BANGLADESH UPDATE 385 New cases in 24hrs | 546,216 Total cases | 8,408 Deaths | 496,924 Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE 2,540,711 Deaths | 114,586,435 Total cases

GRADUATION FROM LDC STATUS

We've to sustain the recognition: PM

UNB, *Dhaka*

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government is committed to sustaining Bangladesh's recognition as a developing country through the expansion of education and building skilled workforce and worthy citizens.

"Bangladesh today is a developing country. We've to maintain the recognition we've got, and for that we need to expand our educational facilities, build a skilled workforce and worthy citizens," she said.

The PM said this while inaugurating a programme of distributing stipends, tuition fees and treatment grants among poor and meritorious students from the PM's Education Assistance Trust under the education ministry.

Hasina joined the event virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

She said the government is firmly committed to building skilled and worthy citizens. "To make Bangladesh free from poverty, education is needed most. We think, like the Father of the Nation, that spending on the education sector is not an expense at all. We do consider it as an investment and that's the investment for the future generation."

The PM said the government is setting up various universities across the country, considering the demand for the modern world.

Hasina mentioned that the government has established Maritime University and Aviation University, considering the requirement of a specific area.

She also mentioned that science and technology-based education along with vocational one is most needed as these could create employment opportunities both at home and abroad.

The PM said the government is setting up 100 special economic zones across the country where huge technical persons and skilled manpower will be needed as both local and foreign investments are coming there.

"We want to develop people as skilled manpower so that they can substantially contribute to economic development of the country. We're taking steps keeping eyes on that," she said.

Regarding the higher number of female students than the male ones, Hasina asked teachers and guardians to find out the reason why the number of male students is falling.

She added that the government has decided to reopen educational institutions on March 30 and all the teachers and employees of the institutions will be vaccinated against Covid-19 by that time. "We've already directed the health ministry to get them vaccinated."

About the vaccine for college and university students, the PM said the government will ensure the vaccine for the students whose vaccination is not restricted by the World Health Organisation.

The PM also mentioned that nearly 1,500 poor students are getting financial assistance for their education every year from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Trust.

A total of 163,882 poor and meritorious students yesterday received stipends and other assistance for education and treatment through mobile phone and online banking system from the Prime Minister's Education Assistance Trust.

Education Minister Dipu Moni, Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hassan Chowdhoury and Secretary of Secondary and Higher Education Division Mahbub Hossain also spoke on the occasion.

Two building painters putting their lives at risk, hanging off a makeshift ladder without any safety harness. Such disregard for safety leads to injuries and deaths. The photo was taken from Foy's Lake area of Zakir Hossain road in Chattogram yesterday. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Over 31 lakh vaccinated for Covid-19

8 more die, 385 infected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of people vaccinated crossed 30 lakh mark as the countrywide inoculation campaign entered 18th day yesterday.

With a total of 125,752 people vaccinated yesterday, the total number of people vaccinated has reached 31,10,525 according to a press release issued by the Directorate General of Health Services.

The countrywide mass inoculation campaign started on February 7.

Meanwhile, eight more people died from novel coronavirus in 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, said another press release from the DGHS.

With the latest fatalities, the total number of deaths has reached 8,408. The death rate was 1.54 percent.

At least 385 new infections were recorded in the same 24-hour period, taking the total number of infected people in the country to 546,216.

Against a total of 13,566 tests in those 24 hours, the positivity rate was 2.87 percent. The overall positivity rate now stands at 13.51 percent.

At least 817 Covid-19 patients have recovered during the same period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 496,924 and the recovery rate is 90.98 percent.

Among the eight deceased, six were males. One of the dead was aged between 31 and 40 years, one between 41 and 50, two between 51 and 60 and four were above 60 years, said the DGHS release.

As of 5:30pm yesterday, a total 4311,708 people have registered to get vaccines.

Hiss or boom?

FROM PAGE 1

And, it either can come through hisses or booms! Hiss is not a pleasant sound to hear. But, bear with it, you're certainly better-off. You're safe actually with the hisses.

Think of any family of ours. Don't we see demonstrations of disagreement, dissatisfaction, difference of opinions or perspectives, and contradictory approaches to situations? We argue, shout, fight and cry over any debatable issue. Together, we make a hiss before settling for a solution.

