

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,396
New cases in 24hrs



3,66,383
Total cases



5,305
Deaths



2,78,627
Recoveries



GLOBAL
UPDATE



1,029,019
Deaths



34,569,066
Total cases

Trump, Melania catch Covid

FROM PAGE 1

Briefing reporters at the White House Friday morning, Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows said the president was experiencing "mild symptoms" but remained in "good spirits" and "very energetic."

"The American people can rest assured that we have a president that is not only on the job, will remain on the job, and I'm optimistic that he'll have a very quick and speedy recovery."

Meadows said Trump's doctor would continue to attend to him at the White House, declining to give details of any treatment being provided.

Technically obese and in his 70s, Trump is in a higher-risk category.

Doctor Daniel Griffin, an infectious disease specialist in the New York area, told AFP Trump had an estimated 20 percent chance of developing severe disease requiring oxygenation, in light of his age and weight.

As the shock news sent global stocks sliding, leaders including Germany's Angela Merkel and Britain's Boris Johnson wished the president and first lady a speedy recovery -- while Russian President Vladimir Putin predicted Trump's "vitality, good spirits and optimism" would see him through.

While its ultimate effect on the race remains unpredictable, the thunderbolt news had immediate electoral consequences for Trump, forcing him to cancel a rally planned later in the day in key swing state Florida.

Further ahead, it looked certain the Republican -- who is lagging the Democrat Biden in the polls ahead of November 3 -- would have to abandon a weekend trip to Wisconsin, another battleground, as well as a tour of western states next week.

And a question mark hangs over his second televised debate, set for October 15, against Biden -- who has made criticism of Trump's coronavirus response his key issue.

The Democrat, who was mocked by Trump for his conspicuous mask-wearing as they shared the debate stage -- unmasked -- last Tuesday in Cleveland, said he and his wife Jill wished the couple a "swift recovery."

"We will continue to pray for the health and safety of the president and his family," Biden wrote on Twitter.

It is not clear if the the former vice president has undergone a test after he shared the same stage with Trump on Tuesday night for the first presidential debate in Cleveland.

Melania Trump for her part tweeted that she was "overall feeling good" and hoping to recover fast.

"Thank you for the love you are sending our way," she wrote.

News of Trump's infection right after one of his closest advisors, Hope Hicks, tested positive -- sparking fears of a cluster of cases emanating from the heart of the White House.

Trump met with dozens of people through the week and reportedly went to a fundraiser in New Jersey after it was known Hicks had contracted the virus.

The White House said it was carrying out contact tracing, while Melania Trump's spokeswoman said the couple's 14-year-old son Barron had tested negative.

Vice President Mike Pence, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo all let it be known they had tested negative, and the White House said Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett had also been given the all-clear.

Trump's positive test was more than a PR disaster for a president who has staked everything on trying to persuade Americans that fears of the virus are overblown.

In what has become an overtly political gesture, Trump almost never wears a mask in public -- an example followed by his supporters and many of his aides.

The president has been using large rallies to try to change the subject from his much criticized Covid-19 response, vowing in a speech just Thursday that "the end of the pandemic is in sight."

All that is now on hold, and with the clock ticking on the election.

According to Reuters/Ipsos survey released yesterday showed that most Americans have settled on their choice for president little more than a month before the Nov 3 election.

The most recent survey, conducted Tuesday through Thursday, found that 50% of likely voters were backing Biden, while 41% said they were voting for Trump. Four percent said they were voting for a third-party candidate and 5% were not sure.

Sinovac now wants co-financing

FROM PAGE 1

they are placing the financial burden on us," said Prof Sayedur Rahman, member of the ethical review committee of the Bangladesh Medical and Research Council (BMRC).

There is a requirement for human trials on 10,000 to 30,000 people to get any vaccine approved globally, he said.

Prof Nazrul Islam, a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19, said, "This makes everything unclear."

Currently, the potential vaccine is being trialled in countries including Brazil, Turkey, and Indonesia.

On July 18, the BMRC gave permission to the icddr,b to conduct human trials of the vaccine at seven hospitals in the capital.

The clinical trial of the Chinese shot was supposed to start by the end of last month as icddr,b was supposed to get the necessary doses for the trial.

As per the contract, Sinovac would provide 110,000 free vaccine doses to Bangladesh if the Phase-III trial of the vaccine is proven safe.

