

# China races to find virus vaccine, put scandals in the past

AFP, Beijing

China has mobilised its army and fast-tracked tests in the global race to find a coronavirus vaccine, but its labs also have an image tarnished by past health scandals to overcome.

Six months after the first cases emerged in the city of Wuhan, China has moved quickly to develop a vaccine and is involved in several of the dozen or so international clinical trials currently under way.

Researchers have reported promising early results from tests on humans and monkeys, and authorities hope to have the first shots ready for the public this year.

The Military Academy of Medical Sciences is among those working on a vaccine, in partnership with a pharmaceutical firm.

China has authorised fast-track procedures, allowing preclinical phases -- such as animal tests and other studies -- to be conducted at the same time instead of one after the other.

But Ding Sheng, dean of the School of Pharmaceutical Sciences at Beijing's Tsinghua University, sounded a note of caution around using "non-conventional methods".

"I understand that people are eagerly waiting for a vaccine," Ding said in the People's Daily, a Communist Party organ.

"But on a scientific point of view, we can't lower our criteria, even in an emergency," he said.

Ding also questioned the decision to authorise phase one and two clinical trials at the same time,

allowing labs to avoid having to seek authorisation before proceeding from one to the other.

Nick Jackson, of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), however, pointed out that China was not the only country to do this.

"Many organisations globally are conducting adaptive trials that allow for rapid transition from phase one to two studies," said Jackson, whose organisation funds research into vaccines.

"This approach is necessary given the urgent need for vaccines."

One pharmaceutical company, Sinopharm, said its vaccine could be ready for the public at the end of the year or early 2021.

The head of China's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention hopes a vaccine could be ready as early as September for priority cases, such as health workers.

But China will also have to convince the public that any vaccine it produces are safe as the country's pharmaceutical industry has been hit by scandals involving tainted medicine and corruption in recent years.

Parents have held protests and some are scared enough to seek foreign-made vaccines for their children over those made in China.

One of the biggest scandals involved Changchun Changsheng Biotechnology, which was fined a record \$1.3 billion in 2018 after it fabricated records for a rabies vaccine for humans.



Protesters maintaining social distancing hold placards during a demonstration against the government's handling of the fight against the coronavirus, in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Cops to seek Interpol help to nab traffickers

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nine districts, but they have agents in other districts, said police.

They initially send the aspiring migrants somewhere out of the country -- mostly in the UAE or India -- by arranging tourist or on arrival visas and then to Libya via Jordan's capital Amman. International members in the syndicates cooperate in the whole process.

Police found that members of these syndicates belong to different nationalities.

A Bangladeshi man living in Libya nicknamed "Goodluck Bhai" was found to be a linchpin of one of the syndicates.

For the whole journey, the traffickers

used to collect a hefty sum of around Tk 8-9 lakh from each migrant.

Law Enforcers has come up with the findings following the recent arrests of 39 people who were allegedly involved in the trafficking of the 26 victims.

Of them, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested around 22 people, Rab arrested around 11 people and Detective Branch (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested six people till date.

"We have got some information about the operation of some of these syndicates," said Sarwar-Bin-Quasem, legal and media wing director of Rab headquarters.

"Many of the members are in different countries, so we may seek

Interpol's assistance to trace the traffickers and take action against them," he said.

According to Police Headquarters (PHQ) statement, around 22 cases were filed across the country regarding the trafficking of the 38 Bangladeshis.

CID is investigating 15 of the cases. Contacted, Syeda Jannat Ara, special superintendent of CID told this newspaper on Thursday that they got names of some 120 people after analysing the complaints and first information reports filed by the relatives of the victims who were killed in Libya.

Apart from them, CID teams got dozens of more names, she said, adding that it might take some time

## Trump says he will 'do other things' if he loses 2020 election

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump said he will go on to other things if he loses the Nov. 3 election, after Democratic opponent Joe Biden said the Republican might cheat and refuse to leave the White House.

"Certainly if I don't win, I don't win. I mean, you know, go on and do other things," Trump told Fox News Channel in a television interview broadcast on Friday.

As the race between Trump and Biden heats up ahead of the election, the two have increasingly asserted that the other side intends to cheat their way to victory.

Biden, who is leading Trump in most national polls, earlier this week said his greatest concern was that Trump would try to "steal" the election.

