

Glaxo starts testing its swine flu vaccine

AP, London

Drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline PLC said Friday it has started testing its swine flu vaccine in humans.

Glaxo said it plans to conduct 16 clinical trials of its swine flu vaccine in more than 9,000 people in Europe and North America. It expects to have early results in September from its first trial in Germany. The data will be shared with drug regulators so they can make an early decision whether to license the vaccine.

Both Europe and the United States have fast-track approval systems for the swine flu vaccine, to ensure that the vaccine is available as soon as possible and before complete safety tests are finished. The European Medicines Agency has said swine flu vaccines could be approved within five days.

Two other major drugmakers, Novartis AG and Sanofi-Aventis SA, began testing their swine flu vaccines earlier this month. In July, Australian pharmaceutical company CSL started testing their vaccine in Australia.

Glaxo's first trial is being conducted in Germany among 128 people aged 16 to 60, according to spokeswoman Alexandra Harrison.

The company said once it has initial results, these will be submitted to European and American regulatory authorities. Glaxo said it also would provide older data on a bird flu vaccine, on which the swine flu vaccine is based.

Other Glaxo trials will test the vaccine in infants, children and the elderly. The trials are scheduled to last about a year, although Harrison said the vaccine is expected to be on the market much sooner.

"We aim to get the first doses out in September," Harrison said, with major orders fulfilled by the end of the year or early 2010.

In Europe, Glaxo is testing vaccines with an adjuvant, a chemical compound used to stretch a vaccine's active ingredient and boost the body's immune response.

In Canada and the United States, Glaxo is testing vaccines both with and without adjuvants. Neither country has ever licensed any flu medications that contain the compound.

Army camps

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Matiranga upazila of Khagrachhari district were pulled out.

"The camp was set up on the government khas land. I'll be looking after the security of the area from now," said Mohammad Rahed Hossain, Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), while talking to The Daily Star.

He said the camp consisting of 40 army members had been overseeing the security of five villages since 2004.

Matiranga UNO Mohammad Mostafizur Rahman confirmed that Baillachhari army camp, which was established in 1986 to ensure security of 10 villages, has already been pulled out.

On July 29, the government announced that it would withdraw 35 temporary camps and one brigade from the CHT.

Meanwhile, members of the CHT commission yesterday visited several places of Dighinala upazila.

First Darbar

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"We are going to sit on Monday at the Darbar Hall," BDR Director General Maj Gen Md Mainul Islam told The Daily Star last night.

It's the first official meeting after the mutiny, the DG said, adding that they want to discuss different issues with officers and jawans with an open mind.

"I have already held meetings at different places but not at the Pilkhana headquarters. Now I want to talk to all at the Darbar Hall as the situation at Pilkhana is calm now," he added.

He said 15 army officers deputed at BDR have already started residing there with their family members. He himself also lives there, he added.

Gen Mainul said members of the border security force in Dhaka would attend the Monday's meeting at the Darbar Hall.

Robbery on Feni highway

A CORRESPONDENT, Feni

A band of highway robbers yesterday looted money and mobile phones from drivers and passengers halting about five taxis on Feni-Sonagazi road on the north side of Dhalia Bazar.

Sonagazi Awami League member and former Chhatra League leader Zahirul Alam alleged he found fallen trees barricading the road while he was on his way from Feni to Sonagazi by a CNG-run taxi at around 12:30am yesterday.

As the taxi stopped, a gang attacked the passengers. They took away cash taka and mobile phones.

After they had proceeded to Balua Choumuhani Bazar, they told the incident to patrol police who with the help of the locals caught a gang member identified as Kamrul, 24.

On Kamrul's confession another mugger Mishaq, 21, was arrested. A mobile set and some money were recovered from them, said Aminul Islam, officer-in-charge of Feni Police Station.

A case was lodged in the connection.

Drug

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which have already been opened, is made under the new duty structure, it might help keep their market prices stable.

Moulvibazar Traders' Association General Secretary Golam Mowla said the tax cut on the commodities would be more beneficial for consumers, if the government had taken the decision at least three months ago.

