

BANGLADESH UPDATE



1,884
New cases in 24hrs



4,87,849
Total cases



6,986
Deaths



4,14,318
Recoveries



1,594,254
Deaths



71,012,864
Total cases

Biden, Harris named

FROM PAGE 1
real estate tycoon-turned-politician's presidency after one term.

Biden received roughly seven million more votes than his Republican adversary, who is yet to concede, claiming widespread fraud of which there is no evidence.

Time praised the Democratic ticket for ousting an incumbent president for the just the 10th time in US history.

"Biden and Harris had to revive the party's fading strength with white voters without college degrees; energize its emerging base of diverse, urban young voters; and motivate the hordes of angry suburbanites, particularly college graduates and women, who had fled the Trump-era GOP," it wrote.

Time magazine's award -- handed out annually since 1927 -- honors the person or people who most impacted the news, for better or worse, during the calendar year.

When asked by Time what he would like people to say about him after four years in the White House, Biden replied: "That America was better off and

average Americans are better off the day we left than the day we arrived. That's my objective."

Harris is the first Vice President-elect to be named Person of the Year.

She said in an interview with Time that Biden's administration would have to tackle a host of issues from the White House, including the pandemic, an "economic crisis" and a "long overdue reckoning on racial justice."

"We have to be able to multitask, just like any parent or any human being does," Harris said.

Essential workers on the frontline against the coronavirus pandemic, including doctors, nurses and grocery store employees, had topped a readers' poll of who should be named Person of the Year.

Earlier Thursday, Time named basketball superstar LeBron James Athlete of the Year for his achievements on and off the court.

The 35-year-old Los Angeles Lakers player was honored for battling voter suppression among Black citizens in a year when he won his fourth NBA title.



Wholesalers wait for buyers at a vegetable market in Savar's Genda area. Prices of winter vegetables have dropped following increased supply in the last few days. Yesterday, cauliflower was selling for Tk 8 a piece at the market.

WHO calls for fast-tracking vaccine

FROM PAGE 1
"Countries in our Region are among the world's largest vaccine manufacturers, and the vaccines produced here are likely to be administered to billions of people globally. I am certain that together, in solidarity with all people of the Region and world, you will effectively contribute to health and well-being of all," Dr Khetrapal Singh said.

THE ADB INITIATIVE
The announcement of ADB's \$9 billion initiative Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility (APVAX) came yesterday.

"As ADB's developing members prepare to vaccinate their people as soon as possible, they need financing to procure vaccines as well as appropriate plans and knowledge to be able to safely, equitably, and efficiently manage the vaccination process," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa in a statement yesterday.

"APVAX will play a critical role in helping our developing members meet these challenges, overcome the pandemic, and focus on economic recovery."

More than 14.3 million positive cases have been identified in Asia and the Pacific, causing over 200,000 deaths. As the pandemic persists, economic

growth in developing Asia is projected to contract by 0.4% in 2020, the first regional gross domestic product contraction since the early 1960s.

The APVAX provides a comprehensive framework and resource envelope for supporting developing Asia's vaccine access.

"This may include such areas as cold-chain storage and transportation, vehicles, distribution infrastructure, processing facilities, and other physical investments. The component may also be used to develop or expand vaccine manufacturing capacity in developing members."

ADB financing for vaccines will be provided in close coordination with other development partners including the World Bank Group, World Health Organization, COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility (COVAX), GAVI, and bilateral and multilateral partners.

"Additional access criteria, such as a vaccination needs assessment, a vaccine allocation plan by the developing member, and a mechanism for effective coordination among development partners also help ensure that vaccine support under APVAX can be fairly and effectively implemented."

Pfizer vaccine gets experts' nod

FROM PAGE 1
Britain this week became the first Western country to roll out the Pfizer-BioNTech jab, which Canada, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have also approved.

And while Russia and China have already begun inoculation efforts with domestically produced vaccines, EU countries are eagerly awaiting clearance.

The EU's watchdog said it would deliver decisions on the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines in late December and early January respectively, despite the disturbance of a two-week-long cyber attack, which is under investigation.

A new combined approach is also being tested by AstraZeneca, whose Russian branch said it would mix its shot with the Russia-made Sputnik V vaccine in clinical trials.