Besides, the company committed to let a "qualified" Bangladeshi drugmaker produce the shots at a discounted price, so that the needs of the people of Bangladesh are met.

Prof Nazrul said, "We

recommended the trials considering the technology transfer, because that would have gotten us the vaccines at a cheaper rate."

Officials at icddr,b said they could not see any reason behind Sinovac's move.

The icddr,b has already engaged its scientists and appointed necessary human resources for the trial, sources said.

Sinovac has not fixed the price of its vaccine yet. Another Chinese company Sinopharm has announced that two shots of its vaccine, expected to become available in December, might cost around \$145.

Meanwhile, Oxford University and AstraZeneca say their vaccine will be about \$4 per dose.

Quoting Sinovac Chairman and CEO Yin Weidong, Chinese media on September 25 reported that the company might begin analysing data from final-stage human trials this year to decide whether it is effective enough to seek regulatory approval.

Some western companies are also racing to evaluate efficacy of their vaccines, the report added.

Sinovac can start assessing the vaccine's ability to protect people as soon as researchers observe at least 61 trial subjects, its CEO told a news conference.

Biman, Saudia to operate

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The Caab chief also said they were ready to give permission to Saudia to operate as many flights as they wanted.

The eight Saudia flights will fly 2,500 passengers a week, said sources at the airlines.

Talking to The Daily Star, a top Saudia official said taking the rush of Saudi-bound passengers in consideration, they would also operate several chartered flights from Dhaka to the KSA.

At least 55,000 Bangladeshi expatriates have been waiting to board Saudi Arabia-bound flights since the pandemic struck international flight operations.

Of the passengers, about 25,000 have return tickets of Biman and about 30,000 have return tickets of Saudi Arabian Airlines, said officials of the two airlines.

There were several other foreign airlines which, before the pandemic, would carry a significant number of passengers from Dhaka to different destinations in the Kingdom via stopovers in other countries, said sources at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

The airlines are Kuwait Airways,

Etihad Airways, Emirates, Air Arabia and Gulf Air.

But they are yet to start carrying Saudi-bound passengers.

Since the resumption of flight operations by Saudi Airlines on September 23, expatriate Bangladeshis rushed to sales offices of Biman and Saudi Arabian Airlines in the capital to ensure re-issuance of their return tickets to Saudi Arabia.

Almost every day since the resumption of the flight operations to the KSA, several hundred expatriate workers gathered in front of the offices of Saudia and Biman, hoping to be able to return to their workplaces.

They fear they might lose their jobs if they fail to return to Saudi Arabia before their visas and Iqama expires.

Late last month, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said the Saudi government had agreed to increase the tenure of visa and Iqama of Bangladeshi workers until October 17.

Home to more than 22 lakh Bangladeshis, Saudi Arabia is also the prime destination of Bangladeshi migrant workers and the biggest remittance-generating country for Bangladesh.



A truck and a pick-up lie beside the railway track along Bangabandhu Bridge East Link Road in Tangail's Kalihati upazila yesterday morning after the two vehicles collided head-on on the road. The accident left one person dead and two others injured. Railway communications between Dhaka and the north and southwestern districts remained suspended for about an hour following the accident.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Giving away greenery

FROM PAGE 1

As the total area was an estimate, natural landmarks defined the borders of forest and the Forest Department has been protecting it for almost a century.

After being declared a "reserve forest" under the Assam Forest Regulation 1891, it was expanded by several hundreds of acres over the years, until it stood at 12,768.80 acres in total.

Following a 1933 lawsuit by the Prithimpassa Estate, 1,987.85 acres of land was de-reserved from the forest area in 1937. It was later acquired and handed over to the Forest Department.

Though there is no documentation of re-reserving this land, that 1,987.85 acres is being protected by the Forest Department as part of the reserve forest.

WRONG CLASSIFICATION

In the 2013 digital land survey, 2,174.35 acres of land from the middle of the reserve forest, now under Moulvibazar district, was recorded by the office of the deputy commissioner as "khas land" and classified as "hillock".

Of the total of 13,648.01 acres of this reserve forest recorded by the 2013 survey, only 11,473.66 acres were recorded in the name of the Forest Department.

At the time, the Forest Department protested the classification and wrote several memorandums to the responsible authorities.

"The land survey was wrong in all ways possible. They did not consider the landmarks, changed the classification, and chose the middle of the forest for an ill purpose," said Deputy Conservator SM Sajjad Hossain.

