

BANGLADESH UPDATE 410 New cases in 24hrs 544,954 Total cases 8,384 Deaths 494,755 Recoveries GLOBAL UPDATE 2,514,534 Deaths 113,393,091 Total cases

Follow Covid guidelines after shots: PM

UNB, Dhaka Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday renewed her call to the people to strictly maintain the health protection guidelines even after receiving the Covid-19 vaccine. [You] don't think that all problems will be over after taking the Covid-19 shots. You will have to wear masks always and follow all health guidelines to keep yourselves protected. I hope everyone will do it," she said.

The premier made the call while addressing the Mujib Year Graduation Parade of the 55th Batch Cadets of Bangladesh Marine Academy (BMA) in Chattogram. She joined the programme through a video conference from the Gono Bhaban. Hasina said though the government is implementing the vaccination programme, all the people should follow all health protection guidelines, including using face masks and keeping their hands clean always as these are essential. She said her government was making all-out efforts to ensure all types of health services for the people and it took appropriate measures to that end. Talking about the graduating cadets, the PM urged them to brighten the country's image at home and abroad through performing their respective responsibilities with utmost honesty, sincerity and competence. Hasina asked the cadets to follow all existing laws and rules during their work at home and abroad. Noting that the ocean transport is the most effective to keep the world economy moving, the PM said the graduating cadets will have to perform a big responsibility not only for Bangladesh but also for other countries as the navigation in the sea is a very challenging job and tough task.

She said her government found Bangladesh Marine Academy in a very poor state, but it was implementing massive programmes to modernise the academy, set up by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Hasina said her previous government had established Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University in 2013. The government has recently established four more marine academies which will start functioning this year. She said the waterway is the most important for riverine Bangladesh and the country is constructing a deep sea port. The government was creating various educational scopes for the students of the country, the PM added. "We will have to catch up with the pace of the world. We need to receive the highest education and training to do that. We are creating this scope." MODERNISING MARINE ACADEMY About the development of the marine academy over the last 10 years, Hasina said its teaching method was digitised, navigation simulator was set up (in 2019), and the academy got many international recognitions. Besides, a process is underway to set up Engine Control Simulator at the academy this year for the sake of improved marine engineering training, she said. The PM also commissioned two training lifeboats at the academy's lake virtually. Cadet Captain Adnan Hasib Shawon was awarded "Shipping Corporation Medal" for the best performance among 192 cadets of the 55th Batch, while the "Honourable President Gold Medal" was conferred on Chief Cadet Captain Abir Md Sadman Noor for the best all-round performance. On behalf of the PM, State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury handed the medals to them.



Students of the College of Home Economics demonstrate near the institute's gate yesterday, protesting the authorities' decision of not taking pre-announced examinations.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Students protest exam deferral

FROM PAGE 1 The NU authorities yesterday said in a statement the postponed examinations of all courses, including the second-year degree exams and certificate courses of 2019 and the final year master's exam of 2018, will begin from May 24. Besides, the first-year admission test process (2020-2021) will begin on June 8, 2021. The NU authorities have called upon students to prepare accordingly. Meanwhile, police also charged batons on students of Home Economics College, which is under Dhaka University, as they were staging a demonstration in front of the college demanding continuation of exams, students alleged. Meanwhile, police detained at least 18 students of different colleges under the NU for several hours when they went to Shahbagh to stage protests over the postponement of exams. Besides, students of Chittagong University, Rajshahi University, and various colleges in Sylhet, Chandpur and Netrakona, held demonstrations with the same demands. Protesting students said their educational institutions have been closed since March 17 because of the Covid-19 pandemic, due to which they lost academic time. Some universities, including NU, had started to hold final exams. Shahbagh police detained at least 18 of the NU students, who were gathering in the area to stage a protest against exam postponement, said Mohammad Al Amin, a protest organiser and student of Siddheshari College. He said that they were released after several hours. "We are giving authorities time till Sunday to cancel their decision of postponing all exams. Otherwise, we will hold sterner programmes," he warned. Students of different colleges of Netrakona gathered in front of the district Press Club at noon. When they were marching toward the DC office, police charged batons on them, said Fahim Khan, a demonstrator. Akbar Ali Munsii, Netrakona's