"Combinations of different COVID-19 vaccines may be an important step in generating wider protection through a stronger immune response and better accessibility," the pharma giant said in its statement.

Yet some vaccine development efforts have suffered setbacks.

France's Sanofi and Britain's GSK

announced that their candidate would not be ready until the end of 2021, after new results showed a low immune response in older adults.

The development of a vaccine by The University of Queensland in Australia was also abandoned Friday after clinical trials produced a false positive HIV result among subjects involved in early-stage testing.

The government will now axe plans to purchase millions of doses of the candidate vaccine and instead increase orders of alternatives from AstraZeneca and Novax, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said.

Once it secures official approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the US hopes to start vaccinating 20 million people this month.

Long-term care facility residents and health workers at the front of the line will be the first to get shots.

Momentum behind the Pfizer jab has been building with New England Journal of Medicine recently publishing results of a clinical trial involving nearly 44,000 people, which confirmed it was 95 percent effective with no serious safety issues.

A landfill in disarray

FROM PAGE 1
These extremely poor people, many of whom are women and children, come from nearby villages and stay at the landfill from 8:00am to 6:00pm every day.

They segregate reusable plastics, glass and metal objects from knee-to-waist-deep heaps of waste without wearing any gloves, masks or any other type of safety gear, exposing themselves to different kinds of skin and respiratory diseases.

Shah Alam, a waste picker who works there along with his wife and two children, said they often get injured by sharp materials such as glasses and metal objects.

"Most of us are also suffering from skin diseases and breathing problems. But we are poor people and have no other means of income. If we don't collect these, we will have to starve. We rely on Allah for our health," he told The Daily Star at the landfill.

The landfill authorities also cannot give daily soil cover over the garbage due to the shortage of heavy equipment. As a result, unbearable stench emanating from the site can be felt from miles away. **SHORTAGE OF MANPOWER, EQUIPMENT**
Waste generated from areas of the Dhaka North City Corporation are dumped at the Aminbazar landfill, established on 52 acres of wetland and in operation since 2007.

According to DNCC officials, the landfill is running with less than 20 percent of the required staff.

At present, there are only 19 people to manage over 3,000 tonnes of solid waste generated daily. These staffers are a motley collection of helpers, technicians and operators of non-operational equipment.

The three crucial posts of waste management supervisors are vacant. There are no mechanical or civil engineers or waste management professionals at the site.

"We have to continue our operations round the clock with whatever resources we have. I have to engage all the available workers in all kinds of tasks. For instance, technicians often act as waste management inspectors," Shahin Sadat Siddiqui, a sub-assistant engineer who is in charge of supervising the operation, told The Daily Star.

Officials said the landfill got a boost after (late) Anisul Huq became the DNCC mayor in 2015. It was at that time when heavy equipment such as bulldozers, dump trucks, excavators and roller compactors were purchased.

The leachate treatment plant was repaired, which is now discharging refined liquid waste into a nearby river. According to the recent test reports done by Buet authorities, pH, SSW, BOD and COD values of these treated liquid are within the tolerance level.

However, the brief leap towards

progress was very little compared to the need of this massive dumping site.

In the meantime, the consequence of such an acute shortage of manpower can be seen everywhere at the landfill.

According to a High Court injunction, waste can be transported to the landfill only from 10:00pm to 6:00am. But garbage is dumped at the landfill all day long.

Heaps of waste dumped under the nearby Aminbazar bridge and on two sides of the Dhaka-Aricha highway were also found during the visit.

"Due to the shortage of manpower, we cannot station an adequate number of staffers at night. This is why we are permitting daytime dumping," said Shahin.

He, however, refuted an allegation that DNCC trucks dump waste outside the landfill.

Shahin said they allowed local waste pickers in as they lack the manpower to segregate and recycle garbage on their own.

Asked about the waste pickers' safety, he said, "We don't have any budget for that [ensuring the safety gear]. But we welcome any charitable organisations if they want to help."

The landfill is also having chronic equipment shortage.

There are six excavators, eight chain dozers, two wheel dozers and one payload loader at the landfill. Only one payload loader has recently been repaired. Rest of these valuable equipment are damaged and non-functional despite the fact that most of those were purchased four to five years ago.