To settle the dispute, Md Abdul Mannan, the then director general of the Land Record and Survey Department, visited the reserve forest in 2014.

In his report, which The Daily Star obtained, he stated in favour of the Forest Department's points about the nature of the land and the wrong classification.

He said only the 1,987.85 acres of land from the side of the forest -- which was de-reserved following the 1933 lawsuit -- can be recorded as khas land, but none from the middle part of the reserved area.

Not only the recorded reserve

forest, which cannot be leased in any case, all surrounding acquired forest also must be classified as unleaseable, added the report.

He also instructed Sylhet's zonal settlement officer to identify the officials who intentionally changed classification from "forest" to "hillock", in order to take departmental action.

But these instructions were not followed, according to Forest Department sources and land ministry records seen by The Daily Star, and the land remains "khas" and classified as "hillock" which can be leased.

In 2015, to correct the record, the Forest Department filed a case with the Land Survey Tribunal of Moulvibazar against the deputy commissioner, director general of the Land Record and Survey Department, and assistant commissioner (land) of Juri upazila.

ATTEMPT TO LEASE

Several tea companies have shown interest in taking hold of the disputed part of the reserve forest, since it was recorded as "khas land" in 2013.

Recently, a prominent tea company applied for a long term lease of the disputed land; around 1,000 acres each for expansion of their tea plantations under two subsidiary companies and another 169.59 acres for the mother company.

In response to a letter of the company's chairman on January 29 this year, Jashim Uddin Haider, director (14) at the Prime Minister's Office, wrote to the secretary of the land ministry on February 18.

In his letter, the director stated that the decision over the land can only be taken after the disposal of the case under trial at the Land Survey Tribunal.

He also stated the prime minister instructed that expansion of tea plantation will eventually benefit the country economically and initiative can be taken to expand the tea plantation on the land.

This newspaper has obtained copies of the letters.

Earlier on November 26, 2018, the PMO asked the UNO of Juri upazila to examine the land.

The UNO in response wrote to the PMO on January 23, 2019, stating that the land is unused, covered with bamboo and uncultivated with no

habitat of human, sources said.

Following the PMO letter, the land ministry held meetings on August 9 and 23 in this regard where representatives of all stakeholders were present, but no formal meeting resolutions have been published yet.

Contacted on September 24, Md Muksodur Rahman Patwary, secretary of the land ministry, said, "We've prepared a committee in this regard who will submit a report soon. After that, as per the recommendation of the report, we'll decide about the land considering all legal grounds."

Mallika Dey, additional deputy commissioner (revenue) of Moulvibazar, said, "As the case is under trial, we've submitted our arguments to the tribunal and hope to win the case as per how it is recorded. As the matter is being considered at the ministry level, we will obey any given order by the ministry."

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, eminent environmental lawyer, thinks when a case is pending at the tribunal, such a recommendation may influence the judgment.

She said not expanding a tea estate but protecting a forest is the constitutional responsibility of the government.

"We have many tea gardens but only one of such forest. The government should protect it with priority," added Rizwana, also the chief executive of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela).

The disputed 2,174.35-acre land lies in two forest beats -- Sagarnal and Gazipur.

It consists of a part of 3,279-acre Sagarnal natural bamboo garden and most of the 780 acres of Gogalichhara natural bamboo garden.

Moreover, there are rattan gardens, social forestry plantations, natural waterways and wildlife in the disputed land.

Ziaul Hasan, secretary of the ministry of environment, forest and climate change, said, "There are disputes over many such forests all over the country and we are struggling to get all the disputed areas back to the forest. But any forestland should no way be leased for any other purposes."

"I am not officially informed about the progress of the dispute and the initiative to lease out the disputed land. I will look into the matter."

Girl suffers burns in acid attack by husband

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A teenage girl sustained acid attack allegedly by her husband in Rajshahi's Godagari upazila early yesterday as she refused to stay with him.

Khairul Islam, officer-in-charge of Godagari Police Station, said the victim Mahbuba Begum, of the upazila's Raninagar village, got married to Murad Ali, 30, of the same village, around a year ago.

She, however, was staying with her parents for the last four months and told her husband that she would not return.

Hearing this, Murad intruded Mahbuba's parents' house early yesterday and threw acid on her, the OC said, quoting the victim's family members and locals.

According to the police officer, no case was filed in this regard but police were investigating the incident.

