

**BANGLADESH
UPDATE**



399
New cases in 24hrs



5,44,116
Total cases



8,374
Deaths



4,92,887
Recoveries



2,491,066
Deaths



112,481,859
Total cases

We will build our own fighter jets: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed the desire to build fighter jets in Bangladesh to protect its sovereignty.

"We are building the Air Force to make it competitive. We have a desire to build fighter jets in Bangladesh. We are preparing to protect our air border by ourselves," she said.

The premier was addressing the programme marking the handing over of the National Standard to 11 and 21 squadrons of Bangladesh Air Force.

The event was held at Air Base Bir Sreshtha Matiur Rahman in Jashore. The PM joined it virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

Hasina said the government has taken steps to protect the country's sovereignty and take the country some steps ahead in defending it. She expressed optimism that the country would be able to get success in this regard.

She mentioned about the "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation and Aerospace University" and aeronautical centre where the research works would be done effectively.

The PM said protecting the dignity of the national flag is the sacred duty of all the armed forces personnel. She said she thinks that the members of the armed forces would always remain ready to make any sacrifice for protecting the dignity of the flag, the country's independence, sovereignty and while performing duties in UN peacekeeping missions so that the dignity of

Bangladesh could be enhanced.

Recalling the efforts made by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to build the Air Force after the country's independence, Hasina said Bangabandhu in 1974 had formulated Defence Policy for Bangladesh.

"Following that footsteps, we have formulated Forces Goal 2030 to make our armed forces a time-befitting and modern one, and we have started implementing that."

Hasina briefly described the introduction of various modern and technology-based equipment in the Air Force.

As the country is celebrating Mujib Borsho, the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation, the government has taken massive programmes for its overall development and implementing those to change the fate of the general people, including those living in rural areas, she added.

"We will celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our independence. Let's promise on the eve of that to make ourselves patriot and fearless."

She said Bangladesh would be built as a developed and prosperous "Golden Bengal" with the united efforts of all to materialise the dream of the Father of the Nation.

Air Chief Marshal Masihuzzaman Serniabat, on behalf of the premier, handed the national flags to 11 and 21 squadrons of Bangladesh Air Force.

Japanese firm keen

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Salman F Rahman, private industry and investment adviser to the prime minister, and Momura Masafumi, vice minister of MLIT, among others, are expected to deliver speeches in the day-long meeting.

Besides, officials from both the countries and agencies and companies concerned will also take part in the meeting which was scheduled for March last year, but deferred due to the pandemic.

Bangladesh and Japan have already agreed to work on five important projects under PPP with government-to-government initiative.

Under the arrangement, Japanese companies will invest under the government-to-government system without participating in any bidding.

At the first meeting of the Japan-Bangladesh Joint PPP Platform on December 6, 2017, Bangladesh's PPPA sought multi-billion-dollar support from Japan for implementing 18 infrastructure projects.

Five projects have been selected so far.

TWO NEW PROJECTS

Speaking to The Daily Star, PPPA Director (investment promotion) Najmus Sayadat yesterday said, "Two new project proposals would be placed at tomorrow's [Wednesday] platform meeting."

He said the proposal on Nabinagar-Paturia Expressway project was supposed to be placed before the platform meeting last year. Later, Japan picked JFE Engineering Corporation for the project and the company talked with the RHD on different issues regarding the project.

"They [Japanese authority] have given initial concurrence regarding the project," he added.

Asked about the airport project, Sayadat said the Japan government and Mitsubishi Corporation showed interest.

Air Vice Marshal Mafidur Rahman, chairman of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), which operates the country's airports, said Mitsubishi Corporation submitted their proposal on December 19 last year.

"As it is a sensitive issue involving the security of the country's prime airport, we have decided to assess pros and cons of the proposal by a third party and check whether it will be financially viable for us," he told this newspaper yesterday.

Mafidur said they were also considering how deeply the country's interest would be protected through operating its main airport by a foreign company.

Currently, Aviation Dhaka Consortium (ADC), comprising Mitsubishi Corporation, Fujiata Corporation and Samsung C&T, is implementing the third terminal project of Hsia at a cost of Tk

20,598 crore.

In 2019, CAAB earned around Tk 1,500 crore from Hsia. Biman Bangladesh Airlines operates the ground handling activities at the airport.

However, there are widespread allegations that services at the airport are not up to the mark.

An RHD official said the length of Nabinagar-Paturia expressway -- with four normal lanes, two emergency lanes and two service lanes -- would be around 58km. The exact length would be known after the selection of the location for the second Padma bridge.

PROGRESS OF FIVE PROJECTS

The five selected projects are: Construction of Multimodal Transport Hub (MmTH) at Kamalapur Railway Station; Construction of MmTH at Biman Bandar Railway Station; Detailed design, construction, operation, and maintenance of MRT Line-2; Construction of Outer Ring Road (southern part); and Improvement of Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway.