superintendent of police, said that two police officials were withdrawn to the SP office and they are inquiring into the incident. In Sylhet, Students from MC College, Sylhet Govt College, Madan Mohon College and several other colleges formed a human chain under the banner of General Students in front of Sylhet Central Shaheed Minar at Chowhatta point. "Male police officials charged batons on us around 11:30am, women officials tried to drag us inside the campus," said Ayesha Siddika, one of the protesters of Home Economics College, adding, "We will continue our movement until our demands are met." The protest started around 7:00am at Nilkhet intersection. The students later moved in front of their college and were continuing the protest until this report was filed at 2:45pm. Sanowar Hosen, assistant police commissioner of Lalbagh Zone, said that they tried to disperse the protesters with permission from the college authority. "However, batons were not charged on them," he said. Students of Rajshahi University started demonstrations at Paris Road of the university around 11:00am and postponed it at 1:00pm until next Sunday, upon assurance from the authorities, reported our RU correspondent. Tomalika Haque, a student of Geology and Mining department, said, "The university authorities postponed our exams as per the instruction of the Education Ministry. We want the examinations to continue even if our dormitories aren't reopened. Seven colleges affiliated with Dhaka University have been successful in realising their demand. It's possible to take examinations on our campus as well." RU proctor Prof Lutfor Rahman said he will request the vice chancellor of the University to restart the examinations. Students of Chittagong University held a rally in front of the university's Shaheed Minar. Prattoy Nafak, a student, said that

they also demanded the introduction of bus service between the campus and Chattogram city and submitted a memorandum to the vice chancellor in this regard. CU proctor Robiul Islam said that university authorities will hold a meeting on the issue on Sunday and take a decision. Barisal University students blocked the Barishal-Kuakata highway when protesting the continuation of all examinations that started in January last. Khorshed Alam, general secretary of BU Teachers' Association, said, "We'll contact the higher authorities over resuming the examinations as the students are demanding it." Chandpur district Chhatra Adhikar Parishad also held a human chain in front of Chandpur Government College with similar demands. Students of different universities have been demonstrating in and outside their campuses since Saturday with different demands, including reopening of their educational institutions and halls. Against the backdrop of protests at Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Rajshahi University and others, the government on Monday announced that all universities would reopen on May 24 after the Eid-ul-Fitr. No examinations will be held before reopening of the universities, but online classes will continue, Education Minister Dipu Moni announced. The NU cancelled all their exams on Monday until further notice. Dhaka University took the same step the next day. Frustrated by the decision, a group of students of DU's seven affiliated colleges blocked Nilkhet intersection and some other roads near the DU campus on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning. DU authorities on Wednesday decided to hold all ongoing and previously announced exams of its seven affiliated colleges in the wake of student protests.

Five die, 410 get infected with Covid

UNB, Dhaka Five more Covid-19-related deaths and 410 new cases were reported in the country in 24 hours till yesterday morning. A total of 957 people recovered during the same period, said the Directorate General of Health Services in a handout. With the updated figures, the Covid-19 fatalities climbed to 8,384 and the number of total infections to 544,954 in Bangladesh. The daily infection rate now stands at 2.63 percent which was 2.65 percent on Wednesday, the latest figures showed. The overall infection rate slightly fell to 13.61 percent, which was 13.66 percent on Wednesday. The mortality rate remained steady at 1.54 percent for the past few days, the DGHS handout said. So far, 494,755 patients (90.79 percent) have recovered from Covid-19. The authorities have so far tested 4,003,236 samples, including 15,560 in the same 24-hour period. Bangladesh reported its first novel coronavirus cases on March 8 last year and the first death on March 18.