At a larger scale, a society or state is akin to a giant pressure cooker. It's absurd to have an all-agreeing population within a state. We all are different people, with difference of opinion, ambition and expression. People from different race, religion, age-group, political belief, financial background and school of thoughts make up the 17-crore population of Bangladesh. And, we all have the fundamental right to express ourselves. So, critical voices and dissenting views are only natural for those with power to expect.

Tension, commotion, disagreement and disgruntlement are bound to creep up while a state is being governed. So, the pressure starts to accumulate within the sealed state pot and push up the lid. And, it's time to let the steam go off with a hiss. This is how democracies accommodate dissents, take benefit from those and move on to survive.

But the process of hissing starts to choke in a situation when autocracies reign supreme or democracies slip into a crisis. It's not the case of Bangladesh alone that the health of democracy is not well at all. Look around the world, we would see the recently-defeated Donald Trump in US, Boris Johnson in UK, Vladimir Putin in Russia, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Xi Jinping in China, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Hun Sen in Cambodia or Narendra Modi in India. It's not a good time for free media and freedom of expression.

Hissing is a dissent, which is not appreciated by the people in corridors of power. They try to muzzle dissents with all the might they possess. With the help of new laws, technology and excuse of national security and image, they push down the lid on freedom of the press and freedom of expression. And, in the process, they successfully turn the giant state pressure cooker into a ticking bomb: ready to explode any time.

Over a decade, the space for dissent is gradually shrinking and the process of hissing being choked in Bangladesh. Voices from effective opposition political parties are no longer heard either on streets or in the parliament. The free media is made to work its way through a series of obstacles -- the Digital Security Act (DSA), defamation law, Official Secrets Act of 1923, unofficial gag order and the constant fear of being picked-up, before capturing the sound of hissing for the people. The traditionally-strong cultural or social activism lost its cause. The once-vibrant civil society chose to be mostly silent for fear of tongue-lashing from people in power or from lickers of their sandals.

True, there are some hisses that we still could hear in the social media space. Understandably, louder among the hisses come farther from Bangladesh, in the safety away from home. Within Bangladesh, social space users could realise by now that their freedom of expression may land them in jail without bail. The fate of Mushtaq Ahmed will now remain burnt in their brains, forever.

Picked up under DSA for barely letting out a hiss at government's handling of pandemic, the celebrated crocodile entrepreneur-turned-writer died in jail Thursday. In the last nine months in prison, the bohemian visionary might have expected the government to respect his freedom of expression or the legal system, despite having been denied bail six times, to come forward for upholding his right to express himself.

Mushtaq is now beyond justice and making any hiss. Picked up along with Mushtaq on similar charge of hissing in the social media, cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore is now seriously ill and languishing in jail. A healthy photojournalist, Shafiqul Islam Kajol, has found himself reduced to a crippled old man following his 53 days of quizzical disappearance and 237 days in jail.

With the sole bread-earner restricted mostly to bed, his family is now being forced to run around the corridors of court for the trial of a case filed under DSA.

With every such injustice and every such muzzling of dissent, pressure continues to build up within the "Cooker Bangladesh". Let it hiss, before it's too late for a hiss.

18 killed, 30 hurt in police

FROM PAGE 1

Several wounded people were hauled away by fellow protesters, leaving bloody smears on pavements, media images showed. One man died after being brought to a hospital with a bullet in the chest, said a doctor who asked not to be identified.

"Police and military forces have confronted peaceful demonstrations, using lethal force and less-than-lethal force that – according to credible information received by the UN Human Rights Office – has left at least 18 people dead and over 30 wounded," the UN human rights office said.

Myanmar has been in chaos since the army seized power and detained elected government leader Aung San Suu Kyi and much of her party leadership on Feb. 1, alleging fraud in a November election her party won in a landslide.

The coup, which brought a halt to tentative steps towards democracy after nearly 50 years of military rule, has drawn hundreds of thousands onto the streets and the condemnation of Western countries.

Among at least five killed in Yangon was internet network engineer Nyi Nyi Aung Htet Naing, who a day earlier had posted on Facebook about his concern at the growing crackdown, medics said.

Teacher Tin New Yee died after police swooped to disperse a teachers' protest with stun grenades, sending the crowd fleeing, her daughter and a fellow teacher said.

Police also hurled stun grenades outside a Yangon medical school, sending doctors and students in white lab coats scattering. A group called the Whitecoat Alliance of medics said more than 50 medical staff had been arrested.

Three people were killed at Dawei in the south, politician Kyaw Min Htike told Reuters from the town. Two died in the second city of Mandalay, Myanmar Now media and a resident said. Resident Sai Tun told Reuters one woman was shot in the head.