Under the improvement of Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway project, the 136km long highway would be upgraded to a four-lane highway with service lanes on both sides. The estimated cost of the project is \$1.693 billion.

The authorities have already appointed Buet as consultant for reviewing a feasibility study on the project. The deadline for completing the work is June 30.

The 24km MRT-2 line will connect the capital's Gabtoli with Chattogram Road via Basila, Jhigatala, Science Lab, Azimpur, Central Shaheed Minar, Golap Shah Mazar, Motijheel, Mugda, and Demra. The project's estimated cost is \$3.465 billion.

The government has planned to construct 48km expressway along the southern part of the capital's outer ring road to link Dhaka-Aricha, Dhaka-Mawa and Dhaka-Chattogram highways.

The project's estimated cost is \$1.20 billion. The RHD has already appointed consultants for carrying out a feasibility study and prepare a detailed design.

Marubeni Corporation was selected for these three projects.

Under Kamalapur MmTH project, the railway station would be turned into a multimodal transport hub, which would have connectivity with different modes of transport, including conventional train, high speed train, metro rail, bus.

Kajima Corporation has already outlined a concept in this regard.

Similarly, Biman Bandar Station would be turned into a multimodal transport hub. The project's estimated cost is \$200 million. The Japanese government initially selected Sojitz Corporation, but later picked Mitsubishi Corporation for the work.

Police Station in this regard.

"Law enforcers repeatedly told us that my son might have joined a militant group. They told us that my son might be taking the training. I repeatedly told them that he could never join a militant group," she said.

"What an unfortunate mother I am that I can't see my son's body," she lamented.

The family is now trying to locate Rafi's grave with the help of Anjuman Mufidul Islam which buried the body.

According to the GD, Sadman left the house on the morning of January 13 without informing anyone. His mobile phone was found switched off.

Monowara earlier said that her son returned to Dhaka from Malaysia in September 2019. But he could not go back to Malaysia due to the coronavirus situation.

Among three siblings, Sadman is the youngest. He was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. He was admitted to APU in Malaysia three years ago.

SI Hafizur Rahman of Bhatara Police Station, who was in charge of investigating the GD, said they had tried to locate Rafi using technology, but failed.

SI Harun-or-Rashid of Hatirjheel Police Station said the woman identified the unclaimed body seeing the photographs and clothing.



An Air Force official hands a memento to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday marking the handover of the National Standard to 11 and 21 squadrons of Bangladesh Air Force.

PHOTO: PID

Some BB officials feed off scams

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have recently given confessional statements to lower courts regarding financial scams.

Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar said the ACC does not arrest the errant people in most cases as well.

"We are now forced to spend time in dealing with the misdeeds done by SK Sur Chowdhury and PK Halder [Prashanta Kumar Halder] as the regulators [BB and SEC] have not done anything," the judge said.

The ACC has been investigating Halder's involvement in siphoning off around Tk 10,000 crore from four financial institutions -- PLFSL, ILFS, EAS Finance, and Reliance Finance -- between 2009 and 2019.

PK Halder left the country after embezzling a huge amount of money, but the ACC and the BB took no steps against him, the HC said.

The officials concerned of the central bank are not doing anything to pay back the depositors' money, which cannot be allowed, it added.

In reply, BB's lawyer Tanjib-Ul-Alam told the court that his client was working to that end. He, however, said it cannot be done without assistance from the authorities concerned.

During the court proceedings yesterday, 51 of 143 people who defaulted on loans from PLFSL, the beleaguered NBFI, appeared before the HC bench in line with its January 21 order.

The borrowers who did not appear before the court yesterday will be given

another chance to provide explanation to the court within two weeks.

If they fail to do so, a directive will be passed to arrest them, Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar warned.

Some 137 defaulters will have to be present before the HC bench tomorrow when the judge will discuss with the BB governor, the chairmen of the ACC and the SEC on exploring ways to recover non-performing loans (NPLs).

As many as 280 defaulters have been asked to appear before the court in connection with the scams involving PLFSL.

PLFSL is a listed company with the capital market, meaning that 80 percent of its shares are owned by common people, the HC bench observed.

The court said depositors and shareholders of the NBFI are facing deep trouble as they have not yet got back their hard-earned money.

Some defaulters even told the HC bench that they had not opened any accounts with PLFSL.

The management of the NBFI opened accounts in their names illegally without informing them, they said, adding that the management even transferred funds from one account to another in order to trade shares.

For instance, the wife of a former PLFSL managing director, who died in 2018, said she never knew that she had a beneficiary owners' (BO) account with the NBFI.

"My husband had operated the

account using my name and transacted shares without informing me," she said.

Meanwhile yesterday, the same HC bench reconstituted a BB's fact-finding committee to look into the financial scams in the NBFI sector.