Dhaka-NJP train service to start on March 26

STAR REPORT A new passenger train between Dhaka and New Jalpaiguri (NJP) of India's West Bengal state will start its service on March 26 as part of the golden jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh's independence. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, who would travel to Dhaka on March 26, are expected to flag off the new train service as part of the efforts to revive the rail connectivity that had existed till 1965 between the two neighbours. The operation of the nonstop ten-coach train between Dhaka and NJP, which will cover a distance of 513km, was discussed at a two-day meeting between a team of Bangladesh Railway officers and Ravinder Kumar Verma, divisional railway manager of India's Kathihar division in New Jalpaiguri on Tuesday and Wednesday, reports our New Delhi correspondent. Mohammed Shahidul Islam, the divisional railway manager of Paksey division, who led the Bangladesh team to the meeting, told the media in Siliguri on Wednesday that Bangladesh wanted to operate the train between Siliguri and Dhaka. "But Siliguri didn't have the required infrastructure, so it had to be New Jalpaiguri instead," he added. New Jalpaiguri has the biggest railway station in the northern part of West Bengal and is just six km away from Siliguri. It is a key junction between mainland India and north-eastern India. The Dhaka-NJP train would take the same route as the Haldibari-Chilahati train that was flagged off last year. The name of the Dhaka-NJP train and its fare are yet to be decided, said Verma.

Plan to vaccinate 15k convicts in jail in first phase

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and SHAHEEN MOLLAH The Department of Prisons has finalised a plan to vaccinate for Covid-19 convicts and inmates in 68 jails in the country. Convicts who are 40 years old or older would be vaccinated first. Once all the convicts aged above 40 are vaccinated, people in jail who have not been convicted of any crime and are 40 or above would get the shots. Brig Gen Md Mominur Rahman Mamun, inspector general of prisons, revealed the plan to The Daily Star yesterday. "We were working to ensure vaccine in jails as per the policy enacted by the government. As part of continuous discussions, we held talks with the home ministry's senior secretary today [Thursday]," he said. The home ministry asked for a finalised list of over 15,000 convicts, said the IG Prisons. "After the list is prepared, we will try to ensure they [convicts] are vaccinated with priority. Besides, we are also trying to complete the registration of inmates who are 40 or above," he said. There are 83,107 inmates and convicts in the 68 jails of the country, according to yesterday's tally. Among them, around 68,000 have not been convicted of any crimes. Regarding vaccination of these inmates, Brig Gen Mamun said they would decide about them after giving shots to the convicts since those inmates could leave jail securing bail or getting acquitted. He said that it did not mean those inmates would not get the jabs, rather they would get the shots in later phases. Asked when the vaccination would start, the IG prisons said he had talked to the home ministry and now they would write to it regarding the matter. "We will start ensuring the vaccine soon after the ministry responds. We are hopeful of starting the vaccination in jail

within the next month," he added. Sayed Belal Hossain, additional secretary (jail wing) of the home ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday that they have decided in principle to start vaccination in jails. "We are hopeful of starting it soon," he added. At least 18 convicts in Luxmipur jail, all above 55 years of age, were given the shots on February 9 following an initiative of the civil surgeon concerned. The jail has 625 inmates, of whom 102 are convicts. Md Shakhawat Hossain, jailer of Luxmipur jail, told The Daily Star yesterday that they completed Covid-19 vaccine registration of all inmates and convicts there. "We will start giving the vaccine after the district civil surgeon approves," he said. Shakhawat said the 18 convicts, who go the jabs, did not have any side effects. "Still, we have kept them under observation of the jail doctor and nurse," he said. VACCINE PROCESS IG Prisons Brig Gen Mamun said that they are planning to give the shots at the medical centres inside jails bringing in trained nurses. "If we fail to give vaccine inside the jail, then we would take the registered convicts and inmates to the government listed vaccine centres after corresponding with the civil surgeon and deputy commissioners," he said. Meanwhile, two jail guards and a jail pharmacist are in isolation as they started showing Covid-19 symptom yesterday. Yesterday, there were 38 people in quarantine in Dhaka Central Jail and five people in Chattogram jail. Md Mojammel Khan, deputy jailer at the Department of Prisons, said Covid-19 could not affect the jails severely since they kept new arrivals on 14-day quarantine. Besides, meeting relatives has been suspended, he added.