Police and the spokesman for the ruling military council did not respond to phone calls seeking comment.

Police foil JCD protests

FROM PAGE 1

Club at 10:30am to protest the authorities' decision to revoke the gallantry award of late president Ziaur Rahman, and to demand the repeal of the Digital Security Act and an investigation into the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in custody.

Nearly 500 leaders and activists gathered there but police barred them from taking to the streets, saying the party didn't take any permission to hold the programme.

The clash erupted around 11:00am when a group of Chhatra Dal leaders and activists tried to come out of the press club premises and sat on the road. Police charged baton on them, witnesses said.

Chhatra Dal men then took position inside the press club and hurled brick chips at police, leading to a series of clashes that lasted for about 40 minutes.

At one point, police entered the press club premises to drive them away. Some JCD men then came out of the press club and chased the policemen with sticks and brick chips. They also vandalised a police box in front of press club.

Police were seen firing tear gas shells targeting the press club. They charged baton on any protesters in their path.

During the clashes, there was heavy traffic congestion on the road as vehicular movement was halted for hours.

At least 40 people, including 30 JCD men, eight policemen and a TV cameraperson, were injured in the clashes and took treatment at different hospitals.

Of them, 25, including three policemen, took treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Sheikh Mamun, ATN Bangla senior cameraperson, was injured on his head.

Police detained nine Chhatra Dal men -- two from in front of the press club, two from the emergency unit and five others from outside the emergency unit at the DMCH.

However, Shahnewaz, a joint secretary of JCD, told The Daily Star that 16 of their activists were also detained at Shahbagh, Ramna, Paltan and Motijheel police stations.

"On Saturday, we announced that we would be holding a rally. But coming here in the morning, we saw 300-400 policemen," the JCD leader said.

Eventually, the protest was foiled before it could begin.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir was supposed to join the rally. Besides, Dhaka Metropolitan South BNP President Habib-un-Nabi Khan Sohel was present at the spot.

BNP spokesperson Imran Saleh Prince said 30 of their leaders and activists were injured in the clash, claiming some of their activists were missing.

"Our leaders and lawyers were not allowed to enter Shahbagh Police Station to know about the detainees," he said.

BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, at a programme at the press club, condemned the attack on JCD activists and alleged that the government was gagging people's voice using the police.

Sazzadur Rahman, deputy commissioner Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Ramna division), told reporters that the DMP commissioner's permission is needed to hold such programme at any place in Dhaka city but Chhatra Dal did not take any permission.

"They took to the streets with 400-500 activists from inside the press club without permission and attacked the police. Bricks were thrown from inside the press club. Seven to eight policemen were injured in the incident."

He claimed the attack on police was pre-planned.

"Legal action will be taken in this regard. Some people have been taken into custody," he said.

On May 6 last year, RAB arrested Mushtaq, 53, from his Dhaka home for "spreading rumours and carrying out anti-government activities". He took to social media to write about the government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sued under the Digital Security Act, he had been in Kashimpur High-Security Jail-3 in Gazipur since August 20.

On Thursday evening, he lost consciousness and was taken to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College and Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

PROTEST AT SHAHBAGH

Speakers at a protest rally yesterday demanded a probe into the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed to find out real reasons behind the death.

Besides, they demanded the release of those arrested under the DSA so far and those who were detained during the recent protests against the death of Mushtaq.

The rally was organised under the banner "Jaan O Jobaner Shadhinota Chai, Digital Nirapotta Ain Mani Na" in front of the National Museum in the capital's Shahbagh.

Addressing the rally, Prof Anu Muhammad of Jahangirnagar University alleged the government formulated the act to give protection to corrupt people and looters.

Economist Prof MM Akash said as per information from Mushtaq's wife, the writer had no physical ailment about a week before his death.

It is important to find out the reasons behind his death through a probe, said Akash.

The Santal warrior

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upazila, Shyam lives in the village of Jalahar Uttarpara with his family.

Now 69, he is hard of hearing and has breathing difficulties, one of his daughters said. His condition has visibly deteriorated since this correspondent's last visit to his home a couple of years ago.

Last Wednesday afternoon, Shyam was reminiscing about the war, sitting on a stool in front of his dilapidated mud house.

After the war broke out, he and his family members, like others in the village, left for Singabad in Malda district of West Bengal where they took shelter in a refugee camp.

