

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**1,877**  
New cases in 24hrs



**4,94,209**  
Total cases



**7,129**  
Deaths



**4,26,729**  
Recoveries



**GLOBAL UPDATE**



**1,635,363**  
Deaths



**73,539,033**  
Total cases

## Won't tolerate chaos

FROM PAGE 1

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The PM alleged that these bigots with political patronage were showing their audacity.

"The people of Bangladesh are pious, but not fanatics. We must not make religion as the weapon of politics. Everyone has the right to perform his own religious rituals."

Hasina mentioned that Bangladesh is a country of communal harmony. The country achieved its independence in an exchange of blood of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. "The people of the country will move on towards prosperity, progress and development keeping the religious morale high."

She briefly described various development programmes of Bangabandhu and Awami League governments for flourishing Islam in the country.

### DEBT OF BLOOD

In her 18-minute speech, the PM urged all to take a vow on the eve of the Victory Day not to forget the debt of blood of millions of martyrs.

"We must not let the non-communal spirit of the Liberation War fade away. My request to the youths and the new generation is that you must not forget the supreme sacrifices of your predecessors ever. You must not let someone dishonour the red and green flag that they have gifted [us]," she said.

The premier said youths must take a vow to transform the country into Golden Bengal imbued with the spirit of Liberation War.

### VICTORY DAY AMID COVID

Talking about the Covid-19 pandemic, Hasina said the country is going to celebrate the Victory Day this year in a different situation.

"We have to bring changes to our daily routine due to the coronavirus pandemic. We are carrying out our personal, social and national activities avoiding public gatherings. Each life is invaluable...the death of a single person due to negligence is not desirable."

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Candidates of the exam for enrollment into Bangladesh Bar Council line up in front of its Paribagh office in the capital yesterday to collect admit cards for the December 19 test. Although most of the candidates were wearing masks, they did not maintain social distancing in line with Covid-19 safety guidelines.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## A train to massacre

FROM PAGE 1

They stabbed all the passengers on the train to death with knives and bayonets, except for around 10 to 12 young boys and men who made a run for it in the dark.

The Daily Star spoke to three of these survivors who lost their family members and witnessed the barbaric Golahat massacre in Nilphamari's Saidpur upazila, which saw at least 448 people, mostly Marwaris, killed on June 13, 1971.

Nijhu Kumar Agarwal, now 65, narrowly escaped death but lost nine family members -- including his father and elder brother.

"From the afternoon of June 12, two military lorries from Saidpur cantonment were engaged to carry us from our homes to the railway station. We were told by the soldiers to hurry as there would be no space in the train compartments for those who were late."

As soon as the unsuspecting Marwaris reached the station, they were escorted by soldiers in civil dress and the Biharis, and were pushed into the compartments of the standing train, he said.

"From the spot, Pakistani soldiers abducted 20 young Marwari girls, and out of panic, their guardians couldn't make even the slightest protest," Nijhu continued.

In the early hours of June 13, the train began its short journey on the Saidpur-Chilahati route.

Tapan Kumar Das, a 70-year-old survivor, said the train moved very slowly along the steel tracks before it reached near railway culvert No 338 in the Golahat area and rolled to a stop.

To their horror, he said, those inside found that all gates and windows of the train were locked from the outside and peeping through a crack, he noticed that the train was encircled by local Biharis carrying knives and bayonets and Pakistani soldiers in civil dress at a slight distance.

The killers then opened the gates of each compartment one by one to drag out the men, women and children -- first looting all their belongings and finally stabbing and cutting them down to their harrowing deaths, according to

the few remaining survivors.

Binod Agarwal, 65, said some victims requested they be killed by shooting but they were kicked at and the soldiers shouted that the Pakistan government would not waste their bullets on them.

Survivors Nijhu and Binod said during the massacre, the killers were shouting "kharcha khata, kharcha khata".

Later, the bodies were carelessly buried in knee-deep holes on one square kilometre area on both sides of the rail tracks. They were mostly eaten by jackals and dogs, he said.

The incident was described in the 2014 book "Golahat Ganohatya" written by Ahmed Sharif, who works with the organisation 1971 Genocide and Torture Archive and Museum Trust.

"All the victims of the Golahat massacre were lured to that train being assured that they would be sent to India. They were later killed," Ahmed Sharif told The Daily Star.

The massacre is also documented in Zahangir Alam Sarkar's "History of Nilphamari", published by Bangla Academy.

### SAIDPUR IN 1971

A large number of Marwaris, from various parts of undivided India during the British era, lived in a part of Saidpur which came to be called "Marwari Patti".

They stayed on in the railway town, home of an important railway workshop in the region, trading in jute and other lucrative industries.

Bangalee residents of Saidpur who witnessed those days of turmoil in 1971 said after the March 7 speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it was clear that Bangalees were heading towards independence.

However, Urdu-speaking Biharis who migrated here after 1947 came to dominate Saidpur from the morning of March 23, Pakistan's Republic Day, with the help of the Pakistani army.

