

CJ forms two more virtual HC benches

Total six such benches will now run judicial functions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday constituted two more High Court benches for virtually hearing and disposing of urgent cases during the ongoing restrictions due to Covid-19 pandemic.

With these two, a total of six HC benches will now perform judicial functions till further order, Supreme Court Spokesman Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star.

The two new HC benches are of Justice Mamnoon Rahman and Justice Khandaker Diluruzaman; and Justice Sheikh Md Zakir Hossain and Justice Khizir Hayat.

Earlier on April 11, the chief justice formed some benches of the Appellate and High Court Divisions of the Supreme Court for virtually hearing and disposing of urgent cases to deal with the changed situation amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Two separate notifications were issued to this effect on April 11.

Now, a full bench of the Appellate Division led by the chief justice and its chamber judge's bench are running judicial functions through using information technology.

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A part of the footpath on Pragati Sarani is taken up by one of DNCC's secondary waste transfer stations, built encroaching the space. To solve one problem, the corporation created another one, as pedestrians must now jaywalk around the structure while dodging traffic. While officials point to space constraints for constructing the station this way, urban planners think an alternative would have been possible through proper planning. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Footpath, road blocked by DNCC's structure

Waste transfer station, vehicles encroach pedestrians' space in capital's Badda

MATHEWS CHIRAN

Dhaka residents usually come across footpaths and roads being blocked by vendors and parked vehicles. As a result, they may have to jaywalk or manoeuvre their vehicles through the obstacles, hoping that one day authorities will clear the path.

But when the organisation responsible for making the city liveable creates the problem itself, what hope can residents have?

The length of footpath from Nadda to Natun Bazar is easily walkable, but after reaching Natun Bazar, pedestrians are forced to jaywalk on Pragati Sarani, because Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has set up a large garbage dumping station, known as Secondary Transfer Station (STS), occupying an entire part of the footpath.

If that was not enough, the vans and trucks for carrying garbage are usually parked alongside the footpath in a long line.

At one time, there was no proper STS in the capital, and waste was dumped on old-fashioned containers, which were provided by the city corporation, on the main road. Unfortunately, due to a lack of proper planning and disregard for pedestrians, installation of some STSs created major problems.

There are 56 such stations, measuring from 1,500 to 4,000 square feet, in DNCC, according to DNCC officials.

After a recent visit to the dumping station at Natun Bazar, this correspondent observed the issues first-hand.

"The footpath is blocked by DNCC itself, when it's the city corporation's duty to free footpaths from encroachment, making way for pedestrians,"

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A metro train gets unloaded at DMTCL jetty near the metro trail depot at the capital's Diabari area. The first set of trains reached the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

First set of metro trains reach Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The first set of metro trains reached Dhaka yesterday, registering a major development to the country's first ever metro rail project.

MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited (DMTCL), the implementing agency of the project, confirmed the matter to The Daily Star.

A barge carrying two of the six coaches of the train reached the newly-constructed jetty of DMTCL near the metro rail depot at capital's Diabari around 5pm, he said.

Another barge carrying four coaches reached later.

"This is major milestone for the project," he told this correspondent.

Earlier, the first consignment of metro train arrived at Mongla port from Japan on March 31. After completion of all necessary procedures there, two barges carrying the train set started for Dhaka on April 16.

The train left Port of Kobe in Japan on March 4.

The train set would be taken to the depot within two days. Then an integrated test of the coaches would be carried out. The authority has to carry out the test here, as they could not send their experts in Japan due to Covid-19 and have the inspection done there through third party.

"We have to do 19 tests, and it may take up to months. Then we will be preparing to start trial run," MAN Siddique said.

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It may take six months to carry out the trial run, sources said.

Each train will have the highest capacity of 2,308 people, they said.

DMTCL in August 2017 signed a contract with Kawasaki-Mitsubishi Consortium for manufacturing 24 sets of trains for the metro rail. Five sets were manufactured within December last year.

The second set of trains was loaded to barge yesterday and likely to start for Bangladesh anytime soon, MAN Siddique said, adding that those are expected to reach the depot on June 16.

Mass Rapid Transit Line-6 or MRT-6, the country's first ever metro rail, is being built from the capital's Uttara third phase to Motijheel at the cost of Tk 22,000 crore.

Once completed, the rail service -- which has 16 stations -- will be able to carry 60,000 passengers per hour, reducing travel time from Uttara to Motijheel to at least less than an hour from the current two hours.