These equipment are essential for moving garbage from unloading sites to the landfill site, compacting the garbage and giving soil-covering over the garbage.

Now the authorities are outsourcing from the private sector to run the landfill.

It spent more than Tk 10 crore for outsourcing and maintaining the equipment and an additional Tk 4.75 crore for fuel in the last fiscal year, according to DNCC records.

"Due to the massive amount of collected waste and resource constraints, we have to run these equipment day and night, which severely reduce their longevity," said the landfill in-charge.

Amid the shortage of resources and space constraint, DNCC has decided to acquire further 80 acres of land to expand the site as its capacity will exhaust this year, said SM Shafiqur Rahman, additional chief waste management officer of DNCC.

Besides, the DNCC has recently signed an agreement with China Machinery Engineering Corporation to set up a 42.5MW power plant at the landfill, which will produce electricity by incinerating the waste at high temperature.

"After the establishment of the power

plant, much of the existing problems will be solved as most of the waste will be incinerated at the power plant. It will increase the landfill's longevity," said Shafigur.

NOT A SANITARY LANDFILL
Experts said the Aminbazar dumping site was still far away from being a sanitary landfill and expanding it further under the current conditions would not be a sustainable solution.

"How can you call it a sanitary site when they are dumping all the garbage into a wetland? Construction of such a site in the flood flow zone is a complete violation of the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers' Association (Bela).

"Expansion of this landfill will be disastrous for the environment and the locals," she added.

Bela had filed a writ petition with the HC, seeking a rule against the construction of a landfill in the flood flow zone. On February 28, 2010, the court ordered the then Dhaka City Corporation to stop dumping garbage at the landfill.

However, on March 14 that year, the Supreme Court stayed the HC order.

Talking to this newspaper, Buet Prof Tanvir Ahmed, meanwhile, said, "The amount of waste is so huge that a thin layer of occasional soil covering or only one leachate treatment plant can do little to prevent pollution. Therefore, it is little more than an open dumping ground."

Segregation of waste from primary sources can shed the burden of waste at landfills up to 30 percent, he said, adding that expansion of the landfill was never a sustainable solution.

The experts also argued about energy plants as a solution.

"We are hearing about waste-to-energy plants for a very long time. It is extremely expensive and I hardly believe it will be feasible for our country. Besides, burning plastics will produce toxic gases and carcinogenic compounds, which will endanger the public health," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan.

Prof Tanvir said, "A large part of our waste is of moist nature such as waste that comes from the kitchen and kitchen markets. Production of electricity by burning these will be extremely difficult."

But SM Shafiqur Rahman said, "If you think about our resources and the amount of waste we are handling, we are giving the best possible services. We are in the process of recruiting more manpower and using modern technologies."

"Environmentalists may not agree with us in all terms, but where shall we dump such a massive amount of waste? Apart from criticising us, they should also come up with feasible solutions."



Bhasan Char gets its youngest inhabitant

Rohingya woman gives birth to a boy on the island

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Saidul Bashar, a seven-pound baby boy became the first child to be born in Bhasan Char.

Faced with a brutal military crackdown in Myanmar, the newborn baby's parents fled to Bangladesh seeking shelter in 2017.

On December 4 this year, they were among the first groups of Rohingya refugees to have reached the newly settled island on the Bay of Bengal, off the coast of southern Noakhali.

Both mother and child are doing well after the baby was born yesterday.

The new-born baby is the third son of Md Kasem and Rabeya Khatun.

The elder son, Noor Bashar, was born in Myanmar and the second son, Abul Bashar, in the Kutupalong camp.

"My mother named the boy. I am happy as both the son and the mother are doing well," Kasem told this correspondent over phone.

Commodore AA Mamun Chowdhury, project director of the Ashrayan-3 Project (the official name of the Bhasan Char project), said, "It was really an amazing feeling, in this month of victory, that we could relocate the first batch of forcibly displaced Myanmar Nationals [FDMNs] from Cox's Bazar."

He also said, "News of the first baby being born in Bhasan Char is really amazing."