Marwaris, Bangalee Hindus, and those who supported independence of Bangladesh in Saidpur remained confined in their homes out of fear during the month of March.

On March 23, when the Swadhin Bangla flag was hoisted across the

country, the Biharis in Saidpur opposed this, instead hoisting Pakistani flags from house-tops.

After the night of March 25, Pakistani plainclothes soldiers and Biharis began looting and killing Bangalee homes and also attempted to attack the wealthy Marwaris, though they were not Bangla speakers.

Before that fateful June day, many local Marwaris and Hindu young men -- estimated to be from 185 to 300 -- were forcibly taken to the cantonment to work at the under-construction Saidpur airport.

From June 5, Pakistan army officers and local Bihari leaders spoke with Marwari community leaders, assuring them the Pakistani government had arranged a special train for all of them to be taken to India.

They also announced this by loudspeakers in different parts of Saidpur over a few days, asking them to prepare to leave for India, which came as a great relief for the under-siege Marwaris.

### NEGLECTED MARTYRS

Survivor Nijhu Kumar Agarwal, who recently visited the killing ground with our Nilphamari correspondent, pointed a finger to the spot where he last saw his loved ones.

"Just there, my father and brother were killed," he said, tears rolling down his eyes.

Starting in 2015, the Saidpur upazila administration, along with local bodies, built a memorial at the spot which was finished in 2018.

Saidpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Nasim Ahmed said they have a list of 448 victims of the Golahat massacre.

"We pay homage to those martyred at the memorial site," he said.

Earlier, the number of dead was reported as 437 but local journalist MR Alam Jhantu, also a martyr's son, said after extensive interviews in the area, the number was revised to 448.

Jhantu also said more than 4,000 people were martyred in Saidpur during the Liberation War.

"But successive governments did almost nothing to preserve the memory of those martyred."

## Hefajat sticks to its stance

FROM PAGE 1

"We have also told the minister not to set up Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's sculpture in the city's Dholaiarp as there are many mosques, madrasas and Islamic institutions in the area," Ataullah told The Daily Star.

Ataullah is also the chairman of Khelafat Andolon, a political party registered with the Election Commission.

A Hefajat leader, wishing not to be named, said they told the minister that the government could build monuments like the Qutab Minar in India at different places inscribing 99 names of Allah on them to show respect to Bangabandhu.

A government official present at the meeting said its atmosphere was nice and that both sides placed their arguments in an amicable way.

Asked about the meeting's outcome, the home minister, Asaduzzaman Khan, yesterday said discussions with the Islamic clerics on the sculpture issue was fruitful and that the talks would continue.

"I want to make it clear that the government will not go beyond the constitution. We will not do anything that hurts people's religious sentiment," he told reporters at the secretariat.

In reply to another query, the home boss, however, claimed that his party Awami League was not maintaining a policy of "bowing down before anyone" to resolve the ongoing crisis over Bangabandhu's sculpture.

More discussions would be held to settle all issues, raised by the Alems, in a friendly manner, he said.

"We think a beautiful environment has been created... They have agreed with us that no one should vandalise anything or violate law. They told us to remain vigilant to stop propaganda being spread on Facebook over opposing Bangabandhu's sculpture. They also said they won't wage any movement. They want to solve the issue through talks," he said.

Asaduzzaman mentioned that

discussions took place with the clerics on their five-point demand, including establishment of "Mujib Minar" instead of sculptures of Bangabandhu.

He said even Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina may hold discussions on a larger scale to resolve the issue.

Replying to another question, the minister said the construction of Bangabandhu's sculpture in Dholaiarp was underway. He, however, said: "No decision has yet been made on whether the sculpture will exist there."

"We will resolve all those issues through discussions."

About Hefajat's demand for building "Mujib Minar" with 99 names of Allah, he said they also discussed the matter. "We have told them that sculptures are not meant for worshiping."

State Minister for Religious Affairs Md Faridul Haque Khan, Bepaq Secretary General and also a top Hefajat leader Maulana Mahfuzul Haque, Maulana Farid Uddin Masud, Maulana Nurul Islam, and Maulana Ruhul Amin, among others, were present at the meeting on Monday.

A section of Qawmi madrasa-based clerics on December 5 came up with their five-point proposal. On December 7, two sedition cases were filed with Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Court against Hefajat Amir Junayed Babunagari, its Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque and Nayeb-e-Amir of Islami Andolon Bangladesh Syed Faizul Karim.

Under its new leadership, Hefajat has recently been speaking against the construction of Bangabandhu's sculptures, terming them anti-Islamic.

They demanded that the government finds an alternative way in light of Islamic rules to show respect to Bangabandhu.

Several top ministers of the government have been arguing that sculptures and idols are not the same and that sculptures exist even in many Islamic countries, including Saudi Arabia and Iran.

## She only went to buy chips

FROM PAGE 1

grandparents started looking for her, but did not find her anywhere.

Later, her family members, relatives and locals began a search for her across the village. Around 1:30am, they found her body near a bamboo grove, said Gazir Rahman, additional superintendent of police (Sherpur circle) of Bogura.

The girl was rushed to Dhanat Upazila Health Complex.