The original implementation period of the project was 2012-2024. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina later directed that metro services from Uttara to Agargaon be made operational by 2019, and from Agargaon to Motijheel by 2020.

Failing to meet the deadline, authorities in May 2019 said the project would be launched on December 16, 2021, as the country celebrates golden jubilee of its independence.

Barishal SBMCH records 56.52pc positivity rate

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

The rising rate of Covid-19 infections in Barishal is alarming healthcare professionals and general citizens.

According to an RT-PCR lab report submitted to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College and Hospital (SBMCH) in Barishal, 56.52 percent of samples tested last Tuesday were positive for Covid-19. This is the testing facility with the highest capacity in the division.

This is a record rate of positive Covid-19 tests. According to the report submitted by the lab to SBMCH, they tested 186 samples on April 20, of which 106 were positive for coronavirus. Mentionable, 186 is the highest capacity of the lab.

This infection rate of 56.52 percent is the highest recorded by this PCR lab since it began operations on May 8 last year, confirmed the lab's in-charge, Dr Akbar Hossain.

On Monday (April 19), 51 out of 187 samples were tested positive, putting the percentage at 27.27. On Sunday (April 18), 78 out of 185 samples were tested positive, putting the rate of infection at 42.16 percent, confirmed lab sources.

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Youth voices remain unheard

Speakers identify shortfalls of National Youth Action Plan in webinar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To get the voices of grassroots youth heard, a National Youth Council consisting of national and divisional representation needs to be formulated urgently, speakers stressed at a webinar yesterday.

Titled "Implementing National Youth Action Plan in the Context of the Pandemic", the webinar was jointly organised by ActionAid Bangladesh and The Daily Star. In the session, discussants sought to explore the situation, challenge, and way forward for the National Youth Action Plan 2020 in the post-Covid period.

During her speech, ActionAid Bangladesh country director Farah Kabir said although the government has prepared the National Youth Action Plan 2020 -- four years after the initiation of the National Youth Policy 2017 -- the time has come to rethink how the plan will be implemented, keeping in mind the impact of Covid-19 on the youth population.

Meanwhile, Sabi Rani Rabidas, member of Nilphamari's Agrogami Jubo

Foundation, discussed how the lives of young women have been affected by the onset of Covid-19.

"Due to the income loss of the families, many parents are marrying off their daughters at an early age, while a large number of young women were getting involved in day labour at the EPZ," she said. "This is compromising with their education, as well as physical and mental wellbeing."

As an example, Sabi shared a personal struggle. She said while it took her more than a year to complete her four-month-long driving training, she is yet to get her license, all of these delays being caused by the pandemic.

Presenting the strengths and shortfalls of the National Youth Action Plan 2020, Korban Ali, deputy manager, Youth Representation of ActionAid Bangladesh, recommended that the authorities hold a national-level dialogue with youth-led organisations to find ways to overcome the gaps in the implementing process.

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Another DSA case filed against Nur

RU CORRESPONDENT

A case was filed against former vice president of Dhaka University Central Students' Union, Nurul Haque Nur under Digital Security Act.

This case was filed in Rajshahi yesterday on charge of hurting religious sentiments of Awami League activists and supporters through a Facebook live session on April 14.

With this, five cases have been filed so far against Nur over the same incident.

The case was filed by the city unit Jubo League Joint Secretary Tourid Al Masud Rony with Boalia Model Police Station in Rajshahi city, said Nibar Chandra Barman, officer-in-charge of the police station.

The case was filed against Nur for hurting religious sentiments of AL leaders and activists during Facebook live by delivering "provocative speech", the OC said.

According to the case statement, the complainant mentioned that Nur's speech on Facebook live on April 14 hurt "religious sentiments" of general people as well as Awami League activists and supporters, as he termed them "not real Muslims".

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70,000kg govt rice recovered from pvt warehouse in Ctg

DB says syndicates behind misappropriating such amounts

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Ctg

Tonnes of rice get imported by the government from different countries to keep prices stable in Bangladesh's market, but syndicates of unscrupulous Chattogram food officials, transport contractors, and local rice traders misappropriate the rice in different ways to later sell it at higher prices.

Amid piled-up allegations against food department officials following several such incidents, members of Chattogram Metropolitan Police's (CMP) Detective Branch (DB) recovered a total of 1,400 sacks of government rice yesterday, each weighing 50 kg. The total amount of rice is 70,000kg.

