

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**388**  
New cases in 24hrs



**5,39,153**  
Total cases



**8,239**  
Deaths



**4,85,290**  
Recoveries



**2,358,080**  
Deaths



**107,639,175**  
Total cases

MARTYRED INTELLECTUALS

# Govt finalises definition

First list to be announced on March 25

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Intellectuals who lost their lives at the hands of Pakistani army and their collaborators in the Liberation War will be defined as martyred intellectuals, according to a committee formed by the government.

The government would announce a partial list of around 500 martyred intellectuals on March 25 and subsequently publish the names through a gazette notification, said member secretary of the committee Rathindra Nath Datta, deputy secretary at the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs.

Literateurs, philosophers, scientists, artists, teachers, researchers, journalists, lawyers, physicians, engineers, architects, sculptors, government and non-government employees, politicians, social workers, cultural activists, musicians, and people involved in filmmaking, theatre and arts, who were killed by the Pakistani forces or went missing between March 25, 1971, and January 31, 1972, would be defined as martyred intellectuals, said one of the members of the committee Chowdhury Shahid Kader, associate professor of history at Jagannath University.

The Mirpur area of Dhaka was freed from pro-Pakistan Biharis on January 31, 1972, said Shahriar Kabir, President of Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee.

While making the list, the committee would review each person's intellectual contribution in the emergence of Bangladesh, he added.

A sub-committee was formed to review the names of 1,222 people the ministry has, he said.

The names of the martyred intellectuals were found in Bangla Academy's Shaheed Buddhijibi Koshgrantha, a 1972 publication of the government called "Bangladesh", Banglapedia, and postal stamps.

The intellectuals were the country's leading intelligentsia and the guiding light. They were instrumental in organising the mass movements against the repressive Pakistani rulers and contributed to the 1971 Liberation War. From the night of March 25, 1971, the intellectuals were being targeted by the Pakistan army, aided by their local collaborators, brutally killed them to cripple the nation intellectually. Premeditated killings of the intellectuals reached its peak on December 14, two days before the Victory Day.

The nation still lacks a comprehensive and final list of the martyred intellectuals.



**EU Ambassador Rensje Teerink, top, German Ambassador Peter Fahrenholtz, left, and Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Vikram Doraiswami, right, getting Covid vaccines at the Sheikh Russel Gastro Liver Institute and Hospital yesterday.**  
PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Govt to engage pvt hospitals

FROM PAGE 1

Urging people to take the vaccine, the minister said, "Now the challenge is to administer the doses. Another 50 lakh shots of vaccine will reach the country by this month. Moreover, we have a contract to get 6.5 crore shots of vaccines from the Covax."

The government had a stock of 70 lakh doses of three different batches. Shots from two of the batches will expire in April while those of the other in June this year.

The minister claimed that the government has successfully arranged treatment for all Covid-19 and non-Covid patients during this pandemic.

Yesterday, 1,58,451 people, including eminent personalities and diplomats

of foreign missions in Dhaka, took the vaccine jabs, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

With this, the number of vaccine recipients rose to 3,37,769 against the target of vaccinating 35 lakh people in the first month.

Of those vaccinated yesterday, 70 showed side effects. With them, the number of vaccine recipients who showed adverse effects rose to 277. However, none of them had any severe side effects, say health officials.

Initially, the government had planned to administer 60 lakh shots in the first month, but the number was revised apparently due to a lukewarm response to the online registration.

Another 2.4 lakh people registered

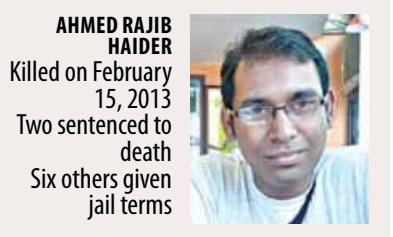
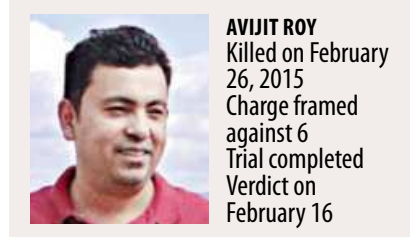
to take vaccines visiting the government website [www.surokha.gov.bd](http://www.surokha.gov.bd) till yesterday afternoon, raising the figure to 9.4 lakh.