He however said the government move would help serve the purpose as import of huge quantities of goods is in the pipeline.

Soon after assuming power, the current government moved to make the TCB active to keep essentials' prices at a tolerable level.

But questions have been raised about the TCB's capability of influencing the local market, as it does not have adequate supply of commodities.

If the TCB identified the real demand of commodities during Ramadan, why did it fail to deliver the goods on time, asked Debapriya.

TCB cannot substitute the private sector but it will have a little effect on the domestic market through Open Market Sale (OMS) and fair price outlets, he said.

Bakht said TCB's major role is to ensure supply of essentials to the local market when their prices go up.

The government failed to import goods through TCB. But the commerce ministry, not the TCB should be blamed for it, he said.

"There might be a collusion between the businessmen to keep the TCB inactive," Bakht said.

Jahir Uddin Molla, a customer at Karwan Bazar, said price hike of essentials ahead of Ramadan is quite common.

"If it is predictable that essentials' prices will soar at a specific time, why can't the government check it?" questioned Jahir, who was bargaining with a grocer over sugar price that went up to Tk 48 from Tk 42 last week.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) President Annissul Huq admitted to the fact that a few businessmen control the whole market.

He said right now the TCB is incapable of influencing market prices.

Most traders at wholesale and retail market continue to ignore the government directive of hanging price list of essentials to let consumers know their real prices.

SQ Chy

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taken against him on charges of killing in 1971 and setting fire to the houses of Hindus, said Qamrul Islam, reported ATN Bangla.

He told this to the media after distributing foods among the poor in front of the Awami League central office at Bangabandhu Avenue on the occasion of national mourning day.

The state minister said making such derogatory comments has become a regular practice of SQ Chowdhury. "He will continue this unless he is brought to justice," he added.

Qamrul Islam mentioned that the government has started the process of bringing the killers of Bangabandhu back from abroad to execute the verdict of the much-awaited Bangabandhu assassination case, UNB reports.

"The verdict of the barbaric murder case will be executed soon," he said while addressing a gathering at Kalindi High School ground in Keraniganj yesterday.

Fatwa again

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alleged illicit affair.

The woman, Bashira Khatun, has filed a case against the men who administered the lashings on her.

She told The Daily Star, "After failing to extract sexual favours from me, my husband Md Nannu Mia's uncle Manju compromised my reputation and fulfilled his revenge on me by persuading the village elders to whip me."

"I was unjustly whipped for no reason in public. I want justice," sobbed Bashira as she told The Daily Star her story.

Bashira's husband is an expatriate worker and she lives with her mother-in-law in Kena village under Budumti union in Brahmanbaria Sadar.

She wrote in her complaint with the police that her husband's uncle Manju Mia has long been trying to take advantage of her husband's absence. After repeated failed attempts to lure her into giving him sexual advances, Manju Mia decided to punish her.

On July 24, Manju Mia along with five cohorts Siraj Mia, Liton Mia, Masum Mia, and Kutubul Alam approached Bashira's room late at night. With the help of her maid-servant Jaju Banu, Kutubul Alam entered her room. Manju then rushed to the scene and raised a hue and cry and the other three men came out to help him.

Bashira's mother-in-law Bilatunnesa was away visiting her daughter the night of the incident.

The following evening Manju Mia summoned a village arbitration to try Bashira but not Alam. During the arbitration presided by Tota Mia, a teacher of Kena Madrasa, the muazzin of the local mosque Muhammad Hossain delivered the edict or fatwa for 101 durra (lashes) on Bashira Khatun's back as a punishment.

Manju Mia himself administered the lashings. Bashira collapsed and fainted after about 20 lashes while Manju administered the remaining lashes on the unconscious woman.

The following day Bashira's maternal uncle Joyanal Abedin rescued her from Kena village and brought her to her parental home at Bulla village for medical treatment.

Traumatised and sickened by the brutal torture, it took her days to regain her strength. She decided to ignore the threats of her perpetrators and reported the incident to Brahmanbaria Sadar Thana on August 9 and filed a case accusing eight people, including Manju Mia.