No headway in 10 years

FROM PAGE 1 before court to testify since then. Of them, five are investigative officers of the case, who are to give their depositions after the remaining four witnesses. The court issued several summonses against the four remaining witnesses, the prosecution said. On February 18 this year, Judge Begum Chaman Chowdhury of the Special Tribunal for Prevention of Public Safety Disturbances of Dhaka issued non-bailable arrest warrants against the four absentee witnesses that include Anis Ahmed, brother of Aziz Ahmed, for failing to comply with multiple court orders. The other three witnesses served with non-bailable arrest warrants are Md Kamrul, Md Alauddin and Md Nizam Uddin. The tribunal also directed Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner and Superintendent of Police to take necessary steps to produce all four witnesses before court on March 11 -- the next scheduled date of hearing in the case. Police is the only agency obliged to produce witnesses before the court as per provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, Anwer Shahadat Shawn, special public prosecutor, told The Daily Star on Wednesday. Despite the summonses issued many times, police failed to produce any witness since May 2011 before the court, which is delaying the trial proceedings, he said, adding, "Most of the remaining

witnesses are also not appearing before the court due to security concerns as the accused are top listed criminals." Anis Ahmed has remained a fugitive since May 2004 when he was convicted of murdering a businessman. In May 2004, the Speedy Trial Tribunal-3 of Dhaka sentenced him and his brothers Haris Ahmed to life-term imprisonments in connection with the murder of businessman Mustafizur Rahman Mustafa. However, according to a government circular, the home ministry on March 28, 2019, issued a notification pardoning both Anis and Haris. Tipu was shot dead around 7:30pm on March 13, 1999 on Airport Road in the capital's Khilkhet area when he was in a private car, according to the FIR. Aziz Ahmed filed a murder case with Badda Police Station in this regard on March 13, 1999. On July 22, 2001, Md Mokbul Hossain, an inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police, submitted a charge sheet accusing six people -- top listed criminals Sanjidul Islam Imon, Mohammad Islam Munna, Shamsur Rahman Mona, Anisur Rahman Zaved, Tarique Saif Mamun and Sagor Hossain Osman. The court framed charges against the six on December 10, 2003. Of them, Osman died during trial, Imon, Mona and Mamun are now on bail, while Munna and Zaved are on the run.

Sold in Algeria, waiting for rescue

FROM PAGE 1 Without an Algerian embassy in Dhaka, their visas were processed from Islamabad in Pakistan, their passports show. Brac Migration Programme's head Shariful Hasan attested to the fact. "We had even officially sent letters to the ministry in 2019 saying that workers are being recruited for Algeria, for the purpose of being sent to Spain," he said. Copies of these letters show that these were sent to the Bangladesh Embassy in Algeria, which in turn wrote to the Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister, and to the Director-General of the Wage Earner's Welfare Board. "Whenever the workers complain about the working conditions, they are encouraged to contact the agency's people in Algeria for passage to Spain," said the letter. Shariful commented, "We need to take steps immediately to investigate why people are going to informal labour markets, and how they are being trafficked from there." At least one worker, Abdul Hai, died while trying to make the trip. On January 4, in a drive on both the skills training centre and the processing agent's office which recruited these workers, a total of three arrests were made by Rab-3. The arrestees are Mohsin Madbor and Shakil Chowdhury, the executive director and cashier respectively of the training centre in Munshiganj, and Barun Debnath of Banna Bijoy Overseas Ltd. "This is a clear case of labour trafficking, according to the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act and we have charged them accordingly," said Additional Superintendent of Police Bina Rani Das of Rab-3. "The workers were recruited by the local agent, but their BMET clearances were processed by Banna Bijoy Overseas Ltd. This is illegal. As a result, they were sent to jobs under exploitative working conditions. When the workers were in trouble, or were not getting their payments, they

