

US approves Moderna's vaccine

Countries tighten curbs ahead of holidays; India hits 10 m coronavirus cases

AGENCIES
The United States has authorised Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine for emergency use, paving the way for millions of doses of a second jab to be shipped across the hardest-hit country in the world.
The latest breakthrough came as many governments clamp down on socializing over Christmas and New Year, which is expected to fuel a jump in virus deaths in early 2021.
Italy on Friday announced harsh new restrictions over the holidays with many shops and all bars and restaurants closed, travel between regions banned, and only one daily outside trip per household permitted.
A quarter million people in Sydney's northern beach suburbs were ordered yesterday into a strict lockdown until Christmas Eve to help contain a coronavirus cluster with authorities fearing it may spread across Australia's most populous city.
With the United States now registering over 2,500 deaths a day from Covid-19, senior US officials including Vice President Mike Pence stepped up to receive early vaccinations on Friday.
Pence's public inoculation was the most high-profile attempt yet at persuading vaccine-skeptic Americans to



An elderly man, wrapped in a blanket, taking a sip of tea to keep himself warm in the unbearable cold yesterday. Many homeless people like him are suffering immensely due to the cold wave that has been sweeping over the country recently. The photo was taken near Kamalapur Railway Station in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

BAGHA JATIN'S BUST Jubo League leader, two cohorts held for vandalism

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia
Police yesterday arrested a local Jubo League leader and his two associates over vandalising the sculpture of revolutionary freedom fighter Bagha Jatin at Kaya College in Kushtia's Kumarkhali upazila.
According to police, there was a rift between college Principal Harun-ur-Rashid and the president of its governing body, Nizamul Haque Chunnun, over several issues, including interference in college affairs by Nizamul and irregularities in a recent recruitment at the college.
Kushtia Superintendent of Police SM Tanvir Arafath said, "A third party, willing to take over the presidency of the governing body, vandalised the bust of Bagha Jatin by taking advantage of the situation."
Speaking at a press conference yesterday afternoon, the SP said the three were arrested in a case,

Rajshahi Zilla Parishad CEO held with drugs

Found carrying 6.8 litres of phensidyl in govt car

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi
Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) detained Md Nuruzzaman, chief executive officer of Rajshahi Zilla Parishad, from Chapainawabganj while he was carrying banned phensidyl in a government vehicle.
However, the DNC was unable to hand over BCS cadre official Nuruzzaman to the police because of "pressure from local government high-ups", Zafrullah Kazal, additional director of DNC in Rajshahi division, told our Rajshahi correspondent.
Acting on a tip off that phensidyl were being carried in a government vehicle of Rajshahi, the DNC officials set up a check point at the toll plaza of Mahananda Bridge in Chapainawabganj town from Friday evening.
At 8:30pm, Nuruzzaman was seen driving a government vehicle, said the official.
The DNC officials found another man Ohiduzzaman Lazuk, 44, an alleged drug peddler, in the passenger's seat.
The phensidyl, which amounted to 6.8 litres, was kept in five large bottles of soft

FIRST YEAR OF BANGLADESH BANGABANDHU'S NATION-BUILDING CHALLENGES

Mujib felicitates Kosygin

December 20, 1972
SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

FRIENDSHIP WILL GROW
Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman today expresses his confidence that the bond and deep understanding that exist between Bangladesh and the Soviet Union will grow stronger in the years to come.
Bangabandhu in a message of felicitations to the Soviet Prime Minister AN Kosygin on the historic occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic wishes progress and prosperity of the people of the Soviet Union.
Soviet Ambassador Popov calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Gono Bhaban today.
BHUTTO'S NEW CONDITION FOR RECOGNITION
Pakistan President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto says in an interview with French newspaper Le Monde that all outstanding questions raised by the Indo-Pakistan war a year ago must be solved before his government could recognise the new nation of Bangladesh.
It may be mentioned here that the withdrawal of Indian and Pakistani troops to their sides of the international border in conformity with the Simla Agreement has been completed.
HOME MINISTER SERVES LEGAL NOTICE ON BHASHANI, SANGBAD, GONOKANTHA
Home Minister Abdul Mannan today serves legal notice on