The government had also planned to administer each vaccine recipient the second dose two months after the first one, but it later narrowed down the gap to one month.

### DIPLOMATS TAKE VACCINE

Twenty-one diplomats of different foreign missions in Dhaka took the Covid-19 vaccine at Sheikh Russel Gastro Liver Institute and Hospital in the capital's Mohakhali yesterday.

The missions include those of European Union Delegation, Germany, Turkey, France, India, Australia, Italy and the Vatican.



**AVIJIT ROY**  
Killed on February 26, 2015  
Charge framed against 6  
Trial completed  
Verdict on February 16

**AHMED RAJIB HAIDER**  
Killed on February 15, 2013  
Two sentenced to death  
Six others given jail terms

## Wait now is for verdict

FROM PAGE 1

Islam (Bangladesh Chapter of al-Qaeda in Indian Sub-Continent).

All the victims were hacked to death in a similar manner between 2013 and 2016, with four of them killed within just seven months in 2015. It started with the killing of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider near his house in Mirpur on February 15, 2013.

The militant group was spearheaded by Major (sacked) Syed Ziaul Haque, who planned all those killings carried out by sleeper cells, investigators found.

Maj (sacked) Zia Syed Ziaul Haque, who has been charge-sheeted in all those cases as the prime accused, is eluding arrest ever since. Deputy Commissioner Saiful Islam of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTIC) unit yesterday said their intelligence effort is on to arrest Zia.

Replying to a query, he said they do not have any information that Zia fled the country.

Yesterday, eight members of Ansar Al Islam, including its top commander Major (sacked) Zia, were sentenced to death for killing publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan in October 2015.

Earlier, on December 31, 2015, a Dhaka court handed down the death penalty to two people and different jail terms to six others for the killing of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider.

### THE KILLINGS

On February 26, 2015, US-based Bangladeshi blogger Avijit Roy and his wife Rafida Ahmed Bonya came under attack near the TSC of Dhaka University when the couple was walking out of Ekushey Boli Mela at around 8:30pm.

Avijit died on the spot while Bonya survived with serious injuries.

Prof Ajoy Roy, Avijit's father, filed the murder case accusing unidentified assailants with Shahbagh Police Station the next day. The CTIC unit later submitted the charge sheet on March 11, 2019 and the trial has been completed.

On August 1 that year, the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal of Dhaka framed charges against the six accused - Zia, Akram Hossain Abir, Mozammel Hossain Saymon, Abu Siddiq Sohel, Arafat Rahman Siam, and Shafiqur Rahman Farabi.

The verdict is due on February 16.

Oyashiqur Rahman Babu was attacked by three cleaver-wielding youths in the capital's Teajona industrial area on March 30, 2015.

Later, Monir Hossain, brother-in-law of the victim, filed a murder case with Teajona Industrial Police Station in this regard.

On September 1 that year, the Detective Branch of police, submitted the charge sheet against five ABT members. A Dhaka court framed charges against the five on July 20, 2016.

The accused are Zikrullah alias Hasan, Ariful Islam alias Mushfiq, Md Saiful Islam (now behind bars), Akram Hossain Hasib alias Abdullah, and Junayed alias Taher (now on the run).

Twenty-four prosecution witnesses out of 40 gave their depositions before the court so far in the case, said Assistant Public Prosecutor Md Salahuddin Howlader.

Ananta Bijoy Das was killed at Sylhet city's Subidbazar on the morning of May 12, 2015 while on his way to work. Militant outfit ABT later claimed responsibility for the murder.

A tribunal in Sylhet recorded 18 prosecution witnesses out of 29 in the case.

Blogger Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy was hacked to death by a group of assailants at his rented flat at Goran in the city on August 7, 2015.

After a five-year investigation, police on October 4 last year pressed charges against 13 suspects, including Zia.

Nazim Uddin Samad, a law student at Jagannath University, was hacked and shot to death at Hrishikesh Das Lane in Old Dhaka on April 6, 2016.

On August 18 last year, the CTIC unit pressed charges against nine members of Ansar Al Islam, including Zia, in the case filed over his killing.

Four of the accused have so far been arrested.