Police raided the village the same night but was only able to arrest Tota Mia. Manju Mia and his cohorts are absconding.

Manju's homestead remains abandoned.

Bashira's mother-in-law Bilatunnesa, 65, said that she was not at home on the night of July 24 as she went to visit her daughter.

On Thursday last week, this correspondent found muazzin Muhammad Hossain, who declared the fatwa as he was fleeing the village. As he fled, the man denied proclaiming any such edict. He said he had merely mentioned that had there been Shariah Law in the country, Bashira would have been given 101 lashes.

Basira's uncle Joyanal Abedin, himself a teacher of Haraspur Darul Islamia Madrasa, Md. Abdul Kaiyum Bhuiyan, principal of Kena Madrasa, chairman of Budumti Union Parishad Mizanul Islam, local Mahila Parishad leader Nandita Guha, and others have denounced the incident and called for the punishment of the culprits.

Brahmanbaria Sadar Thana Officer-in-Charge (OC) Rezaul Karim Bhuiyan told The Daily Star that all the absconding criminals would be arrested soon.

Swine flu

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The work of the committees also includes managing patients according to national guidelines and maintaining standard working procedure, undertaking infection control measures and carrying out public health communication as and when necessary.

Directors or superintendents of the hospitals will act as presidents of the committees, he said adding that as there are rapid response teams in all the district sadar hospitals, such committee will not be formed there.

Prof Rahman also said two more cases of swine flu have been detected recently. One patient has come from Malaysia while another aged about 15 years contracted flu after receiving the virus from another victim. Now seven patients are undergoing treatment while the rest of the persons with the flu have been cured already, he said.

While talking to The Daily Star, Health Minister Prof AFM Ruhul Haque said he has a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today when swine flu preparedness and management situation may come as an agenda of discussion.

The minister said as the risk of swine flu have increased in the country following massive spread of the virus in India, the government has also increased training for the health professionals and preparedness activities.

Nation mourns

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souls of Bangabandhu and his family members.

Sheikh Hasina placed another wreath at Bangabandhu's portrait as the president of the ruling Awami League.

She then went to Banani graveyard where most of her dear and near ones and the three national leaders killed in Dhaka Central Jail on November 3 were laid to rest. Hasina placed wreaths there and offered special prayer for the salvation of their departed souls.

A wreath was also placed at the grave of Col Jamil, who was killed along with Bangabandhu. APS to the prime minister Khairul Islam and AL Organising Secretary Ahmad Hossain placed the wreath on behalf of Hasina.

Hasina observed fast yesterday, recited from the holy Quran and offered special prayers. She spent a few hours at Bangabandhu Bhaban where her family members were brutally killed.

Hasina's scheduled visit to Tungipara in Gopalganj where the great leader of Bangalee nation was laid to rest was cancelled because of inclement weather, prime minister's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad told The Daily Star.

Hasina's cousin AL Presidium member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, accompanied by some senior party leaders, placed wreaths at the tomb of Bangabandhu at Tungipara on behalf of the prime minister. They also offered special prayers there.

Different political, socio-cultural and student organisations and hundreds of people from all walks of life wearing black badges gathered in front of Bangabandhu Bhaban in Dhanmondi and at Bangabandhu's graveyard at Tungipara to pay tributes to the founder of the country.

People stood in long queues to place wreaths and

Father

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into hiding," said the victim's father, adding that he had not been living in his house since then and kept his cellphone switched off.

"Not only the police, the influential family members of Kalam and Tushar (the two FIR named accused) also threatened to decapitate me kidnapping from home," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

For the details of his sufferings and threats on him The Daily Star correspondents somehow managed to contact the father at Faridpur town, but it was very unpleasant for the shocked man as his hide-out was discovered.

"I walked for almost 10 kilometres through bushes and fields before dawn to evade anyone's sight and caught a bus," he said.

"I am the only breadwinner of my six-member family, but I don't dare to go out for work since I received threats on my life," he said, adding that his family is now living on the food that the neighbours share at times.