During a drive, officers initially seized a truck with 260 rice sacks from the warehouse of a rice trader in port city's Pahartali area in the early hours. After searching the warehouse, they found another 1,140 sacks.

DB officers arrested Abdul Bahar Mia (45), the warehouse's owner and proprietor of M/s Mahi Traders of Pahartali rice market.

Addressing a press conference, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Faruk Ul Haque of DB (port) said, "The truck was loaded with 260 rice sacks from the warehouse of Chittagong port's jetty. With an

invoice, it was later supposed to go to Charbhatta's LSD godown of the food department in Noakhali."

"But after leaving the jetty, the truck entered Bahar's warehouse, where police detained Bahar and seized the truck, acting on a tip-off," he said.

"When the DB officers were inspecting the truck and rice, they found another 1,140 sacks inside the warehouse, with the food department's logo printed on them," added DC Faruk.

Faruk said the rice was imported from India and later stored inside the jetty for disbursement. "Govt of People's Republic of Bangladesh, Directorate of Food, Ministry of Food" was written on every sack.

"Police suspect that syndicates may have unloaded huge amounts of rice in a similar way earlier," he added.

Asked about involvement of food officials in the incident, DC Faruk said, "It's not possible for anyone to misappropriate a huge amount of rice without inside assistance. We are grilling Bahar and will bring all those behind the incident to book."

Arrested Bahar told The Daily Star, "I managed to get the rice with help from government officials who imported it. I received it with help from one Khokon Babu of a transport company that carries the consignment. Khokon managed everything

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RESUMPTION OF DOMESTIC FLIGHTS

Few passengers on 1st day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Yesterday was the first day of the resumption of regular domestic flight operation. After a 16-day recess, two private airlines -- US-Bangla and Novoair -- operated flights from the capital in the morning.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) on Tuesday allowed three airlines to operate flights on five domestic routes -- Chattogram, Saidpur, Sylhet, Barishal and Jashore -- on a limited scale from yesterday.

Meanwhile, flights on the Dhaka-Rajshahi route will resume from today. Besides US-Bangla and Novoair, Biman Bangladesh Airlines will resume its flights on different domestic routes from today, said Tahera Khondoker, deputy general manager of the national carrier.

On the first day of resumption, the number of passengers on most of the flights were low, airlines sources said.

The number of passengers who boarded Novoair's Dhaka-Chattogram flight was only three to four, said Mesbah-ul-Islam, head of Novoair's marketing and sales department. He said the number of passengers on the return flight to Dhaka was the same.

On Novoair's Dhaka-Saidpur flight, the number was much higher as 58 people boarded the flight. The airlines also carried 32 passengers to Jashore and came back to Dhaka with 28.

Though US-Bangla's Dhaka-Sylhet flight flew with only three passengers, the airlines carried 28 passengers on the Dhaka-Chattogram route, airlines spokesperson Kamrul Islam told The Daily Star.

On its Dhaka-Saidpur route, the airlines carried 49 passengers, Kamrul Islam added.

He said though the number of passengers was relatively lower in the morning, it picked up later in the day.

Novoair's Mesbah-ul-Islam attributed the low numbers of the first day to the lack of publicity regarding flight resumption.

He also cited the ongoing month of Ramadan as another reason behind the low number of passengers on some routes.



At Sylhet city's Surma Market area, 55-year-old Ali Akbar and his umbrella repair toolbox is an ever-present sight. The money he makes is never anything to write home about, but at least it brought sustenance. But as the lockdown intensifies, Akbar sits on the same spot wearing the expression of someone stranded in a barren island. The same can be said about thousands of other informal workers of the city like him.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

UNDER-TRIAL PRISONERS

Over 12,000 released on bail in 6 working days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 12,258 under-trial prisoners got released from jails after they secured bail from virtual courts across the country in last six working days.

Supreme Court Spokesman Md Saifur Rahman in a statement said a total of 20,953 bail petitions were disposed of during this period.

The subordinate courts have disposed of 2,973 bail petitions in connection with different criminal cases through virtually hearing them and granted bail to 1,576 under-trial prisoners on Tuesday, he added.

The regular activities of courts, including the Appellate and High Court divisions of the Supreme Court remain suspended, due to the ongoing surge of Covid-19 cases.

Earlier, Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain issued some directives for the courts about dealing with urgent cases through using information and communication technology during the ongoing closure.