## Double blow

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ul-Fitr last month.

Apart from the entrepreneurs, around 10,000 female artisans who hand-stitch clothes for these boutiques are without work. They also have not received payment for the work they delivered before the shops closed in March.

Talking to The Daily Star, several boutique owners in Thakurgaon said they were struggling to pay rent, utility bills, and staffers' salaries as they could not capitalise on Pahela Baishakh and Eid-ul-Fitr sales.

"We made 1,000 pieces of Baishakhi and Eid dresses including saris, salwar-kameezes, fatuas and baby clothes -- at a cost of around Tk 6 lakh -- aiming to sell these ahead of the Pahela Baishakh and Eid-ul-Fitr," said Chondona Ghosh, owner of boutique named Karupanya.

The main yearly income of these boutiques come from selling products centring around these two festivals, said Chondona, also Thakurgaon's district representative of the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI).

The female entrepreneur invested a bulk of the year's planning and capital into this time of the year with orders already placed before the unprecedented Covid-19 outbreak-driven shutdown announced across the country in the last week of March.

Though the government permitted shops to reopen from May 10, in time for pre-Eid sales, shops in these districts were closed again, said Chondona.

As social distancing could not be maintained, the local administrations ordered shopping malls and markets to be shuttered again from May 18 in Thakurgaon.

Though shops have since reopened, since the end of the countrywide shutdown starting June 1, this gives little hope to boutique owners who cannot, for example, sell the distinctive red-and-white Pahela Baishakh outfits during the rest of the year.

Mokseda Begum, owner of Ananya Hasta Shilpa in Thakurgaon, said she had made three-pieces, panjabis, fatuas and baby clothes worth over Tk 4 lakh. But all these products lie unsold as her shop remained shut during the two festivals.

"The possibility of selling those

products is uncertain as customers will not like to buy these now."

"I built up my business slowly and after the efforts of half my life," said Mokseda, adding that she cannot get her boutique up and running again without financial support.

Around 50 boutiques in the two northern districts of Thakurgaon and Panchagarh are run from the entrepreneurs' homes and at least 2,000 artisans are involved in the industry, said BWCCI's Chondona.

ARTISANS WITHOUT WORK, PAY Bilkis Begum, 30, an artisan from Gilabari village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, said she is one of 30 women in her village who sew for a living. They have gone unpaid by boutique owners for the work they delivered before shops were closed.

The artisans are usually paid for their work with some advance and the major amount is given after the clothes are sold.

The artisans' hopes are dimming as they are also not getting new orders from boutiques due to financial constraints, Bilkis said, meaning they could be without work and pay for months to come.

Halima Khatun, 35, of Islamnagar village in the upazila, said a total of 80 women working under her supervision were in hardship.

All the artisans are without work since the owners of boutiques have not been giving work orders for two months now. They too are yet to get wages for their work for Pahela Baishakh and Eid-ul-Fitr, she added.

Around 400-500 female entrepreneurs who sell boutique clothing and handicrafts in the eight northern districts in Rangpur division are concerned about how to sustain operations and around 10,000 artisans -- mostly women -- are without work, said Fatema Yasmin Era, BWCCI's Rangpur divisional president.

The government should bring these entrepreneurs and artisans under the coverage of special incentives so that the industry can survive, she added.

Deputy commissioner of Thakurgaon, KM Kamruzzman Selim, told The Daily Star that the government has a plan to provide support to small entrepreneurs and once the local administration receives instructions on this, it will start working on the issue.

## Astronauts create

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microscopic world -- which is governed by the often unexpected processes of quantum mechanics -- and the macroscopic world, where classical physics apply.

Scientists hope to use those Bose-Einstein condensates to gain deep insight into quantum mechanics. But they have had trouble because gravity can get in the way of measuring them precisely.

That led researchers to send equipment known as the Cold Atom Lab to the International Space Station. That allowed the astronauts on board to prepare Bose-Einstein condensates in that microgravity environment, and measure how those conditions changed the properties compared with Earth.

They found, for instance, that the atoms hover around for much longer -- the state lasts for more than a second, compared with just tens of

milliseconds on Earth. That in turn will allow researchers to observe the Bose-Einstein condensates with much more precision, since they will have more time to do so.