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Ex-PBCP man killed in drive-by in Khulna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A former member of radical group Purba Bangla Communist Party was killed in a drive-by shooting Friday night in Phultala, Khulna.
Mollah Hemayet Hossain alias Lipu, 45, was a resident of Tajpur village. He was killed when he was with several other villagers, police said.
He was one of the 35 people, who surrendered to the authorities in the presence of the home minister last year, saying that they were willing to get back to normal life as law abiding citizens.
Police arrested Faruq Hossain, 44, of Phultala, and Murad Hossain, 47, of Narail, also former members of Purba Bangla Communist Party, in connection with the murder, said Mahatab Uddin, officer-in-charge of

AI flies military jet for first time



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The US Air Force has used an artificial intelligence pilot to fly a military plane for the first time in a major step towards AI being deployed in warfare.
After completing over a million simulations, the µZero AI algorithm successfully co-piloted a U-2 spy plane in a training mission above California on 15 December.
Writing in Popular Mechanics, Dr Will Roper from the US Air Force described it as a "giant leap for 'computerkind'" in future military operations.
"We trained µZero - a world-leading computer programme that dominates chess, Go, and even video games without prior knowledge of their rules - to operate a U-2 spy plane," wrote Dr Roper.
"It was the mission commander, the final decision authority on the human-machine team..."

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GRABBING BURIGANGA MP Aslamul seeks SC order to avoid eviction

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League lawmaker Aslamul Haque, also the owner of Maisha Group, has filed a petition with the Supreme Court's Appellate Division seeking to stay a High Court verdict that allowed the authorities to conduct eviction drives and recover the land of the Buriganga from

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PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 20

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:20 12:45 3:45 5:22 7:00
JAMAAT 5:55 1:15 4:00 5:25 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Covid-19 positivity rate climbs for 2nd day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

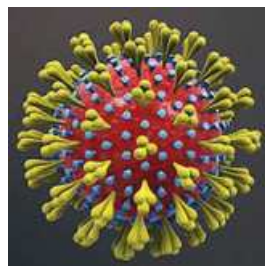
The percentage of the Covid-19 tests that come out positive continued to rise for the second consecutive day yesterday after it hit an eight-month low.
Against a total of 12,300 tests in the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, the positivity rate was 10.30 percent, up from the previous day's positivity rate of 9.19 against 14,336 tests.
On Thursday, the rate of daily positive coronavirus cases dropped to 8.6 percent against 13,191 tests, the lowest it has been in more than eight months.
Since the first three confirmed cases were reported on March 8 in the country, the transmission of Covid-19 was highest between June and July.
The highest daily positivity rate of 31.91 was recorded on August 3. It remained stagnant around 12 percent throughout

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Severe Covid variant found in S Africa

AFP, Johannesburg

A severe variant of the coronavirus has been detected in South Africa which could explain the rapid spread of a second wave that affects younger people, the health minister said.
Known as the 501.V2 Variant, it was identified by South African researchers and details have been sent to the World Health Organization, Zwelini Mkhize said in a statement on Friday.
A team led by the Kwazulu-Natal Research Innovation and Sequencing Platform (KRISP), has sequenced hundreds of virus samples since the pandemic began, and "noticed that a particular variant has increasingly dominated the findings of the samples collected in the past two months," he added.
South African doctors have remarked that more patients are younger, and do not always have other conditions that amplify the virus' effect, but are nonetheless suffering from more severe forms of Covid-19.
That "strongly suggests that the current second wave we are experiencing is being driven by this new variant," Mkhize concluded.
The research team, led by Tulio de Oliveira, has shared its findings with the scientific community and alerted



authorities in Britain, who have "studied their own samples and found that a similar mutation ... was the variant that was driving their resurgence in London," he said.
Variants of the coronavirus have regularly been identified and called to the attention of global health officials.
The South African health minister reiterated that the most effective way to fight back is to practice social distancing, wear face masks and wash your hands regularly.
South Africa has been affected more by the coronavirus than other countries on the continent, and as of Friday had recorded 24,845 deaths and more than 900,000 cases among a population of almost 60 million people.
More than 8,700 cases were detected there in the previous 24 hours, still well below the peak of around 12,000 per day seen in July.
Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has called senior ministers to an unscheduled meeting on Friday evening to discuss how to contain a new, more virulent variant of the coronavirus, The Telegraph newspaper reported.
An emergency toughening of COVID-19 restrictions could be announced as soon as Saturday, possibly including restrictions on travel between the southeast of England,

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