The central bank had formed a five-member committee, led by one of its deputy governors, on February 15.

Yesterday, the HC bench included two persons -- Moyeedul Islam, a former district and sessions judge, and Dr Nurur Rahman, a former secretary -- in the committee so that the inquiries can be done properly.

The body will also investigate whether the central bank officials' had any involvement in the scams since 2002 till date.

The committee will be allowed to interrogate any official of the BB.

Lawyers Mejbahur Rahman appeared for PLFSL while Khan Mohammad Shamim Aziz, Tanjib-Ul-Alam and Kazi Ershadul Alam represented the central bank and several lawyers argued for defaulters in the court.

PLFSL, which commenced its operation in 1996, faced a wide range of financial scams from 2004, which forced the central bank to appoint an observer in 2015.

In addition, the central bank removed five directors of the NBFI in 2015 for their alleged involvement in embezzlement of Tk 358 crore.

Despite that, the central bank failed to restore corporate governance in PLFSL. In the meantime, the financial health of the NBFI continued to worsen.

Health ministry begins planning

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The student dormitories at those universities will reopen on May 17, she said.

All procedures to this end will be completed following the health guidelines, she said, adding that 1.30 lakh residential students, 15,000 teachers, and other staff members of public universities would be vaccinated before May 17.

"Vaccination is a must for students if they want to return to their halls," she said.

No examinations will be held at those universities before the reopening. But online classes will continue, the minister said.

Experts, however, said educational institutions irrespective of universities should be reopened immediately and vaccination for students and teachers can also run simultaneously.

"The plan for reopening educational institutions after vaccination is not a realistic one. The World Health Organization (WHO) has instructed to go for reopening if the positivity rate remains stagnant below five percent for more than two weeks. We have this situation here for around a month and we can reopen step by step by ensuring health rules," Mushtaq Hussain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) told The Daily Star

yesterday.

He said that further delay is not good for the education sector.

"The residential institutions should be reopened first. The daily academic activities can be arranged in shifts by reducing the time and number of the students. And the vaccination can be done simultaneously."

There are 48 public and 107 private universities, including the National University, in the country. About 41 lakh students are currently enrolled in public universities and their affiliated colleges, while the private universities have around 3.50 lakh students.

SECOND DOSE LIKELY FROM APRIL 7 Health Minister Zahid Maleque told reporters yesterday that the government is planning to start administering the second dose of Covid-19 vaccine from April 7.

"Everything will depend on the availability of the vaccines," the minister said while addressing a press conference at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Affairs.

He called upon women to take the vaccine as there is a gap between the male and female recipients.

"We have received 20 lakh doses of vaccine early today (yesterday) but we were supposed to get 50 lakh," the minister said, adding that the government is asking the Serum Institute of India (manufacturer of the

Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine) to send more as soon as possible.

But the supplier is also under pressure due to the huge demand for vaccines in India, he added.

"Some new suppliers have also applied for supplying vaccine (to us). We are considering those," the minister said.

Bangladesh is expected to receive 1.31 lakh doses of Pfizer vaccine under the COVAX arrangement by the end of this month, according to health officials.

The country is expected to get 6.8 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccine from Covax, the global vaccine alliance.

The minister also said those who will travel abroad will require a Covid-19 negative certificate even after taking two shots of covid vaccines.

Bangladesh started the mass inoculation campaign on February 7 with 70 lakh Oxford vaccine shots in hand. Apart from the 50 lakh doses of purchased vaccine, the country received another 20 lakh doses of Covishield from the Indian government as a gift.

After two revisions, the government now plans to vaccinate 70 lakh people in the first month.

Meanwhile, the number of people who have registered on www.surokha.gov.bd rose to 3,646,970.

Of them, around 2,491,053 lakh have been given the shots, including yesterday's 182,896.

A full stop to 'symbol of protest'

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environment, and good governance.

As news of his death spread, many expressed their condolences in social media recalling his good deeds.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, executive director of a non-government organisation, wrote, "We have lost our Gandhi."

An RHD engineer wrote that he met Abul Maksud at his home a few days ago and that Maksud appeared to be suffering from a cold.

He posted that Abul Maksud virtually attended a discussion of Roads and Highways Department yesterday where he spoke about the life and works of Bangabandhu.

Abul Maksud was awarded the Bangla Academy Award in 1995 for his contribution to Bangla literature. He wrote many books and articles on politics, society, literature, and the culture of Bangladesh. He also wrote articles on the biographies and works of famous literateurs and politicians.

The noted essayist has penned 40 books.

According to his family, Maksud,

son of Syed Abul Mahmud and Saleha Begum, was born in Elachipur village in Shibabaya upazila of Manikganj on October 23, 1946. He started his journalism career at the weekly Nabajug in 1964. This paper was the mouthpiece of Pakistan Socialist Party.