contacted the local agent who had no legal responsibility over them. The legal responsibility lies with Banna Bijoy, but they do not even know which workers they sent." While Singapore Skills Training Centre is still operational as Asia Skills Training Centre, Banna Bijoy Overseas Ltd's licence has been temporarily suspended, said the Rab official. No other officials from the two companies could be contacted as the phone numbers The Daily Star got were found switched off. BMET Director-General Shamsul Alam said, "The only way a recruiting agency can send workers recruited by another agency is if they formally let the BMET know that they are taking over the workers of the agency. They have to provide a written statement pledging that they will take the responsibility of the workers. If this was not done, then it is unacceptable. "If the lower officials of BMET are facilitating such processes then they should be found out. I am deeply against this." SUBHUMAN LIVING CONDITIONS As the barometer dips to 10 degrees Celsius in the city of Boumerdes of Algeria, with gusts of wind coming in from the Mediterranean Sea, Sohel Rana and his group bathe and defecate outdoors. These workers, constructing a housing project, sent videos over WhatsApp to this correspondent to prove their claims. A single PVC pipe hanging over a muddy cesspool, comprises their bathing area. Their toilet is a hole in the ground, with raised planks for squatting. "We were asked to defecate in the open when we got here, but we could not do that, so we created these structures. They docked a day's worth of wages for all those who spent the day constructing a toilet," alleged Sohel Rana in a clip, while another worker wearing a woolen cap and scarf wrapped around his face walked out of the "toilet." This correspondent spoke to Sohel earlier this month.

"Just three days ago, we were allowed to move into these [ship] containers to give us some weather protection. Up until then, and throughout winter, we had been living in an under-construction building with no doors or even walls to catch the draught coming in from the sea," he said. The under-construction buildings had damp dirt floors and were littered with construction materials stored in the living quarters of the workers. The irony of the matter is that they are constructing a luxurious ocean-view multi-story housing project. The project is in an area called Ouled Abdel Krim and is done by a Chinese company. Tushar, who worked in another project, said, "It was very cold. It used to snow but we did not have any gloves. If we asked for gloves, they said to talk to the Bangla boss. "We had knee-deep snow, but we are not allowed to heat water for bathing because it would use up the gas cylinder, and then we would have nothing left for cooking." While Tushar managed to escape -- his family sent him money and he bought a ticket back to Dhaka on December 30 last year -- others however have not yet been that fortunate. DEBT-LADEN FAMILIES The workers seen in the videos and contacted by this correspondent unanimously spoke about how they do not get their monthly wages in time, and have tens of thousands in arrears. When the wages are paid, the worker's employers send the money directly to the Bangladesh recruiting agent. Several workers said their families got paid only once or twice. "We only got money twice from the agent, and that was only Tk 80,000 in total," said Abdur Razzak, the father of one worker. This is about three months of his son's salary, even though he had been working for a year by then. "When he asked for his salary after six months, his company told him that they bought him," said Razzak. His son ran away from these exploitative conditions and is elsewhere now, but where he does

not know, because they have had no contact in three months. "I cannot even die in peace because I loaned a lot of money to send him," he said. Similarly, Kanon, the wife of a worker Swapan Sardar, waits for the monthly wages her husband had been promised. "I was once told by the agent that my husband sent me Tk 30,000 but whenever I went for that money, they drove me away. I have not gotten a single taka from the agent," she said. Nilufa, the widow of the worker Abdul Hai, who attempted to make the trip in December 2019 and died after his boat capsized, told this correspondent that she, too, was in debt. "I got his body back in February of last year. To this day, I don't know how he died, or even when he died. When he was in Algeria, he used to complain about not having enough to eat." She sent a photo of his dead body -- drenched, blue with cold, lying against what seems to be the bottom of an orange lifeboat. Next, she sent a photo of her kids, aged three, eight and 10. The eldest, a boy, is the spitting image of his dead father. "He had gone to Algeria after borrowing Tk 3.5 lakh in 2019. I only got money from him twice, a total of Tk 1.2 lakh. The minute I got the money, the loan sharks took it away. I had to sell my house for Tk 45,000 to pay off another lender. The next day I was told he died. What am I and my children to do now?" Meanwhile, the Bangladeshis in Algeria wait to return home. "Rescue us from this place, please, we entreat the government," workers said in a video sent to The Daily Star. "We don't know how many Bangladeshis are stuck there in dire situations, but there might be over a hundred," said Brac's Shariful. Contacted recently, The Director-General of the Africa Wing of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Md Tarikul Islam, said he is not aware of Bangladeshi workers in Algeria awaiting repatriation, but said he would inquire into it.