

BANGLADESH UPDATE 396 New cases in 24hrs 5,41,434 Total cases 8,298 Deaths 8,88,621 Recoveries GLOBAL UPDATE 2,424,542 Deaths 109,888,121 Total cases

Bad things happen when life is good

PM warns

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon all to stay alert saying that bad things happen when people lead a good life and the country moves towards prosperity.



"I would like to alert you...one thing you might have noticed that the possibility of being attacked emerges when the life goes well in Bangladesh, when the people start dreaming of a good life and when the lifestyle improves. So, all will have to stay alert," she said.

The PM mentioned this while unveiling the cover of the document on 8th Five Year Plan (July 2020- June 2025) during an Ecneq meeting at the NEC Conference Room of the Planning Commission. She joined the meeting virtually from the Gono Bhavan.

Remembering the assassination of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members on August 15, 1975, Hasina said he was killed at a time when the country started standing up from the devastation of the war with bumper food production and Bangladesh's economic status was improving steadily with the fruits of independence reaching the people's doorsteps. Talking about the Covid-19 pandemic, she said the government has

been working tirelessly with its limited resources to change the fate of the people and offset the impacts of the pandemic. "We have been able to get the coronavirus under control with our all-out efforts. We have given directives [to tackle it], announced stimulus packages and started vaccination even though many developed countries are yet to roll it out."

Hasina said the government contacted all the countries, when they started research on vaccine development, to collect doses for Bangladesh.

"We made advance payments to book vaccine doses so that we can get those once the WHO approves it. We've been able to do that and set an example."

Stating that the people of the country are very much conscious in this regard, the premier hoped the impact of novel coronavirus will not be there in the country anymore. **8TH FIVE YEAR PLAN**

About the 8th Five Year Plan, Hasina said the government approved it earlier and started implementing it. The PM said the plan was formulated keeping in mind the Vision 2041. She hoped the government, whichever takes office in future, would continue it through the formulation of the next Five Year Plan in future.

He was killed

FROM PAGE 1

Avijit's brother, meanwhile, demanded immediate arrest of Zia and other fugitives.

The verdict was pronounced at 12:10pm with four of the accused on the dock.

Except for Farabi, the three others were calm during the verdict delivery. With their hands cuffed behind their backs, all four were taken to the courtroom six minutes before noon amid tight security.

A large number of police personnel surrounded them when they were on the dock, wearing helmets. An archway metal detector was erected at the entrance of the block that housed the tribunal.

Before and after the judgement, with the exception of Farabi, the three others were seen talking among themselves and laughing. They looked calm.

The punishment of the fugitives will be effective from the day of their arrest or surrender, the judge added in his judgement.

The verdict came just six days after the same judge handed down capital punishment to eight members of the same banned outfit, Ansar al Islam, also known as Ansarulaha Bangla Team, on February 10 for hacking to death publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan on October 31, 2015. Zia, Akram, Sohel and Mozammel were also among those sentenced to death for murdering Dipan.

Dipan, owner and publisher of Jagriti Prokashoni, was killed because he published a book by Avijit Roy.

Judge Majibur Rahman also observed that the convicts killed Avijit Roy with a common intention to keep people away from thinking and working freely. There is no scope to see which accused played which role, he observed.

"If the killers of Avijit Roy are alive, other members of Ansar al Islam who are untouched will be encouraged to commit the same crime. Scientific and freethinking writers will not be emboldened to write and think freely," the judge observed.

"The accused do not deserve any sympathy," he said, adding so it will be a justice to hang them by their neck till their death.

The deaths of the five convicts will be a consolation to the victim's family members, he said.

Additionally, free-thinking writers will be encouraged to express themselves and it will be a deterrent to such crimes, the judge remarked.

The killers attacked Avijit, then 42, from behind around 8:30pm on February 16 with machetes when they he and his wife were returning from the Ekushay book fair. They also attacked his wife Rafida Ahmed Bonyha when she tried to save Avijit. Bonyha suffered severe injuries to her head and lost a finger.

Avijit's father Prof Ajoy Roy, who taught physics at Dhaka University, filed the murder case against unidentified assailants with Shahbagh Police Station the next day.