Xulhaz Mannan, also a former USAID official, was hacked to death at his Kalabagan home along with his friend Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy on April 25, 2016.

On July 28, 2019, police pressed charges against eight Ansar Al Islam members, including Zia, in the case.

The case is now under trial at the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal of Dhaka, which recorded 15 prosecution witnesses in the case so far.

## Sikder Group chief

FROM PAGE 1

Flourishing in entrepreneurship after the country's independence, Sikder was born on August 12 in 1930 in Assam before partition. He migrated to Bangladesh during partition.

"He was one of those who contributed greatly to the development and progress of the country," said the press release signed by Sikder Group COO & Director Qamrul. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed condolences after the death of Sikder, who was also a freedom fighter, reports BSS.

Hasina prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family.

Sikder had been with the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as one of his close and trustworthy associates since 1945.

He had also arranged a Quikhwani for Bangabandhu and his family members on August 19, 1975, four days since their brutal murder, in the capital's Rayerbazar area. For that, he had to face harassment and intimidation of the military intelligence, while having to suffer in jail.

Qamrul said they are trying to bring Sikder's body back to the country by the evening today.

Sikder established ventures in education, health, housing and tourism, banking, power, economic zones, port, aviation, infrastructure development, hotel and resort, and trading.

The company also has business entities in Thailand, Singapore, Canada and the USA, according to the website of PowerPac Holdings Ltd.

Sikder started his career in real estate & construction and subsequently diversified and expanded his business 1982, said the website.

The group employed about 20,000 people in the last seven decades.

He was also chairman of the National Bank Ltd, the first private bank.

In addition to those, he headed the board of Sikder Real Estate Ltd, Sikder Pharma, Monowara Sikder Medical College and Hospital, ZH Sikder Womens Medical College and Hospital (Pvt) Ltd, and was the chairman of ZH Sikder University of Science and Technology.

## An attack on free speech, secularism

FROM PAGE 1

Avijit was murdered on the Dhaka University campus eight months earlier.

The convicts handed the capital punishment are Ansar al Islam's top commander Sayed Ziaul Haque alias Maj (sacked) Zia, "squad leader" Moinul Hasan Shamim alias Samir alias Imran, trainer Abdus Sabur alias Samad alias Sujoy alias Raju, and top operatives Khairul Islam alias Fahim alias Jishan, Sheikh Abdullah, Abu Siddiq Sohel, Mozammel Hossain alias Saimon and Akram Hossain alias Hasib.

Of them, Zia and Akram are absconding, while the rest are behind bars.

In his observations, the judge outlined the role of each of the militants in the grisly murder that shook the nation.

Zia trained the other militants and financed the operation, Akram planned the murder, Moinul collected the weapons and led the team of the killers, Mozammel took part in the killing and also stalked Dipan prior to his murder, Sohel and Khairul stood guard outside the murder spot to make sure that the operation went smoothly, and Abdullah moved money from one place to another to finance the operation.

The judge quoted Abdullah as saying in his confessional statement, "In 2015, money used to flow in to kill bloggers, publishers and homosexuals in the country. I used to deliver the money to Saimon and others at the instruction of Sagor Bhai [Zia]."

The militants took a week-long training at a house in Mohammadpur Nabodoy Housing before the killing mission, stated the judge.

"There is no scope to judge who played a bigger role in the murder. Since the accused organisationally orchestrated the killing, their punishment must be the same," said the judge.

In the judgment, the tribunal said the prosecution was able to prove the charges against all the accused and that the accused were handed capital punishment for their involvement in committing the heinous offence.

Ahead of the court proceedings yesterday, security was beefed up in and around the courtroom.

Most courtrooms in the precinct are a flurry of activity - lawyers in black surn in and out cradling folders under their arms, justice-seekers lounge in the long balconies straddling the courtrooms, and peanut-sellers conduct brisk business catering to people in line.

The courtroom yesterday, however, looked different, apparently as it was getting prepared for the sentencing of militants for the sensational murder.

The entire floor was blocked off by a wall of policemen, and every person going in was frisked rigorously. Before people were allowed in, the entire courtroom was combed for explosives. For once, the metal detector was plugged in.

One by one, six members of the banned militant group Ansar al Islam, accused of killing Dipan, were produced before the court.