The victim was sent to the burn unit of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Her face and parts of neck were affected the most, the police officer said quoting RMCH doctors.

Pandemic creates 'surge' of flawed research

AFP, Paris

The Covid-19 pandemic has created a surge in potentially flawed scientific studies as researchers rush to publish results without adequate oversight, a leading medical ethicist said yesterday.

Since the novel coronavirus appeared late last year there have been more than 4,000 academic papers relating to the virus, many of which have appeared online without the benefit of a full peer-review process.

Icddr,b chosen

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yesterday. The five other laboratories were initially selected for this vaccine-assessment network are: Nexelis (Canada), Public Health England (PHE, UK), VisMederiSrl (Italy), Viroclinics-DDL (The Netherlands), and Translational Health Sciences and Technological Institute (THSTI, India).

According to the release, the network will use the same testing reagents -- originating in the labs of Nexelis and PHE -- and follow common protocols to measure the immunogenicity of multiple Covid-19 vaccine candidates (both CEPI-funded and non-CEPI funded developers).

This approach will ensure uniformity in assessment and informed identification of the most promising vaccine candidates, read the press release.

CEPI is actively negotiating with additional laboratories to participate in this network, it added.

Richard Hatchett, CEO of CEPI, said, "Encouraging data is now emerging on multiple Covid-19 vaccine candidates, however, there is no way to draw direct comparisons, as different labs may use different measurements to infer immune response."

"The establishment of CEPI's centralised laboratory network is the first time a project has been done at such speed and scale in response to a pandemic. Our network of labs will operate as though vaccines are all being tested under one roof, to speed up assessment and identify successful vaccine candidates so that we move as quickly as possible to reduce the great suffering caused as a result of this global crisis," he added.

About the initiative Reuters reports: hundreds of potential Covid-19 vaccines are in various stages of development around the world, with shots developed in Russia and China already being deployed before full efficacy trials have been done, and front-runners from Pfizer PFE.N, Moderna MRNA.O and AstraZeneca AZN.L likely to have final-stage trial results before year-end.

Typically, the immunogenicity of potential vaccines is assessed in individual lab analyses, which aim to see whether biomarkers of immune response -- such as antibodies and T-cell responses -- are produced after clinical trial volunteers receive a dose, or doses, of the vaccine candidate.

But with more than 320 Covid-19 vaccine candidates in the works, Saville said, the many differences in data collection and evaluation methods are an issue.

As well as potential variations in markers of immunity, there are differences in how and where samples are collected, transported and stored -- all of which can impact the quality and usefulness of the data produced, and make comparisons tricky.

CEPI itself is co-funding nine of the potential Covid-19 vaccines in development, including candidates from Moderna, AstraZeneca, Novavax NVAX.O and CureVac.

custodial death took place since January 2017 to July 2020, according to a study report of Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK). It includes 207 deaths in "encounter", "crossfire" and "gunfight" in the first six months this year.

The ASK findings are based on the reports published in different leading newspapers.

"Extrajudicial killing is a gross violation of the constitution and law and such incidents are not acceptable in any manner," said Supreme Court lawyer and ASK chairperson ZI Khan Panna.

"The HC must not give any directive in favour of violation of the constitution and law," he said, referring to the yet-to-be disposed of rules.

The lawyer also said they would take steps for holding of hearing on the HC rules over extrajudicial killings after the pandemic was over.

Manzill Murshid, another SC lawyer who moved one of the two writ petitions, said his clients sought HC directives for the law enforcers to ensure proper protection of a detained accused when he is taken away to recover arms.

He also observed that it is important for the government, political leaders and law enforcers to

reach a consensus to stop extrajudicial killings in custody.

Khurshid Alam Khan, a Supreme Court lawyer and editor of Dhaka Law Reports, told The Daily Star that the HC might have given some guidelines about protection of the detained accused in custody had the rules been heard and verdicts delivered.

He said it has been a long time since those rules were delivered.

"And when the hearing resumes, it might be the case of starting all over again due to the reconstitution of those HC benches concerned," said Alam.

Contacted, Ministry of Law Secretary Md Golam Sarwar said on September 7 that he could not say about the issue without seeing the record.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal could not be reached over their cell phones for their comments on this issue.

33 deaths

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188 in Barishal, 231 in Sylhet, 239 in Rangpur, and 111 in Mymensingh divisions have been reported dead.

Across the country, 14,504 people are now in isolation and 42,916 are in quarantine.