After four long years waiting for justice for his murdered son, Ajoy Roy passed away at a hospital in Dhaka at the age of 85 on December 9, 2019.

Investigation Officer of the case Inspector Mohammad Monirul Islam of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CITC) unit pressed charges against the six convicts on March 11, 2019.

The tribunal framed charges against the six on August 1 the same year.

Ajoy Roy testified before a court on October 28 that year and while testifying, out of frustration, he said he would not continue appearing for the hearings.

"We are quite upset seeing the progress of the trial," he told The Daily Star after coming out of the courtroom that day.

After 32 working days the judge completed the trial, the judge said,

adding that 28 prosecution witnesses testified during the trial.

The tribunal fined each of the convicts sentenced to death Tk 50,000 while Farabi, sentenced to life imprisonment, was fined Tk 50,000, in default of which he will have to serve another two years more in jail.

Defence lawyer MABM Khairul Islam said that they would challenge the judgement before the higher court.

ROLE OF THE CONVICTS
According to the judgement, Abu Siddiq Sohel had tailed Avijit Roy on various occasions and exchanged information with his fellow Ansar al Islam members in a plan to kill the writer-blogger.

After following Avijit on February 26, 2015, he confirmed to Saimon that Avijit came to the Ekushay Boi Mela. Besides, he stood guard for the killers with their leaders at the spot during the murder.

Arafat Rahman Siam visited the book fair after buying bags and machetes and followed Avijit with an intention to kill him.

He waited beside Avijit's car with a bag containing machetes.

Arafat and three others -- Ali, Antu and Anik of the operation branch of ATB -- hacked Avijit indiscriminately with machetes.

Mukul Rana alias Sharif, who was later killed in an encounter with police, gave each of the four Tk 2,000 to buy bags and machetes.

The four bought bags and machetes from the capital's Tongi area and individually surveilled Avijit's house.

Arafat and others also surveilled the book fair on February 24 and 25 before killing Avijit so that they could go to a safe place after the murder.

Mozammel Hossain Saimon directed Sohel to follow Avijit. He himself followed Avijit several times. He informed Zia and other leaders that Avijit came to the book fair. During the murder, he stayed near the killers with Zia and other leaders.

Avijit was killed at the directive of Major (sacked) Zia. Zia stood nearby when Avijit was murdered.

Akrum Hossain showed Avijit's photo to Sohel. He himself had tailed Avijit several times. During the murder, he was nearby, supporting their leader Mukul Rana.

Farabi uploaded the photos of Avijit, his wife and daughter on his Facebook page and made an open call to kill Avijit, terming him an atheist. He assisted the killers by exposing Avijit.

Besides, six other members of the banned Ansar al Islam were involved in the killing, but the IO did not submit charge sheets against them as their details and identities could not be revealed, the IO said yesterday.

ANUJIT'S REACTION
Avijit's brother Anujit Roy expressed satisfaction with the judgement.

"Police administration should not be relaxed after the judgement. They should continue their efforts to arrest the two masterminds -- Maj (sacked) Zia and Akram Hossain -- as soon as possible," he told The Daily Star over phone.

He was not present at court during the delivery of the judgment.

Anujit said the militant group can be more vengeful and plot conspiracies to kill more people after failing to have their operatives released.

"It is a matter of concern that the two masterminds are still at large," he added.

"I am satisfied with the judgement though it took a long time..." he said. "When fundamentalism is becoming extreme in the country and an attempt was made to justify the killing by citing demeaning of religion, I am satisfied with the verdict..." My father would also be satisfied if he was alive," he said.

He also demanded quick execution of the judgement.



Police take Shafiu Rahman Farabi to the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal in Old Dhaka's judge's court area yesterday before the delivery of the verdict in the writer-blogger Avijit Roy murder case. The court sentenced him to life imprisonment and handed death sentences to five others.

PHOTO: STAR

Demeaning army chief amounts to demeaning PM

FROM PAGE 1

An institution like Bangladesh Army, which is the pride of the nation, pride of the country -- so that confusion arises," General Aziz told the media after a programme organised by Army Aviation Group at Dhaka's Tejgaon yesterday morning.