Each of them wore helmets, bulletproof vests, and over starched white Panjabi and salwars. Their hands were cuffed tightly behind their back, and they were not allowed to wear shoes as a precautionary measure. Even as they stood locked in the docket, a wall of police encircled them.

Up until the verdict was delivered, the six ABT men were murmuring under their breaths, their mouths silently chanting words.

After the judge handed down the death sentence, the only one crying was Dipan's wife, Razia Rahman, who

silently wept into her lap, shoulders hunched. She said nothing, but apparently the sentencing of her husband's killers opened a floodgate of emotions for her.

The convicts either listened to their death sentence being read out with a calm expression on their faces or let out bemused chuckles. While one can wonder what was going through their heads, perhaps it can be questioned if repentance was on the agenda.

As lawyers hailed the judgment as exemplary, a few of the convicts curiously stood on tip-toes apparently to observe who was saying what about them.

The trial was concluded in 36 working days since the framing of charges against the eight accused on October 13, 2019.

Earlier, the tribunal recorded statements of 23 prosecution witnesses, including the complainant of the case.

On November 2, 2015, Dipan's wife filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station accusing some unknown people.

On November 14, 2018, Assistant Commissioner Md Fazlur Rahman of Detective Branch of police pressed charges against the eight.

Yesterday, the convicts were also fined Tk 50,000 each.

"This is an expected verdict," Dipan's father, Dhaka University's former Prof Abul Quasem Fazlul Huq, told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the defendants' lawyer Nazrul Islam said they did not get their expected verdict and added that they would file an appeal with the High Court, challenging the verdict.

"The charges against the accused have not been proved and the investigators could not question the principal actors. There were also problems with the documents," he said.

## We will now look into the legal aspects

FROM PAGE 1

Remained on the ministry website as award recipients and collect evidence on how "Ziaur Rahman was involved in the killing of Bangabandhu".

"We will sit for a meeting soon to verify legal aspects regarding the decision to revoke the gallantry awards of Zia and four other killers of Bangabandhu," Shajahan Khan, an AL MP and a member of the probe body, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Shajahan, a former minister and a member of the council, said they would also seek vetting from the law ministry in this regard.

Talking to reporters, Law Minister Anisul Haq yesterday said there would be no legal complications regarding cancellation of the freedom fighter's title of Zia.

"If someone is a freedom fighter, then it is normal for him to have the title of freedom fighter. But if a freedom fighter ruined the spirit of the Liberation War, I want to leave the question to the people as to whether he has any right to hold the title," the law minister told reporters after receiving the Covid-19 vaccine.

The alleged involvement of Zia in the conspiracy to assassinate Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members has always been discussed by top Awami League leaders, including its President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, elder daughter of Bangabandhu.

Hasina and her younger sister Sheikh

Rehana luckily escaped the mayhem on August 15, 1975 when Bangabandhu and most of his family were murdered.

According to the list of gallantry award winning freedom fighters on the website of the Liberation War Affairs Ministry, Shariful Haque Dalim was a "Bir Uttam", Nur Chowdhury a "Bir Bikram", and Rashed Chowdhury and Mosleh Uddin were "Bir Pratik".

Talking to The Daily Star, Mozammel yesterday said "Zia was involved in the assassination of Bangabandhu" and his gallantry award should be revoked.

"There are many instances in the world in which gallantry awards given to people were revoked later for their roles. We have come to a decision that the title conveyed to him [Zia] is not honourable for the state," the minister said.

He said evidence supporting Zia's "involvement in the killing of Bangabandhu" was being collected and the probe body would evaluate and submit those to the council.

**BNP'S REACTION**  
BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, who is being treated at a hospital in Singapore, yesterday told The Daily Star that the council's decision to revoke Zia's "Bir Uttam" title insulted and disrespected the freedom fighters.

Fakhrul said Ziaur Rahman did not give the recognition to himself and that the Bangabandhu's government had bestowed the honour on him.

secretary general of SCF yesterday told The Daily Star that Ziaur Rahman did not have the right to hold the title of "Bir Uttam" for his patronisation of the killers of Bangabandhu and Razakars.