Asked what police told him during his confinement at the police station, the victim's father said, "I heard the then IO tell another officer that he had taken me into custody to realise the fuel used during the raid to the houses of the accused."

The poor father said as he was kept without food, acid formed in his hungry stomach. "I requested a policeman for some food but instead he-- I do not know him-- calling dirty names refused me. I could not even close my eyes for a moment for the mosquitoes."

He said during his confinement, around 40 local influential persons went to the Charchhadrasan Police Station to try to convince police in favour of the accused. They tried to establish that his daughter was amoral and responsible for the incident, concluded the victim's father with a heavy voice.

Faridpur rapists

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rape of a class-V student.

Following the incident, a number of parents have also stopped sending their children to schools, locals said.

"I know at least three guardians in the neighbourhood who have stopped schooling of their daughters after the incident spread through CDs and video footages," said a retired schoolteacher of the locality.

The Daily Star correspondent had a glimpse of the incident in a CD copy where the girl seemed to be not protesting vehemently.

Advocate Zahid Hasan Khokon, one of the counsels of the victim, told The Daily Star that the victim is only 14 years old and if such incident took place even with her consent it is still statutory rape as per law.

He said she is also the victim of circumstances. Referring to the video footage of the rape, he said the offenders have committed a serious crime by clipping the footage and circulating it.

Sand traders

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Environment even if the land is privately owned," said Nazmul Haque.

Sand lifters are extracting sand with shallow tube wells in different villages of Sadar, Shahajanpur, Kahalu, Dupchachia, Dhunot, Gabtoli and Shibganj upazilas of Bogra. Some houses are vulnerable to land subsidence due to excessive sand lifting at Mongespur under Sadar upazila, locals claimed.

Officials at the Department of Environment apprehend that a large area may subside soon if the lifting of sand from underneath goes on.

RMG worker

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and passed her to one Khalil, 45. Later Khalil and his accomplices Osman, 30, and Khorshed, 28, raped her repeatedly taking her to Gangina riverbank.

At one stage, the alleged rapists tried to kill her in a pond. But local people rescued the victim on hearing scream and took her to union parishad office.

Dhara Union Parishad Chairman Mizanur Rahman sent her to Haluaghat Police Station yesterday. Officer-in-charge Hamidur Rahman admitted the incident. Till filing this report at 6:45pm, an attempt to record a case in this regard was on, police sources said.

Scientists find rare gene behind short sleepers

AP, Washington

Scientists have discovered a gene that helps a mother and daughter stay alert on about six hours sleep a night, two hours less than the rest of their family needs.

It's believed to be a very rare mutation, not an excuse for the rest of us who stay up too late. But the finding, published in Friday's edition of the journal Science, offers a new lead to study how sleep affects health.

The National Institutes of Health says adults need seven hours to nine hours of sleep for good health. Regularly getting too little increases the risk of health problems, including memory impairment and a weakened immune system. A major 2006 study estimated that as many as 30 million Americans suffer chronic insomnia, and millions more have other sleep disorders, including sleep apnoea.

University of California, San Francisco, researchers have long hunted genes related to how and when people sleep. In 2001, they discovered a mutation that puts its carriers' sleep patterns out of whack. These people

regularly go to bed around 7:30 p.m. and wake around 3:30 a.m.

Now the same team has found a gene involved in regulating length of sleep. In one family, the 69-year-old mother and her 44-year-old daughter typically go to bed around 10 p.m., and Mom rises around 4 and her daughter around 4:30, with no apparent ill effects. The rest of the family has typical sleep patterns.

Blood tests showed the women harboured a mutation in a gene named DEC2 that's involved in regulation of circadian rhythms, the body's clock. A check of more than 250 stored DNA samples didn't find another carrier.

Then lead researcher Ying-Hui Fu, a neurology professor, and colleagues bred mice and fruit flies that carried the mutation. Sure enough, the flies' activity and brain-wave measurements on the mice showed those with the mutation slept less--and the mice needed less time to recover from sleep deprivation.