"Bangladesh Army is a well-trained and well-motivated force... more organised than ever before. The chain of command of the army is very effective. Every member of the army has rejected this ill attempt in the past and they are rejecting what's there at present, and all those who are in our chain of command are aware of it," he said.

"I want to assure you this kind of propaganda will not be able to affect our chain of command. Bangladesh Army is respectful to the constitution, determined to uphold Bangladesh's constitution, loyal to the Bangladesh government and ready to follow any command of the government... the present government and we are constitutionally committed to face any challenge -- domestic or global," he said.

While replying to a query over Al Jazeera's report on his family members and footage, he said, "I am asking you... case has been filed against you, there's punishment, but if you were acquitted yesterday, and if there is no other case under trial against you -- can you be called a fugitive today?"

"Can it be said that you are a convict? If a convict is acquitted of the charges, he/she is a free person," he said.

"There is an explanation of the propaganda regarding my brothers. We will inform you everything through a press conference on behalf of my family. I can say that I, as army chief, am aware of the image of the army, my position and responsibilities," he added.

He claimed that there were no cases against his brother when he met him in Malaysia.

"There was a conspiratorial case from which he was acquitted in March," General Aziz said, adding that he went to Malaysia in April, 2020.

The Al Jazeera statement was completely ill-motivated, he added.

"Secondly, video footage was captured during my trips to various countries. I think my security, as an army chief, is confirmed officially when I am anywhere within official capacity. Wherever I go, the host country does it. I do not think there is any necessity to take any additional security measures there.

"But if I am on a personal trip, may be visiting my relatives during transits, I don't think I should use the official protocol. I think it is a wastage [of resources] and I shouldn't do that.

"After getting our rejoinder, you would understand the purpose of those who are doing these," he said.

"You have asked why I am the target repeatedly. I think I will leave it up to you -- you guys find out why Bangladesh Army is being targeted.

"This army chief has been appointed by the honourable prime minister of Bangladesh government. Demeaning the army chief means demeaning the prime minister. We must understand that," General Aziz said.

"I am up to speed so that my institution, organisation -- Bangladesh Army -- and our government do not feel embarrassed or face any controversy.

"What you have heard ... they can do it, collecting pieces from different parts. But they will not be able to achieve the target. And you [journalists] have already answered them through your writing. So, I am grateful to you [journalists]," he said.

Asked whether any action will be taken against those in Bangladesh who contributed to the Al Jazeera report, the army chief said Bangladesh Army may not be able to take any action in this regard.

"I am sure, ministries concerned will take action in this regard," he said.

The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) in a rejoinder dated February 15 said the Army Headquarters outright rejected "all malicious attempt and claims of Al-Jazeera to debase a professionally highly skilled, universally

accepted Chief of Army Staff without any valid evidence" in a report titled "All the Prime Minister's Men" broadcast on February 1 by the international news channel.

ISPR REJOINDER
The ISPR rejoinder categorically rejected the Al-Jazeera documentary's claims of the Bangladesh Army buying equipment from Israel and its allegations against the army chief's family.

"Note that the information provided by Al-Jazeera that the signal device was made by Israel is not true at all and the name of Israel is not engraved anywhere in the device. It is to be noted that there is no scope of corruption since the procurement of all military equipment in Bangladesh Army is done under a specific and set policy and following a number of steps.

"The procurement process for this signal equipment began long before the current Chief of Army Staff, General Aziz Ahmed, took over his office. The process started in 2017 during the tenure of previous Chief of Army Staff, following the procurement process of the Army Headquarters and with the approval of the Government of Bangladesh General Defence Purchase (DGDP) entered into the contract in June 2018. Hence the attempt of Al-Jazeera to link the Chief of Army Staff or his brother residing in Hungary in the process of procuring the said equipment was motivated by a completely nefarious motive," the rejoinder said.

The rejoinder added: "It is to be noted here that in the said report, an attempt has been made to directly mention and present the Chief of Army Staff of Bangladesh and portray his family as a mafia family. Such slanders and lies about the Chief of Army Staff appointed according to law by the Government of an independent and democratic country are utterly objectionable and unsolicited and which is not expected from a news agency like Al-Jazeera."

The full text of the ISPR rejoinder is available on www.thedailystar.net

Response still slow in villages

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The mass inoculation drive began on February 7 with an initial aim to vaccinate 60 lakh frontline workers and people aged 55 and above by this month.