Before leaving their homes, Razakars had sexually assaulted two Santal girls in their village and that is what triggered his desire to fight for his people and for the country, he told this newspaper.

When some Awami League leaders of his home district visited the refugee camp he was in at the time, he said he wished to join the Liberation War. As per their advice, he went to Malda's Dak Bunglow and got listed as a freedom fighter.

Shyam first trained at Gour Banga of Malda and then at Siliguri. At the end of his training, under sector 7, he went to the Mahadipur camp in Malda, near the Sonamasjid border.

In that camp, Shyam met Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir, under whose leadership he took part in the war.

They fought in several places including Argarahat in Shibganj upazila, Poragaon and Amnura in Sadar upazila, and Daldali in Bholahat upazila until just before victory was declared.

Freedom fighter Serajul Islam, former publicity secretary of the Sadar upazila unit of the Muktijoddha Sangsad, said he took part in several battles alongside Shyam in 1971.

Hingu Murmu, president of Uttarbanga Adibasi Parishad's central committee, said, "We are proud of him and his participation in the Liberation War is a source of pride for Santals and other ethnic communities."

Even though Shyam helped the country to a victory, the wheel of fortune has not yet turned for him personally. The Santal community in the Barind region continues to live in abject poverty.

Aside from his small monthly allowance as a freedom fighter, Shyam has had to work as a day labourer to provide for his family of nine. However, his deteriorating physical condition makes it difficult for him to move around now.

Of his three sons, two also work as day labourers in the fields, the dominant source of work in the area.

Despite suffering ailments and living a poverty-stricken life, the war hero said all he wishes is that the country he helped liberate runs well and that social harmony is maintained.

Policemen

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hill districts, adding that the prime minister had directed the authorities concerned to take care of the areas.

"We have a report by an additional secretary on what is happening in which places in the three districts. There were some recommendations in it," he said.

Officials have talked with chairmen, elected representatives, MPs, people involved with maintaining peace, and other stakeholders from the three districts, he said.

He added that some parts of the peace accord have yet to be implemented.

"We discussed everything, every small issue, and Shantu Larma assured us that he will provide all kinds of assistance to us," said the home minister.

"We have informed Shantu Larma during the meeting about the deployment of police in the camps."

The districts in the hill tracts are governed like any other districts under the directives of the prime minister.

Since there is the issue of ensuring development in the region, Shantu Larma was invited to the meeting, he added.

"Shantu Larma mentioned some issues and said he would sit with us again.

"We would deploy modern police in the three districts so as to restore peace and order."

The home boss said he informed Shantu Larma that the government did not want killings and extortion in the region.

Govt to make

FROM PAGE 1

A team from the UNCDP is scheduled to visit Bangladesh next month to assist in the preparations of the roadmap and strategies.

The UNCDP is arguing for adoption of a host of international support measures in favour of the graduating least developed countries.

The team will monitor the measures taken by the government and also give technical support for preparing the roadmap and strategies, mentioned the official.

The official also said they will take up some time-bound action plans and send progress reports to the UNCDP every year so that it can monitor and evaluate the country's steps during the transition period.

The government has already submitted the country report regarding the transition to the UNCDP, outlining its plans for the transition period.

In the report, the government said it is going to sign PTAs with Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Bangladesh has also been negotiating with Indonesia to sign Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to boost bilateral trade and also tap into export potential in the Southeast Asian region, the official pointed out.

The Economic Relations Division (ERD) has taken up a project titled "Support to Sustainable Graduation Project" to carry out the activities of the national taskforce and also provide it with secretarial support. The roadmap and strategies will be formulated under the project.

On Friday, the UNCDP, based on assessment, recommended Bangladesh's graduation to a developing country from a least developed one.

Taking into consideration the Covid-19 fallout, the UNCDP for the first time extended the transition period for Bangladesh to five years from three years.

The UNCDP will evaluate the country again in 2024 mainly to observe whether there is any setback in the economy or the graduation.

At a virtual discussion on the country's LDC graduation yesterday, Debapriya Bhattacharya, a member of the UNCDP, said the committee has suggested that Bangladesh should prioritise areas in policy formulation to support its development during the transition period and beyond.

In a presentation, he also highlighted the major policies in which the UNCDP suggested collection of more tax, measures to increase private and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), creation of jobs, and improvement of healthcare and the quality of education.

The UNCDP also suggested product diversification as the country is relying too much on garment items, said Debapriya, also a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.