A total of 1,642 Rohingyas were taken to Bhasan Char on December 4 amid concerns expressed by the United Nations and other development partners who demanded an independent assessment of the housing project before any relocation.

Bhasan Char, an island which appeared only in 2006, now looks like a planned modern township with rows of white multi-storey buildings.

Stop building 5-star hotel in Bandarban

Demand villagers in Chimbuk area

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Members of the Mro community yesterday demanded that the construction of a five-star hotel and amusement park in the Chimbuk Naitong hills be stopped, saying that the project was destroying the ecological balance and risking indigenous life in the area.

At a press conference in Bandarban's Kapru Para Bazar, the Mro people also demanded immediate cancellation of the project and assurance that the authorities would refrain from setting up tourism or recreation centres on Mro jhum land in Chimbuk area.

In a press release, issued after the press conference, they said around 800 to 1,000 acres of jhum land would be grabbed if the five-star hotel was built in the hills.

They alleged that Kwe Shwe Hla, chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council, leased out 20 acres of their jhum land for the project without any discussions with the locals, which was nothing but betrayal.

The Bandarban Hill District Council is obliged to remain accountable maintaining transparency in this regard, the release said.

A welfare organisation and Sikder Group started the construction work after allegedly grabbing jhum land in Dola and Kapru paras.

Number of critical

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At least 1,884 new infections were recorded during this period, taking the number of people infected to 4,87,849, the release added.

The current positivity rate is 11.54 percent, while the total positivity rate is 16.57 percent.

Some 16,323 samples were tested across the country in those 24 hours.

At least 3,866 Covid-19 patients recovered in the meantime.

The number of recoveries now stands at 4,14,318 and the recovery rate is 84.93 percent.

Of the 19 deceased, 13 were men and six women.

One was aged between 21 and 30, one between 31 and 40, four were aged between 41 and 50, two between 51 and 60, and 11 were above 60 years old, added the release.

Currently, Bangladesh ranks 32nd in the world in terms of the Covid-19 death toll and 26th for total number of cases.

19th Bangladesh Business Awards

FROM PAGE 1
industrialist in Nepal, will deliver a keynote speech at the annual event.

Two individuals and two companies will be awarded in the categories of Outstanding Woman in Business, Business Person of the Year, Best Financial Institution and Enterprise of the Year.

DHL Express and The Daily Star introduced the awards to recognise the achievements and positive contributions of business organisations and individuals who have not only grown but contributed to the economic development of the country.

It is now considered as one of the most prestigious events in business circles.

Some notable awardees include business leaders Samson H Chowdhury of Square Group, Syed Manzur Elahi of Apex Group, Amjad Khan Chowdhury of Pran-RFL Group, M Anis Ud Dowla of ACI, Sufi Mohammad Mizanur Rahman of PHP Family, and Azam J Chowdhury of East Coast Group.

Enterprises such as BSRM, MM Ispahani, Bengal Plastic Industries, Concord, Meghna Group of Industries, Rahimafrooz, Runner Group as well as financial institutions like Eastern Bank, Mutual Trust Bank, Brac Bank, City Bank, IDLC Finance and IPDC Finance were also awarded.

Lifetime achievement awards were also bestowed on those who have

made a difference through their work.

Previous winners include M Mattiul Islam, the country's first finance secretary, Nasir A Choudhury, founding managing director of Green Delta Insurance, late MA Samad of Bangladesh General Insurance Company, Laila Rahman Kabir of Kedarpur Tea Company, and Mahbubur Rahman, president of the International Chamber of Commerce, Bangladesh.

Binod Chaudhary, an entrepreneur, politician and philanthropist, is the chairman of CG Corp Global, a Nepalese conglomerate with a portfolio that comprises more than 169 companies and 79 brands in 24 countries.

He is the first businessperson from the Himalayan nation to be named in the Forbes billionaire list. Currently, his net worth is \$1.5 billion, according to the business magazine.

Cold wave may hit

FROM PAGE 1
basins of the country and light to moderate fog may occur elsewhere over the country during midnight to noon."

The bulletin was released at 6:00pm yesterday and forecast weather during the next 24 hours.

"Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged and day temperature may rise slightly over the country," the bulletin added.

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