The government, on January 27, opened online registration on www.suroksha.gov.bd.

Due to a tepid response in the online registration system, the health directorate brought down the target from 60 lakh to 35 lakh on February 3. On Saturday, however, the target was raised to 70 lakh.

The vaccination campaign gained momentum after the age limit was relaxed to 40 from 55 on February 8.

Dr Shamsul Haque Mridha, member secretary of the National Vaccination Campaign at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said, "People's response is growing day by day... We will conduct campaigns throughout the month if needed."

Among the eight divisions, the lowest number of people vaccinated till yesterday was in Barishal, while Dhaka had the highest number of vaccinations -- around 3.75 lakh.

In Barishal division, 3.48 lakh doses of Covid-19 vaccine were allocated. Of them, only 63,659 were used till yesterday.

Dr Basudev Kumar Das, Barishal divisional health director, pointed out multiple factors behind low vaccination numbers in the division.

"There is lack of awareness among people here. Moreover, communication is a big issue in Barishal division. We also face obstacles while providing support to the people to register thanks to slow internet," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, he said more people are coming forward every day. "We have assigned our field-level staffers, like community health care providers, to provide door-to-door registration services," he added.

In Sylhet, 4.40 lakh doses of the vaccine were delivered for four districts. Among them, 2.28 lakh doses for Sylhet, 84,000 Sunamganj, 60,000 for Moulvibazar and 72,000 for Habiganj.

Till yesterday, around 1.06 lakh people were vaccinated.

Dr Anisur Rahman, assistant director (disease control) of Sylhet divisional health office, said, "The response was poor the first few days and the pace is

gaining momentum slowly, but it is still not satisfactory."

"Among priority-listed people, not many are responding. We're contacting their offices to convince them. Meanwhile, the general public isn't aware, even though our awareness campaigns are ongoing," he said.

In Rajshahi division, health staffers are struggling to bring people to the vaccine centres.

Health workers have been engaged across eight districts to visit people door to door and bring them to the vaccination centres, reported our Rajshahi correspondent.

The centres have also been facilitated with laptops and internet to assist vaccine-seekers with online registration.

The response, however, is still unsatisfactory, officials said.

The division received 6.72 lakh doses and a total of 15.37 lakh people were jabbed till yesterday.

"We're trying to improve the situation by extending the vaccination programme to the union level. We think people are becoming apathetic due to the lowering rate of infection," said Dr Habibul Ahsan Talukder, Rajshahi's Divisional Director of the DGHS.

Rajshahi Civil Surgeon Dr Quiume Talukder said, "People in urban areas are registering more than those in rural areas, many of whom are avoiding journeys to the upazila headquarters for vaccination," he said.

In Mymensingh division, a total of 5.04 lakh doses of vaccines were allocated. Till yesterday, 60,602 people have been vaccinated.

Dr Md Shah Alam, division director (Health), said more and more people are getting vaccinated after awareness against rumours about the vaccine.

In Khulna division, a total of 5.88 lakh doses of vaccines were allocated and 1.53 people were vaccinated.

While in Rangpur, six lakh doses were allocated while around 1.27 lakh people were jabbed.

UK's GSP

FROM PAGE 1

over the world as it has left the EU. After a lengthy negotiation, the Brexit came into effect last month.

Jafar said the UK has shown interest to invest in higher education in Bangladesh.

However, British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Robert Chatterton Dickson did not elaborate on it at the meeting, the secretary told this newspaper.

"We have started dialogue with the UK like that of Trade and Investment Forum Agreement (TICFA) signed between Bangladesh and the USA for resolving issues of trade and commerce through consultations between the two countries," Jafar mentioned.

At the meeting, Jafar urged the British government to recruit more doctors, nurses, engineers and teachers in the service sector as the demand for such professionals is high in the UK.

The commerce ministry issued a joint statement saying the UK and Bangladesh agreed to develop a future trade partnership that will enhance mutual prosperity and further Bangladesh's economic development as it graduates from Least Developed Country (LDC) status.

Both countries agreed to improve trade relationship through a mutual commitment to private sector-led growth, encouraging investment, and addressing barriers to trade faced by their companies in exporting goods and services.

