemangal Police Station.

Meanwhile, law enforcers are also requesting landlords not to force tenants to leave their home if they are unable to pay rent during this crisis time, said OC Abul Hasan of Shahbagh Police Station in Dhaka.

"If any homeowner does so, we have asked them to complain to the police stations so that we can take necessary actions in this regard," he said.

Contacted, Mohammad Mostofa, joint secretary of Bharatiya Parishad, said there are many people in the country who are out of work and have no income now. "They are struggling to put food on the table, let alone paying rent," he said.

"When we hear that a family has been ousted by a landlord, we go there and try to take them back to their house," he added.

"We are demanding that the tenants are exempted from paying rent for three months. The government can help the owners in this regard so that they are also not in serious crisis," he said.

Golam Rahman, president of Consumer Association of Bangladesh, said homeowners,

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Ad agencies ask govt bodies to clear arrears

Seek loans at 2pc interest to survive economic fallout of Covid-19 pandemic

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To survive the financial crunch brought along by the coronavirus pandemic, the Advertising Agencies Association of Bangladesh (AAAB) has demanded immediate payment of arrears being withheld by government agencies. The organisation also asked the government to facilitate loans at two per cent interest to keep businesses afloat.

Ramendu Majumdar, president of the organisation, made the demands at a virtual press conference on Tuesday. AAAB Advisor and former Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor, AAAB General Secretary Munir Ahmed Khan and other members were present at the briefing.

Majumdar said 80 per cent of media revenues come from advertising agencies. But they are yet to receive outstanding bills from many ministries, government and semi-government organisations.

"As a result, advertising companies are not being able to pay bills to newspapers, televisions and radio channels. This has created a crisis throughout organisations and the media," he added.

He demanded government guidance to pay the arrears soon for resolution. Besides, advertising agencies will have to be included in the package announced by the government and will have to be given loans at two per cent interest.

There are around 18,000 people working in this sector. Not only those who make or manage advertisements, but people from event management and other sectors are also directly involved in the industry, Ramendu said, adding that there has been no income since the end of March, but costs continue to pile up.

He said they gave a memorandum to the prime minister on May 13, seeking cooperation of the government.

AAAB put forth four demands to overcome this crisis: stop deducting income tax at source, clear the outstanding bills, give loan facilities at two per cent interest for three years, and recognise the advertising industry as a necessary service sector.

"We are requesting the loan facility to meet 70 per cent of our expenses for one year. The agencies will repay the loan in three years. Interest will have to be introduced six months after taking the loan."

Elaborating on the business situation, he added that information provided by various agencies shows that 70 per cent of the business plan for 2020 could not be achieved.

Usually, from January to March, there is a business downturn. Business improves during the two new year celebrations and the last two-three months of the year. But this time, there was no business on Bengali New

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250 isolation beds being added to Ctg hospitals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The government is adding 250 more isolation beds to three hospitals in Chattogram to provide treatment to the increasing number of Covid-19 patients.

Of them, a total of 50 isolation beds have already been added to the existing 100 beds at Chattogram General Hospital (CGH) on Tuesday, said Dr Hasan Shahriar Kabir, Chattogram divisional director of Directorate General of Health Services.

Dr Asim Kumar Nath, superintendent of CGH, said they have already started admitting patients to the newly included beds.

On the other hand, Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and Holy Crescent Hospital will get 100 isolation beds each within today, Dr Hasan Shahriar told The Daily Star.

According to the office of Chattogram Civil

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FARMERS BANK SCAM

HC stays Rashedul Haque Chisty's bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday stayed till May 28 a lower court order that granted bail to Rashedul Haque Chisty, son of Farmers Bank audit committee's former chairman Mahbubul Haque Chisty, in a Tk 159 crore money laundering case.

The bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim came up with the stay order after virtually hearing a petition by Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) through email, seeking stay on the lower court order that granted bail to Rashedul.

The HC set May 28 for further hearing on the stay petition, and asked ACC to submit the lower court order.

Rashedul Haque Chisty cannot get released from jail following the High Court's stay order, ACC's lawyer Khurshid Alarm Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the High Court stayed the bail of Rashedul Haque Chisty considering the gravity of his offence.

Besides, the High Court had rejected a bail petition of Rashedul in October 2018 in the same case with some observations which the lower court did not consider while granting bail on Tuesday, the ACC lawyer said.

He said the ACC filed the case with Gulshan Police Station in April, 2018 against Rashedul, his father Mahbubul Haque Chisty and some others on charges of laundering Tk 159 crore.

Advocate Khurshid Alarm Khan said the lower courts in Dhaka have granted bail to Rashedul Haque Chisty in four corruption cases recently.

The ACC will move separate petitions before the High Court seeking stay on the three bail orders passed by the lower courts, he added.

On Tuesday, Rashedul got bail through hearings in two virtual courts in Dhaka in two money laundering cases.

Metropolitan Magistrate Md Sarafuzzaman Ansary passed the order after Rashedul's lawyer Shahinur Islam submitted a petition through email seeking bail for his client, in a case filed over laundering Tk 58 crore.



With the help of others, a woman gets on an already-packed pickup, heading towards Kanchpur from Narayanganj's Siddhirganj area yesterday. Thousands have begun to leave Dhaka for their village homes ahead of Eid, ignoring the risks of contracting coronavirus and spreading it to others. In absence of public transport due to the ongoing shutdown, many are travelling in such a risky way. This photo was taken on Dhaka-Chattogram highway.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN