

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,209
New cases in 24hrs



3,87,295
Total cases



5,646
Deaths



3,02,298
Recoveries



1,112,726
Deaths



39,858,267
Total cases

VACCINE PROCUREMENT

Govt seeks \$500 million from Japan

JAGARAN Chakma

The government has sought financial support of \$500 million from Japan for the procurement of Covid-19 vaccine.

The Economic Relations Division (ERD) yesterday sent a letter to Embassy of Japan in Dhaka in this regard.

The letter was sent as per the demand of the health ministry, which informed the ERD about the estimated cost of vaccine procurement and to seek necessary funds from development partners.

A senior ERD official said a meeting was held to categorise potential development partners to seek funds from.

He said they have already contacted different partners informing them about Bangladesh's need for funds, adding that they will also seek funds from Asian Development Bank and World Bank.

The ERD wrote that to bring the entire population under the coverage of vaccination, it is estimated that if each person needs two doses of vaccine that costs \$10-12 per person, the cost for covering a population of 165 million will be around \$ 1.65 billion to \$2 billion.

The letter to the Embassy of Japan read that under the circumstances stated above, the government of Bangladesh would like to request the Government of Japan to provide \$500 million as assistance for the procurement of vaccines.

Meanwhile, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Bangladesh government signed an agreement for a \$3 million grant for the procurement of urgent medical supplies.

Besides, the ERD will seek an extra \$350 million from ADB to purchase the vaccine.

Similarly, ERD will also seek financial support of around \$1 billion from World Bank.

According to ERD letter sent to development partners, the Covid-19 is taking its toll on human lives and economies globally and is showing no sign of respite any time soon.

So, it is imperative to restrain the outbreak of the novel coronavirus for protecting both the lives of people and the economy, the letter read.

The financial support is being sought as the vaccine will likely be available in the market within a short of time.

A large-scale commercial production of the vaccine is expected by the end of this year. In this context, a major initiative has been initiated to import vaccines into Bangladesh in order to make it available for all the citizens.

Ensure enough

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over to the family until the verdict is upheld by the highest courts of the country, where the accused will be appealing.

"They have only overcome the first step of the legal process, the High Court comes next, followed by the Appellate Division. The Tk 4 lakh they will be getting once the process is over is not enough to raise the two children," observed Sara Hossain, executive director of Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust, at the webinar.

"The penalty for torture is only a maximum of Tk 25,000 if there is no manslaughter and Tk 2 lakh if the victim died. If there was not a maximum limit, we would have been able to get more people interested in justice," said Taqbir Huda, coordinator of Tort Law Project Bangladesh.

"People have lost faith in the law enforcement and are also losing faith in the judiciary, thinking that if they seek justice, it will take 10 to 12 years. Those of us who are in this sector have never reflected on ourselves to find out why this is so," said Dr Shahdeen Malik, eminent jurist and Supreme Court lawyer.

There is legal precedent for creating a compensation fund, speakers said.

"In 2012, I had challenged the immunity given to the crimes caused by Operation Clean Heart. At least 57 people had died due to torture between January and October 2002 and it could not be that in a country where there is a constitution, there would be no accountability for their deaths. In 2015, we got a verdict and the judge had directed the government to create a compensation fund of Tk 100 crore," said Dr Malik.

Such a mechanism for justice is necessary because of the prevalence of custodial torture, speakers observed.

"For any and all cases, judges these days allow the law enforcers to take the accused into remand and we appreciate this, thinking that a confessional statement can be forcefully acquired from the person. This is unconstitutional -- the constitution clearly states that no person can be forced to give a self-incriminating confessional," said Dr Malik.



At least 35 protesters, who participated in the anti-rape long-march to Noakhali, were injured as the march came under attack in Feni. The ruling Awami League men and police allegedly jointly attacked them repeatedly in the district. The attack drew massive public criticism on social media. PHOTO: STAR

Anti-rape march attacked in Feni

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finally received primary treatment at Life Care Hospital in Chowmuhani.

At least 35 activists got primary treatment from the hospital, said Rakib Uddin, a physician at the hospital. Eight to 10 of them suffered severe blows and were later treated at Noakhali General Hospital.

Photos and videos of the attack went viral on social media as heavy criticism poured in from netizens. In the videos, it was seen that police were mere spectators when attackers swooped and made no attempt to detain them.

The protesters alleged that plainclothes men in DB jackets also took part in the attack.

The attack came on the day when Bangladesh Police organised anti-rape and anti-violence rallies in 6,912 beats across the country to create public awareness against rape and violence against women.

Denying the allegations, Additional Superintendent of Feni Police Mainul Islam told The Daily Star that it was "not an attack", but a scuffle broke out there after the rally.

"Marchers wrote 'Dhorshokor Paharadar' [protectors of rapists], 'Tui Dhorshok' [you are a rapist], on posters of local lawmaker Nizam Uddin Hazari.

In protest, his followers brought out a procession. Activists from the long march chased followers of the lawmaker and a scuffle ensued," he claimed.

The official said police tried to restrain the ruling party men and did not attack the marchers.

The Daily Star called AL lawmaker Nizam Hazari for comments, but he did not answer the phone.

Feni Sadar upazila AL General Secretary Sushen Chandra Shil denied AL's involvement.

"The general public were angered and reacted after seeing derogatory comments on the placards of Nizam Hazari, which also included a photo of the prime minister. No one from Awami League and its affiliates were involved," he told reporters.

Hridhho Anindya, cultural affairs secretary of Chhatra Union's Jahangirnagar University unit, who was at the march, alleged that police first attacked them when some protesters were painting a wall in the Feni Shaheed Minar area.

"Later, when we tried to move towards the bus, some miscreants entered the procession and attacked us. They ransacked our six buses," he said.

Demonstrators said they cancelled their rally in Dagonbhuiyan upazila

after learning that the ruling party men also attacked local leftist protesters there.

The long marchers finally held a concluding rally at Maizidi Shaheed Minar of Noakhali around 4:00pm. They demanded immediate resignation of the home minister.

Later, they announced protest rallies across the country on October 19. If their nine-point demand is not met, they warned of a highway blockade across the country on October 21. Tougher protests will come if the home minister did not resign, they said.

In a press statement, Bangladesh Chhatra Union said such attacks in Feni clarified the position of the government and the police, in favour of the rapists.

Protesting the attacks in Feni, several left-leaning parties brought out processions and protest rallies in several parts of the country, including Dhaka. They demanded arrest of the Feni attackers and resignation of the "failed" home minister.

Protests against rape and violence against women erupted across the country since the beginning of October, following the recent incidents of gang rape in Sylhet's MC College and in Noakhali's Begumganj upazila.

Around 450 protesters, including left-leaning parties, socio-cultural

organisations, students, youths and rights activists, started the long march under the banner "Bangladesh against Rape and Impunity" to press home their nine-point demand, from the capital's Shahbagh area around 10:30am on Friday.

Their nine-point demand includes reformation of the Evidence Act, implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) charter, exemplary punishment for those involved in gender-based violence, and an end to repression of women in the hills and on plain land.

Meanwhile, various political, labour and social parties and organisations organised human chains, demonstrations and protest processions in front of the National Press Club in the capital against rape and torture of women and children in the country.

Speakers at these programmes said the incidence of rape and oppression of women and children is increasing due to the culture of impunity in the country. For the same reason, incidents like murder, kidnapping, and extrajudicial killings are also increasing, they said.



US polls results won't impact its ties with Dhaka

Say experts

BSS, Dhaka

As the US awaits the crucial presidential elections, analysts predict the outcome was unlikely to affect the existing Dhaka-Washington relations despite speculations about the polls impact on US ties with some other nations.

US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen E Biegun has just concluded a three-day Dhaka tour when he indicated that his country treats Bangladesh as a "centerpiece" in South Asia, a position which was unlikely to be changed whoever takes the Whitehouse - Republicans or Democrats.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said the US set outline of its relations with Dhaka under a "well plotted strategy". Past instances suggested that the change of administration after presidential elections there make no rapid change in US foreign policy.

"Whoever comes [to power in US] hopefully will follow the same policy [towards Bangladesh]," he said after a meeting with Biegun on Thursday adding that Bangladesh's robust economic growth and stability alongside its geopolitical location drew the US interest towards Dhaka.

But, he said, Bangladesh counts US interest.

International relations analyst Professor Lailufar Yasmin of Dhaka University echoed Momen saying "US policy towards Bangladesh whether it is under Trump administration or Obama administration didn't change". "Now they [US] took IPS [Indo Pacific Strategy] but there was no change in Bangladesh's geopolitical strategic significance," she told BSS.

She pointed out that in his election campaign President Donald Trump's rival Joe Biden is also speaking against China in line with his party's foreign policy.

International affairs expert Prof Imtiaz Ahmed, however, said Bangladesh should not take any major decision regarding ties with the United States ahead of the polls as the "Trump administration's foreign policy is insular and promoting deglobalization".

Biegun arrived here just less than three weeks before the US polls while the democratic candidate Joe Biden is leading Donald Trump in the national polls for the presidential election.

Ahmed speculated that the senior US official's visit could be part of Trump's election campaign to show the US voters that the Republicans were very confident to stage a comeback and being engaged in geopolitics against China.

He said huge numbers of Indian and Bangladeshi origin USA diaspora voters could be another reason for Biegun's selection of New Delhi and Dhaka for the visit just two weeks before the polls.

During his Dhaka visit Biegun joined an interaction with a select group of journalists including BSS diplomatic correspondent, when he said the current Bangladesh-US relation was in a "very good shape" and the existing ties offered scopes to deepen it.

But the senior US state department official said relations of his country with Bangladesh was mainly based on investment and trade cooperation and this "positive engagement of the USA in Bangladesh is nothing to do about it [the geo politics]". He said a recent bilateral economic dialogue suggested measures to develop an economic roadmap while there were numbers of factors including Dhaka's growth and sustained stability that drive the increasing US interest to Bangladesh.

Biegun had acknowledged that "there are a number of challenges and tensions in the region that have alarmed the US and other countries in the Indo-Pacific".

We're hopeful of preventing further Covid spread: PM

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during this pandemic managing the Covid-19 patients in ICUs and outside. Bangladesh Society of Anesthesiologists helped the government prepare the National Guideline for Covid ICU Management."

Hasina said they also arranged new ICU facilities all over the country and trained up ICU doctors and staffers to deal with Covid-19 patients.

She said a good number of physicians, including some anesthesiologists, died from coronavirus infections while discharging their duties.

The PM paid deep homage to their memories and expressed sympathies for their family members.

Hasina said the government has given utmost importance towards improving the country's healthcare service. "We truly believe that getting healthcare is the basic rights of a citizen. So, we've widened the treatment facilities at government hospitals by adding additional beds, recruiting doctors and other health staffers."

She mentioned that the government has set up a number of new specialised hospitals in the country in the last

couple of years. The private sector has also come up in a big way in this area.

The PM said about 18,000 community clinics and union health centres set up by the government have been providing primary healthcare services to rural people. Patients are getting 30 types of free medicine.

The PM said anaesthesiology, a medical speciality concerned with the total perioperative care of patients before, during and after surgery, is getting increased attention everywhere.

"This is because it covers anaesthesia, intensive care medicine, critical

emergency medicine, and pain medicine. Bangladesh is no exception. We duly recognise their contributions."

She urged them to equip themselves with updated knowledge and the technical know-how to handle the critically ill patients.

Hasina said the job of a physician is a noble profession. By treating an ailing human being, the physicians serve humanity. "So, when anyone becomes a doctor, that person's first and foremost task is to serve humanity. I hope you won't forget your duty under any circumstances."

WHO includes three made by Bangladesh

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Earlier on October 5, Kakan Nag, CEO of the Globe Biotech Ltd, alleged that the WHO is "delaying the enlistment unnecessarily".

Bardan Jung Rana, country representative of WHO, told The Daily Star, "Coming into the landscape doesn't mean anything; it doesn't mean okay... There are lot of things [after that]."

He also said there was no delay but the headquarters had been reviewing the documents.

On October 5, Globe Biotech announced that its first vaccine candidate, which is developed based on D614G variant mRNA vaccine, had passed in the pre-clinical trial on mice and was ready for a clinical trial.

It has not disclosed anything about the two other vaccine candidates - the DNA plasmid vaccine and the

Adenovirus Type-5 vector vaccines.

In a press release yesterday, Globe Biotech Ltd claimed its company is the only organisation which has three Covid-19 vaccine candidates in the WHO draft landscape.

All the three have been listed as pre-clinical stage vaccine candidates.

Meanwhile, Globe Biotech Ltd has signed an MoU with icddr, which will conduct all three phases of the clinical trials, Dr Mohammad Mohiuddin, manager of the Globe Biotech Ltd told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The icddr is now preparing the trial protocol. Once completed, it will apply to the BMRC [Bangladesh Medical and Research Council] for the trial approval," he added.

According to the US Centre for Disease Control (US-CDC), the general stages of the development cycle of a vaccine are: exploratory stage, pre-

clinical stage, clinical development, regulatory review and approval, and manufacturing and quality control.

The final stage trial or Phase-III clinical trial means the vaccine is at its final stage of major trials, in which the vaccine is given to thousands of people and tested for efficacy and safety.

"Globally, many vaccines have been failing even at the final stage of trials. And BANCOCVID [the vaccines from Bangladesh] has just passed the first stage. It does not authenticate the vaccine is effective. We could be sure about the efficacy after the mass scale human trial," Muniruddin Ahmed, a professor of pharmacy at the Dhaka University, told The Daily Star recently.