Ashrafal Kabir, medical officer at the health complex, said she died before being taken to the hospital around 2:00am yesterday.

The body was sent to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

"We primarily found evidence of rape. There were injury marks on her chest and blood in her private parts," said the additional SP.

Police were trying to identify and arrest the culprit(s), he said.

The number of rape and sexual harassment has apparently increased in recent times, triggering public outcry.

Amid countrywide protests

denouncing violence against women, the "Women and Children Repression Prevention (Amendment) Bill, 2020" was passed in parliament November 17 keeping death penalty as the highest punishment for rape.

Meanwhile in Savar, Rab on Monday rescued a 12-year-old girl in Ashulia's Dendabar area. The law enforcers said she had gone missing from Sherpur 15 days ago and was allegedly raped multiple times since then.

Rab arrested two people in this connection.

They are Anzika alias Trisha, 20, a resident of Balyadi village in Sherpur's Nakla upazila, and Ridoy Khan, 21, of Darulhuda village of Patuakhali's Bhandaria upazila.

The victim and Anzika knew each other. Anzika tricked her into coming to Ashulia on November 29, promising her of giving a job, said Rab officials.

Anzika then handed over the girl to Ridoy, who allegedly raped her on multiple occasions, said Maj AHM Adnan Tofadar, company commander of Rab-4.

[Our correspondents in Bogura and Savar contributed to this report]

## Sixty-one more

FROM PAGE 1

a total of 400 Biranganas received the status of freedom fighters.

At least 1.62 lakh women were raped and another 1.31 lakh Hindu women went missing during the War, according to the War Crimes Facts and Findings Committee led by Dr M Hassan.

The Hindu women were believed to have been raped and killed in the Pakistan army camps.

The process of recognising Biranganas as freedom fighters started following a High Court order on January 27, 2014.

It asked the government to explain why it should not be directed to upgrade the social status of war heroines and provide them with state honour and facilities like those of freedom fighters.

Every recognised Birangana will now receive a monthly allowance of Tk 12,000 and special quota in government jobs and benefits for their children and grandchildren.

This year, the nation is going to celebrate its Victory Day, the most prestigious day for Bangalees, in a different manner on the account of ongoing pandemic.

The government has initiated elaborate programmes to celebrate the day at the national level, maintaining Covid-19 health guidelines.

The programmes include a 31-gun salute, placing of wreaths at the monuments to pay homage to martyrs, hoisting the national flag atop all government, semi-government and private offices, as well as offices of autonomous bodies across the country, decorating city streets with miniature national flags and colourful festoons, and illumination of important buildings and establishments, roads and street islands at night.

This year, President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will not visit the National Memorial at Savar.

On behalf of them, tributes will be paid to Liberation War martyrs by placing wreaths.

Besides, the traditional parade with the participation of different contingents of the Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force, as well as Freedom Fighters' contingent, Para-military forces and law enforcement agencies at the National Parade Ground on the victory day will not be held this year due to Covid-19.

Special prayers will be offered at mosques and other places of worship, seeking eternal peace for the departed souls of martyrs and good health of injured freedom fighters as well as peace, progress and prosperity of the country.

To mark the day, a public holiday, national dailies will bring out special supplements on the occasion while Bangladesh Postal Department will release memorial postal stamps to mark the day.

State-owned and private television and radio channels will broadcast special programmes highlighting the Liberation War.

President M Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued separate messages for the eve of Independence Day.

In his message, President Hamid put emphasis on institutionalising democracy and developing a culture of absolute tolerance and mutual respect to provide the benefits of independence to people's doorsteps.

The PM in her message urged everyone to unite against all communal evil forces and thwart any conspiracy against the country, democracy and government.

She also urged all to follow health guidelines and play their due roles in maintaining the country's development, progress and continuity of democracy.

## 40 more die

FROM PAGE 1

remained stagnant around 20 till mid-November. The daily death cases, however, started to rise again since then [last one month] and was stagnant around 35.

With yesterday's count, the highly transmissible virus claimed 7,129 lives in the country which is 1.44 percent against the total number of confirmed cases so far.

Dr Mushtaq Hussain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told The Daily Star that "death cases usually rise three weeks after the infection rises. Maybe, today's [yesterday] figure is a beginning as the infection was high in the past several weeks. We are observing a rising trend in the daily death cases over the last few weeks."

Over the past two months, the number of daily cases has also increased.

Covid-19 cases rose by 33.49 percent in the last month compared to the number recorded in October.

With the latest, the total number of confirmed cases rose to 4,94,209. Against a total of 19,054 tests in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the positivity rate was 9.85 percent, while the overall positivity rate stands at 16.44 percent.

In the same period, a total of 2,884 Covid-19 patients have recovered from their illnesses, according to the press release.

With this, the total number of recoveries rose to 4,26,729 and the recovery rate at 86.35 percent.

Among yesterday's deceased, 26 were males and 14 were females.

Two of them were aged between 31 and 40 years, three between 41 and 50, seven between 51 and 60, and 28 were above 60 years, added the release.