The result: A model that "provides a unique opportunity" to study the effects of different amounts of sleep, Fu concluded.

Suicide attack

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carried out the unprecedented bombing near the headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) and close to an entrance to the US embassy.

The huge explosion, just metres (yards) from the Isaf gate in one of the most secure areas of the country, reinforced fears of an increase in attacks ahead of the August 20 presidential and provincial council elections, said US officials.

But President Hamid Karzai, in a statement condemning the blast, insisted that Afghans "will not be scared of such threats and will go to the voting booths".

It was the first such bombing outside the heavily fortified base, which collects soldiers from several countries and is the headquarters of the US commander of 100,000 international troops in Afghanistan to fight extremism.

"In the suicide attack today at 8:30 am by the enemies of Afghanistan in front of Isaf HQ entrance in Kabul the number of martyrs has increased to seven," an Afghan defence ministry statement said.

The ministry said earlier that 91 Afghans were wounded including a woman parliamentarian and four Afghan soldiers.

Most injuries were superficial, including some caused by flying glass, officials said.

Five Isaf soldiers were wounded, though none seriously, a spokesman told AFP. He could not give their nationalities.

General Stanley McChrystal, the US commander of international troops in Afghanistan, rushed to the scene soon afterwards, an AFP reporter said.

"I have to see my men," he said, but refused to comment further.

The blast destroyed concrete security barriers and brought down branches and a whole tree, with huge plumes of black smoke coming from a burning vehicle that appeared to have been the car bomb.

"It was a suicide bombing carried out in a car right in front of Isaf," defence ministry spokesman General Mohammad Zahir Azimi told AFP.

Also in the area, which was busy with morning rush hour traffic, are the Spanish and Italian embassies, state radio and television and the presidential palace.

"I had two female and one male colleague who were wounded and I was taking them to the hospital," said Abdul Raqib, a driver from the transport ministry nearby.

"As I passed by the explosion site it was still in flames, my tyres melted. There was a car in flames," he told AFP.

A Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said the attack was carried out by a member of the militia in a car packed with 500 kilograms (1,100 pounds)

of explosives.

It was the first suicide attack on the city in months and the first one against the Isaf base established in the capital in 2001, the year after the Taliban regime was toppled in a US-led invasion.

In a surprise attack on Friday night units from the two forces working together dropped from helicopters into Charchino district, in central Uruzgan province, for a battle that lasted several hours, the Afghan army said.

"Twenty-nine enemies were killed. The bodies are still lying in the battle field," southern Afghanistan military corp commander General Shair Mohammad Zazai told AFP.

He said the troops confiscated 96 sacks of aluminium nitrate explosive and a large amount of opium.

Separately, Taliban militants ambushed an Afghan army patrol on Friday in Barmal, a district of Pakhtia province bordering Pakistan, the defence ministry said in a statement.

"A large number of enemies were killed but they left behind two of their dead. Four Afghan soldiers were also wounded," the statement said.

In neighbouring Khost province, seven militants were killed in a joint operation by Afghan army and Nato forces and 17 militants were wounded, the ministry said.

A suicide car bomb struck the perimeter of a separate US base in the city on January 17, killing at least one US soldier and four Afghans.

The Taliban have said they would not directly attack polling stations on August 20 elections but have called on Afghans to boycott the polls and instead join their jihad, or holy war, for "independence".

Karzai's younger brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai, said on Thursday community leaders in the troubled south had persuaded grassroots Taliban leaders not to target the vote.

"I asked (community) elders to talk to the Taliban and they have done, and have assured me that the local Taliban have agreed not to cause trouble," said Karzai, who runs his brother's election campaign in the south.

Fears are growing that attacks and the threat of violence could see voters stay away from the country's second-ever presidential elections, a milestone on a road to democracy.

"With such attacks the enemies of Afghanistan are trying to create fear among people in the run-up to the elections," Karzai said in a statement.

"But they must know that Afghans realise the importance of elections... and they will not be scared of such threats and will go to the voting boxes," he said.

Karzai, who has ruled Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, is leading the race for the elections.