What's more, the condensates can be trapped by weaker forces, the researchers write, allowing them to reach even lower temperatures. As the conditions get colder, the exotic quantum effects become more prominent, allowing researchers to better understand them and potentially shed light on some of the most fundamental mysteries of physics.

"The successful generation of Bose-Einstein condensates in orbit unveils new opportunities for research on quantum gases as well as for atom interferometry and paves the way for even more ambitious missions," writes Maïke Lachmann in an accompanying News & Views article.

## No 'live' virus

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Anshu Banerjee, a senior advisor in WHO's Department of Reproductive Health and Research, said that only "fragments" of the virus had been detected in breast milk, not live virus.

"So far we have not been able to detect live virus in breast milk," he said. "So the risk of transmission from mother to child so far has not been established."

WHO chief also said that vigilance was required worldwide against the "very dangerous virus" even in regions where it appeared to be on the wane.

"Our fear is although it is declining in Europe it is increasing in other parts of the world. Even Europe cannot be safe because the virus can be reintroduced to Europe," he said.

Tedros was also firm on the need for any vaccines had to be shared fairly between countries, amid concerns some could hoard any drugs they develop.

Vaccines should be made available as a global public good, to ensure everyone had fair access to any life-saving products that are developed, Tedros said.

## Zafrullah recovers

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Mahibullah Khandaker, vice principal of Gonoshasthaya Samaj Vitik Medical College, said Zafrullah's breathing was normal with 95 percent oxygen saturation throughout yesterday.

Zafrullah tested positive for coronavirus on May 24.

## Screening boards

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transport crisis in the capital. Under this plan, electric trains will be introduced to reduce pressure on the buses and other transports. The trains will operate during rush hours in the capital.

NO TALKS BEFORE RECOGNITION Bangladesh foreign ministry strongly protests a news published by the Lahore-based newspaper Imroz which claimed that Bangbandhu would soon hold a meeting with Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Terming the news false and baseless, a foreign ministry spokesperson says there will be no dialogue with Pakistan before the country recognises Bangladesh.

4 MORE PLANES FOR BANGLADESH BIMAN Bangladesh Biman plans to purchase four more aircraft as part of its fleet expansion plan. The government has already finalised purchase of two Fokkers from the Netherlands. The Netherlands will also provide training to the pilots of Bangladesh Biman. The national carrier has currently three aircraft. A spokesperson of Bangladesh Biman says the main focus of the expansion will be to strengthen domestic air communication.

TK 36 CRORE MORE FROM THE US The US Senate has sanctioned Tk 36 crore more for Bangladesh aid fund. The money will be spent for strengthening relief and rehabilitation work in the war-torn country.

WEST GERMANY PROVIDES 6 CRORE MARKS West Germany provides 6 crore Deutsche Marks to aid Bangladesh's efforts to reconstruct its economy.

SOURCES: June 15, 1972 issue of Purbodesh.

mechanism" to deal with the outbreak, as paramilitary police were seen around the market and a mass testing campaign was announced.

The chairman of the Xinfadi market told state media that the virus was detected on chopping boards used to handle imported salmon.

MORE THAN 426,000 DEAD

Worldwide, the pandemic has killed more than 426,000 people and infected more than 7.6 million, while wreaking large-scale economic devastation, reports AFP.

Brazil's health ministry recorded 909 deaths in the past 24 hours, putting the total at 41,828 -- meaning the country of 212 million people has now surpassed Britain's death toll.

"Some areas are at a critical stage" in Brazil, with intensive care unit occupancy levels of more than 90 percent, World Health Organization emergencies director Mike Ryan said.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who threatened last week to quit the WHO over "ideological bias", has dismissed the virus as a "little flu", and berated state officials for imposing lockdowns.

World health officials have warned that the virus is far from contained.

The WHO this week said the pandemic is accelerating in Africa, and Botswana's capital Gaborone was locked down yesterday after new cases

## Hospital finally starts

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prepare a hospital to treat VIPs and foreign diplomats who would be infected with the deadly virus. But, the health minister refuted the news and said the government has no such plan.

WHY THE WAIT?

Why the gastro-liver institute waited over two months to admit patients, while other hospitals were struggling to accommodate, remains unexplained.

Prof Faruque said, "I don't want to recall previous issues. I have talked about it a lot. We were ready but we did not get permission to admit patients. Now, we were asked to admit patients. So we are open," he said.