"It is historically true that Ziaur Rahman took part in the Liberation War. But it is also historically true that Zia distorted the history of the Liberation War and rehabilitated the killers of Bangabandhu."

On September 7, 2016, the government removed the Swadhinata Padak (Independence Award) of Ziaur Rahman from the National Museum. Zia's name was also removed from the 2003 list of Independence Award recipients that has been on display on the Cabinet Division's website.

In 2003, the then BNP-Jamaat four-party alliance government gave the Swadhinata Padak, the highest civilian award, to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman for their roles in the Liberation War and nation building.

The Awami League refused the award. The then government then sent the medals and citation papers to the National Museum for display.

On August 24, 2016, the cabinet committee on national award affairs in a meeting recommended revoking Zia's Swadhinata Padak and removing his medal and documents from the museum.

## FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

# Bangladesh stands by Maldives: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said Bangladesh would extend its highest possible support to the Maldives in fighting the adverse impacts of global warming.

She gave the assurance when Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid met her at the Gono Bhaban.

"As the Climate Vulnerable Forum chair, Sheikh Hasina assured the Maldives of extending all-out support to it in facing the adverse impacts of climate change," said PM's Assistant Press Secretary MM Emrul Kayas.

Hasina said Bangladesh has designed its own mitigation and adaptation plans, and is implementing those to fight the climate adversities.

Abdulla expressed willingness to regularise a good number of undocumented Bangladeshis living in the Maldives.

He informed the PM that Bangladeshis in the Maldives would be vaccinated against Covid-19 for free.

About the Rohingya issue, Hasina said Bangladesh has sheltered over one million Rohingyas and a significant number of the forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals are now being relocated to Bhashan Char in Noakhali.

Referring to the two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) signed between Bangladesh and the Maldives, the PM expressed satisfaction over signing of two documents during his visit.

Abdulla highly praised the PM's leadership for gaining tremendous successes in different sectors.

He said the Bangladesh PM is an important leader not only in Bangladesh or South Asia but also in the whole world.

The Maldives minister said the president of his country Ibrahim Mohamed Solih thanked Hasina for inviting him to attend the functions of the Independence Day of Bangladesh in the Mujib Borsho.

He said Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a great leader not only for Bangladesh but also for the whole world.

## 10 more die, 388 new Covid cases detected

Bss, Dhaka

Bangladesh recorded 10 novel coronavirus deaths and 388 fresh cases in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

The recovery count rose to 4,85,290 after another 717 patients were discharged from hospitals during the period, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

"Ten more Covid-19 patients died in the last 24 hours, increasing the death toll from the pandemic to 8,239," the release said.

It said the tally of infections has surged to 5,39,153 as 388 new cases were confirmed in the last 24 hours.

A total of 14,999 samples were tested at 206 authorised laboratories across the country during the time.

Of the samples tested in the past 24 hours, 2.59 percent were positive, while 14.22 percent cases were detected from the total tests conducted so far, the release added.

Among the total infections, 90.01 percent patients have recovered, while 1.53 percent have died so far since the first Covid-19 positive cases were reported in the country on March 8 last year.

## Thank You

FROM PAGE 1

unwavering faith that you had reposed on us over this period.

We, on our part, have tried to deliver on the promise that we made when we started - to be an independent voice. To the best of our ability we tried to look at issues independently and from the perspective of the people rather than that of the government, political parties, policy makers and interest groups. We of course talked with all of them, considered their points of view, judged their arguments but wrote what we thought to be of public interest.

Our positions were fact based, researched, multi-sourced and unbiased.

Three decades of your favourite newspaper's journey has been full of trials and challenges. We could ride through them all because of your support for our journalism and faith in our integrity.

As you well know that the pandemic had severely affected the world of the print media globally as well as in our country. It affected both our circulation and our revenue. However, thanks to your support for ethical journalism we were able to regain a substantial segment of both.

It is also a matter of great pride that our 30th anniversary coincides with the 50th anniversary of the country's birth. Our readers will no doubt be aware that this newspaper has been an inseparable part of the country's journey to success for the last three decades. Our supplement has been designed to reflect that journey.

The first of our five-part special anniversary supplement is being distributed with today's issue. We hope that you find our effort worth your serious attention.

Thank you again for being with us all the way.

- Editor and Publisher