The UK and Bangladesh discussed cooperation in areas such as investment, access of Bangladeshi professionals to UK service sectors, trade facilitation, ease of doing business, financial sector development, higher education, taxation and intellectual property protection.

In the statement, the British high commissioner said, "The UK is committed to working with Bangladesh to create a trade and investment relationship that helps both of our economies grow. Foreign Investment can provide jobs, transfer skills and generate revenue. A conducive business environment and removal of market access barriers can benefit both countries."

Haris still on cops

FROM PAGE 1

According to an investigation by Al-Jazeera, Haris and his two brothers -- Anis Ahmed and Tofail Ahmed alias Josef -- were found guilty of involvement in the murder of Mustafizur Rahman Mustafiz, member of a political party, in 1996.

Haris and Anis were referred to as fugitive convicts in the documentary titled "All the Prime Minister's Men" aired by the Qatar-based television channel.

Haris went into hiding in India after the killing. From there, he fled to Budapest, Hungary. He has been living there, assuming the identity of Mohammad Hasan, it mentioned.

Haris' name was also struck off the Interpol's list of wanted people sometime in 2019.

Following the removal of Haris' name from Bangladesh police's list of the most wanted people on February 12, this correspondent texted Md Sohel Rana, the spokesperson for the police headquarters, on Sunday, asking him on what grounds the name was dropped.

Sohel, assistant inspector general at the PHQ, asked the correspondent to wait.

Contacted yesterday, Sohel said the desk concerned was yet to give him reply in this regard.

According to a report by Bangla daily Prothom Alo on Tuesday, the government granted mercy to Haris and Anis, who were awarded life sentence. Haris was convicted in two murder cases and Anis in one.

His brother Josef was sentenced to death in the case over the murder of Dhaka University student Abu Morshed in March, 2004. Haris was awarded life term in the same case.

Josef was later granted presidential pardon.

On March 28, 2019, the home ministry issued a gazette notification pardoning Haris and Anis from their sentences, mentioned the report.

The Daily Star, however, could not get confirmation of this from the ministry.

Talking to the media yesterday, Chief of Bangladesh Army Staff Gen Aziz Ahmed said, "When I met my brothers in April, there was no case against them. That case was filed as part of a conspiracy. They were acquitted from it."

"Propaganda that Al-Jazeera is running is malicious," he said.

The Prothom Alo report mentioned that Gen Aziz was appointed the army chief on June 25, 2018. A month earlier, Josef had been pardoned from his sentence on May 27, 2018.

Nine months later, the home ministry issued a gazette notification granting clemency to Haris and Anis on March 28, 2019, it pointed out.

On that very day, copies of the notification were sent to two speedy trial tribunals in Dhaka, which handed down the sentences to the accused. The courts then sent orders to Mohammadpur and Kotwali police stations to revoke the arrest warrants against Haris and Anis, it mentioned.

In the notification, the home ministry stated that by power of Section 401 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), Haris and Anis -- both victims of political vengeance -- were pardoned from life sentence that had been passed in a conspiratorial and fabricated case, said the Prothom Alo report.

Section 401 (1) of the CrPC says, "When any person has been sentenced to punishment for an offence, the government may at any time without conditions or upon any conditions which the person sentenced accepts, suspend the execution of his sentence or remit the whole or any part of the punishment to which he has been sentenced."

Despite repeated attempts, The Daily Star could not reach Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan over his mobile phone yesterday. This newspaper called him around 20 times but did not get any response.

Asked how the two brothers got pardon without surrendering before court, Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Abdullah Abu said, "I don't know anything about it."

Earlier, Law Minister Anisul Haque had told Prothom Alo that there is no bar to pardoning the accused in absentia under Section 401 of the CrPC.

But the home minister told the Bangla daily, "A fugitive cannot avail any legal rights. He or she has to surrender to avail those."

Regarding Haris and Anis, the home boss said, "I know nothing about their getting pardon. I cannot say anything without knowing about it."

He, however, said, "A person appealed to us for pardon from life term. I cannot remember his name. The honourable president granted the appeal. Another person claimed that he was suffering from mental illness. The honourable president said the person could go abroad for treatment. That is all I can recall."