In the meantime, the hospital has installed a central oxygen system and eight more ICU beds.

In April, hospital authorities wrote to the health ministry for hiring 150 staffers on an immediate basis and the process is now at its final stage, health

ministry sources said.

Currently, the hospital has 106 doctors and 247 nurses, of whom 90 are pregnant or lactating mothers and would not be able to provide service for now. There are 70 other staffers, including medical technologists.

Speaking to the media on several occasions, the hospital authorities said there are a 120 beds designated for patients of highly infectious diseases, which are ready to provide treatments for Covid-19 patients.

On a private television channel ATN News on May 22, the hospital's joint director Golam Kibria said, "We have completed our preparations to provide treatment."

He said they have already ensured ICU beds, central oxygen supply system for the patients, and provided necessary training to their doctors, nurses and general staffers to keep themselves protected from coronavirus.

## Journalist Moazzem dies

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Reporters Association of Bangladesh (CRAB), was admitted to the hospital with 60 percent burn injuries.

Ershad Hossain, duty officer of the Fire Service and Civil Defence Headquarters, suspected that the blaze started as accumulated gas in the room came in contact with an electrical spark.

On January 2, Nannu's son Swapnil Ahmed Piash, 24, died after a fire broke out in the same room for the same reason.

A police team has launched an independent investigation to check how the fire broke out in same place and in the same way, Md Parvez Islam, officer-in-charge of Badda Police Station, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We visited the scene on Friday and asked for a report from the Crime Scene Unit and fire service department

to learn whether it was actually an accident, as the same tragedy was not supposed to occur twice. We would be able to understand what happened once we get the reports," he said.

He added that they have not yet found a suspicious link to the incident.

Nannu's wife Shahana Hossain Pallabi said that Nannu returned from office work around 2:00am that night, had dinner and then took a shower.

"He went to our son's room around 3:00am and opened the door. As soon as he switched on the lights, there was a loud bang and a fire broke out," she said, adding that Nannu rushed to the bathroom and stood under the shower but he was severely burnt by then.

Pallabi further claimed that they used to get a smell of gas and a few days ago, Nannu said he would fix the problem. The tragedy occurred before he could.

to tell the exact number of people involved.

Golam Mostofa Rashel, deputy commissioner of DB police, said police have already got names of some Bangladeshis staying in the UAE, Libya and Amman, said.

Meanwhile, CID claimed to have discovered another route of human trafficking after arresting five traffickers from Dhaka on Wednesday.

The arrestees are Abdul Jalil, Rubel Hossain, Rubel Ahmed, Kutub Uddin and Parvez Ahmed.

According to CID officials, the traffickers first send job seekers to India on tourist visas. And then they send the victims to Spain via the UAE, Algeria and Morocco.

and Ryanair launched legal action against the British government over a 14-day coronavirus quarantine system introduced this week.

The pandemic has caused unemployment to soar around the world and particularly affected the poor, whose plight Pope Francis highlighted yesterday.

"In these months when the whole world was overwhelmed by a virus that brought pain and death, distress and bewilderment, how many outstretched hands we could we see!" the pontiff said in a message for the World Day of the Poor.

In Nepal, police arrested 10 people, including seven foreigners, yesterday as demonstrations against the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis continued with hundreds of protesters gathering in the capital city Kathmandu, reports Reuters.

Sport has been returning to action around the world, mostly to empty stadiums, but more than 20,000 fans turned out in New Zealand's Dunedin to watch a Super Rugby match yesterday.

Spectator Wendy said she had feared the country would stay locked down longer.

"But I'm happy that we're not," she said. "Nobody's wearing masks, it's good."

They even prepared residential and quarantine facilities for staffers, in case any health worker develops Covid-19 symptoms, he said.

Asked whether there would be any VIP issues, Dr Faruque said, "No. There would be no classification [of patients]. We will admit any Covid-19 patient should they require hospitalisation."

Meanwhile, the health ministry on Thursday sent a letter to the finance ministry requesting it to allow the hospital to hire 150 health workers through outsourcing.

In the letter, the health ministry said hiring 150 staffer thorough a tender process would be time-consuming and to facilitate emergency Covid-19 treatment, the finance ministry should allow the hospital to hire the manpower directly.

"The proposal is still at the finance ministry," Faruque said.