Later, he worked at weekly Janata, supported by the National Awami Party, for some time.

He joined national news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) after the merger of BPI with state-owned BSS in mid 1970s.

Maksud quit BSS in 2004.

He was a regular columnist for daily Prothom Alo and wrote pieces on society, politics, literature and culture.

Maksud's first poetry collection Bikelbela was published in 1981. The second one Dara Shikoh followed in 1987.

He conducted research on the work of authors, poets, and politicians such as Rabindranath Tagore, Buddhadeva Bose, Syed Waliullah, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani.

His book "Germany's Journal" was

highly praised at home and abroad.

He was the founding editor of Chattogram-based Dainik Suprobbat.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed their profound shock and sorrow at the death of Syed Abul Maksud.

In a condolence message, the president said the death of Syed Abul Maksud is an irreparable loss to the Bangla literary arena.

In a message of condolence, the premier prayed for the salvation of the departed soul and conveyed profound sympathy to the bereaved family.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Planning Minister MA Mannan, and Railway Minister Nurul Islam Sujon also expressed deep shock at the death of Syed Abul Maksud. They also conveyed deep sympathies to the family.

When The Daily Star called Maksud's home last night, a relative who picked up the phone said Maksud's daughter was abroad and that matters regarding his funeral would be decided after she returned home.

18 more die, 399

get Covid

STAR REPORT

Eighteen people have died from Covid-19 in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday and at least 399 new infections were recorded in that duration.

The total number of deaths has now reached 8,374 and the death rate stands at 1.54 percent, according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The 399 new infections take the total number of people infected to 5,44,116, added the release.

The current positivity rate is 3.13 percent, down from 3.3 percent the previous day, while the total positivity rate stands at 13.7 percent.

A total of 12,748 samples were tested across the country in the 24 hours.

At least 828 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the period.

The total number of recoveries now stands at 4,92,887 and the recovery rate at 90.58 percent.

Among the deceased, 10 were men and eight were women.

One was between 21 and 30 years old, four between 31 and 40, one aged between 41 and 50 years, two between 51 and 60, and the rest were above 60 years old, added the release.

Bangladesh reported its first novel coronavirus cases on March 8 last year and the first death on March 18.

Nine women arrested over Philippine bomb plots: military

AFP, Manila

Nine women suspected of plotting to blow up military targets in the restive southern Philippines have been arrested, the army said yesterday.

Security forces detained the women and seized bomb-making equipment during raids on Friday of several homes on Muslim-majority Jolo island, a stronghold of the Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf group.

Huji man

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he returned is being investigated," the Rab chief said.

The orchestrated attack on the rally of AL President and current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina left 24 party leaders and activists dead and hundreds of others injured. Hasina, the then leader of the opposition, narrowly survived but suffered injuries to her ear.

In the 2018 verdict, the court sentenced 19 people, including former state minister for home affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar, former deputy education minister Abdus Salam Pintu and two top intelligence officials, to death in connection with the grenade attack.

Among those sentenced to death were 14 members of the militant group Harkatul Jihad (Huj-B).

Besides, 19 people, including BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, were sentenced to life in prison and 11 others were given sentences of different terms and fined.

The special court also found Tarique, Babar and 36 others guilty in the case filed under the Explosives Substance Act and handed punishments ranging from death sentence to 20 years in prison.

At the press conference, Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun said Rab has arrested 15 people, including Mufti Hannan and his brother Muhibullah alias Mofiz alias Abbi. In addition, 16 Arges grenades were recovered in 2007.

He said the elite force was trying to arrest Iqbal since the incident. He spent his days in Jhenaidah, Gazipur and Savar in the guise of security guards, workers and rickshaw-pullers, he added.

He fled the country in 2008.

The Rab chief said they had got little time to interrogate Iqbal after his arrest.

Iqbal told Rab that he joined Huj-B through a local member in Jhenaidah in 2001.

He got close to Mufti Hannan and other top Huj leaders in 2003 and took part in militancy training.

"In August 2004, he came to Dhaka on Mufti Hannan's directive and took shelter in a hideout. He developed close relationships with Hannan and other Huj members," the Rab chief said.

He also attended different clandestine meetings with Mufti Hannan.

About the August 21 grenade attack, Iqbal told Rab members that he took part in the attack directly on Hannan's directive. Hannan also supplied him with grenades to perpetrate the attack and he threw grenades targeting the stage.

After the attack, he went into hiding back in Jhenaidah.

Son of Abdul Majid Mollah from Jhenaidah, Iqbal was once involved with BNP's student wing Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, said the Rab DG. He was an elected class representative of KC College (Jhenaidah) student union in 1994. He studied up to HSC.

From 1995 to 1998, he was in Malaysia, where he worked. Upon his return, he was engaged in ISD phone and other businesses.