DAILY BRIEFING
Meanwhile, Bangladesh yesterday recorded 23 Covid-19 deaths and 1,209 new cases overnight.

The recovery count rose to 3,02,298

after another 1,560 patients were discharged from hospitals in 24 hours until 8:00am yesterday, a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said.

"Twenty-three more Covid-19 patients died during the same period, increasing the death toll to 5,646," the release said.

It said the tally of infections has surged to 3,87,295 as 1,209 new cases were confirmed after 11,573 samples were tested at 110 authorised laboratories across the country during the time.

Of the total samples tested, 10.45 percent tested positive, the release added.

Among the total infections, 78.05 percent patients have recovered, while 1.46 percent died so far since the first Covid-19 positive cases were reported in the country on March 8.

Bangladesh asked to be

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The meeting was attended by Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, Principal Secretary to PM, Member (Health) NITI Aayog, Principal Scientific Advisor, Senior Scientists, officers of PMO, and other departments of the Indian government.

Modi noted the steady decline in the daily Covid cases and growth rate.

He appealed for social distancing, Covid appropriate behaviour, and self-restraint in the upcoming festival season.

National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC) in consultation with state governments and all relevant stakeholders have prepared and presented a detailed blueprint of vaccine storage, distribution, and administration.

Modi directed that keeping in view the geographical span and diversity of the country, the access to the vaccine should be ensured speedily.

He stressed that every step in the logistics, delivery, and administration should be put in place rigorously.

It must include advanced planning of cold storage chains, distribution network, monitoring mechanism, advance assessment, and preparation of ancillary equipment required, such as vials and syringes.

Two Pan India studies on the Genome of SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19 virus) in India conducted by ICMR and D/o Bio-Technology (DBT) suggest that the virus is genetically stable and there is no major mutation in the virus.

Austrian foreign minister tests positive for Covid-19

AFP, Vienna

Austria's Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg is self-isolating after testing positive for Covid-19, his ministry said yesterday, as the country posted a new daily record for infections.

Schallenberg could have contracted coronavirus during a meeting of European Union foreign ministers in Luxembourg on Monday, a foreign ministry spokeswoman told the APA news agency.

"He has not presented any symptoms so far," he said.

The minister has cancelled a trip planned for the coming days to Britain, Denmark, Greece and Cyprus.

Universities to hold tests for admission

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VC Shirin Akhter said Bangladesh Bishwabidyalaya Parishad would sit in another meeting soon to discuss the method of admission tests.

It is certain that no students will be admitted to a university without admission tests, said Prof Rostom Ali, VC of Pabna University of Science and Technology.

When it comes to higher education, public universities remain students' top choice. But the number of seats is much lower than that of students seeking admission.

Of the 46 public universities, excluding National University, Open University and medical universities, 39 universities have the capacity of enrolling around 65,000 first-year students.

This year, confusion about the admission tests emerged after the government decided to award grades to candidates of Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and equivalent exams without holding the public exams amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Instead of the exams, candidates' evaluation would be based on their results in the Junior School Certificate, Secondary School Certificate and equivalent tests.

HSC and equivalent exams were cancelled out of fear that they would increase risk of coronavirus transmission. More than 13.65 lakh students were expected to sit for the exams.

The government postponed the exams following the closure of all educational institutions on March 17. They are to stay closed until at least October 30.

The issue of whether this year's HSC exam results will be given any weight in the university admission tests was also discussed in the meeting.

"We will hold further discussions in this regard. We will reach a decision only after discussing the matter with the University Grants Commission and education ministry," said Prof Rostom.

Usually, universities take the GPA of SSC and HSC exams into account, alongside admission tests, while holding the entry exams at public universities.

VCs said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Digital University VC Prof Munaz Ahmed Noor made a presentation of software through which universities will be able to hold their internal exams online with transparency.

He said, "Some VCs said they can consider online admission tests using the software following its use in internal exams."

Rafiqul and Shirin said the presentation was apparently good.

"But nothing is 100 percent accurate. We will need to scrutinise the software by IT experts before reaching any decision," said Rafiqul.

In a statement after a meeting with public university VCs on Thursday, the UGC said Bangladesh Bishwabidyalaya Parishad, from its meeting yesterday, would decide in principle regarding the admission tests.

"But the UGC wants that no question arises regarding the tests," the statement said.

UGC Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah at the meeting said the nation wants a specific guideline from the VCs regarding the admission tests.

Usually, admission tests at public universities are held a month after the publication of HSC results.

Till last year, 32 of the 39 public universities held separate admission tests, and the remaining seven agricultural universities held a uniform admission test.