

BANGLADESH UPDATE



890
New cases in 24hrs



5,24,910
Total cases



7,833
Deaths



4,69,522
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE

1,979,334
Deaths



92,441,754
Total cases

BGB stops BSF move to build border fence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has stopped installation of a barbed wire fence along the zero line of the Fultala-Batulji border in Moulvibazar's Juri upazila following objections of Border Guard Bangladesh.

Lt Col Gazi Shahidullah, commanding officer of BGB 52 Battalion, yesterday over the phone said BSF started setting up a barbed wire fence 150 yards from the zero line on Sunday.

He claimed that the BSF did not follow the international rule that no fence could be installed within 150 yards of the zero line. This created tension between the two sides, he said.

Later in the day, the BSF stopped installation of the fence after a flag meeting between BGB and BSF.

The situation at the border is calm, the BGB official added.

Masuk Mia, chairman of Fultala union parishad, said the BGB and the BSF intensified patrolling along the border.

Pompeo's remarks irresponsible

Foreign ministry says refuting claim Al-Qaeda carried out attacks in Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has termed Washington's remarks linking terrorist group Al-Qaeda with Bangladesh irresponsible and unfounded.

In a statement on January 12 on the US state department's website, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said, "Imagine too the potential to completely upend fragile places with an established Al-Qaeda presence like Libya, Yemen, and the Maghreb, or increase turmoil in places like Bangladesh, where Al-Qaeda cells have carried out attacks."

In response, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement yesterday strongly rejecting Pompeo's comments as "irresponsible." There is no evidence

of any presence of Al-Qaeda in Bangladesh, it said.

"Such irresponsible comments by a senior leader is very unfortunate and unacceptable," the foreign ministry said.

Bangladesh, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, maintains a "Zero Tolerance" policy against all forms of terrorism and violent extremism, and has been undertaking all possible measures and actions to address the menace, it said.

"If any such claim could be substantiated with evidence, the government of Bangladesh would be happy to take necessary measures against such activities."

Trump impeached again

FROM PAGE 1

"I call on all Americans to help ease tensions and calm tempers. Thank You."

With a large presence of rifle-carrying National Guard troops inside and outside the Capitol, an emotional debate unfolded in the same House chamber where lawmakers crouched under chairs and donned gas masks on Jan. 6 as rioters clashed with police officers outside the doors.

"The president of the United States incited this insurrection, this armed rebellion against our common country," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, said on the House floor.

"He must go. He is a clear and present danger to the nation that we all love." Democratic congressman Julian Castro, a former presidential candidate, called Trump "the most dangerous man to ever occupy the Oval Office." Congresswoman Maxine Waters accused Trump of wanting civil war and fellow Democrat Jim McGovern said the president "instigated an attempted coup."

No US president ever has been removed from office through impeachment. Three - Trump in 2019, Bill Clinton in 1998 and Andrew Johnson in 1868 - were impeached by the House but acquitted by the Senate.

Some Republicans argued that the impeachment drive was a rush to judgment that bypassed the customary deliberative process such as hearings and called on Democrats to abandon the effort for the sake of national unity and healing.

"Impeaching the president in such a short time frame would be a mistake," said Kevin McCarthy, the House's top Republican, before the vote. "That doesn't mean the president is free from fault. The president bears responsibility for Wednesday's attack on Congress by mob rioters."

Trump's closest allies, such as Ohio Republican Jim Jordan, went further, accusing Democrats of recklessly acting out of pure political interest.

"This is about getting the president

of the United States," said Jordan, who received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Trump in a private White House ceremony this week. "It's always been about getting the president, no matter what. It's an obsession."

A handful of Republicans backed impeachment, including Liz Cheney, the No. 3 House Republican.

"I am not choosing a side, I'm choosing truth," Republican Jamie Herrera Beutler said in announcing her support for impeachment, drawing applause from Democrats. "It's the only way to defeat fear."

In a break from standard procedure, Republican House leaders refrained from urging their members to vote against impeachment, calling the vote a matter of individual conscience.

Under the US Constitution, impeachment in the House triggers a trial in the Senate. A two-thirds majority would be needed to convict and remove Trump, meaning at least 17 Republicans in the 100-member chamber would have to join the Democrats.

McCormack said no trial could begin until the Senate was scheduled to be back in regular session on Jan. 19, one day before Biden's inauguration. The trial would proceed in the Senate even after Trump leaves office. A source said earlier yesterday that the Republican Senate leadership had discussed whether to initiate a trial as early as Friday.

McCormack said in a memo to his fellow Republicans he has not made a final decision on how he will vote on impeachment in the Senate.

No Republican senators have said they would vote to convict. Two have called on Trump to resign.

The FBI has warned of armed protests planned for Washington and all 50 U.S. state capitals ahead of Biden's inauguration. Trump on Wednesday urged his followers to remain peaceful, saying in a statement, "I urge that there must be NO violence, NO lawbreaking and NO vandalism of any kind. That is not what I stand for, and it is not what America stands for."

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"Thus, it is patent that the government has nothing to do in respect of withdrawal of a case filed under the Act of 2004 or the Act of 1958. Be that as it may, if the government wants to withdraw a case pending before the Court of Special Judge, in that event it can only make a request or express its pious wish to the commission and if the government makes such a request, the commission is free to decide indifferently whether it would consider such request or proposal of the government or not," the HC judges said.

Khurshid Alam Khan, the ACC lawyer, told The Daily Star that it is the established provision of the law that the government cannot withdraw any corruption case filed or moved by the ACC and even it cannot recommend for their withdrawal.

The HC in the full text clearly interpreted the law in detail, he added.

Deputy Attorney General Sarwar Hossain Bappi refused to make any comment on the HC observation.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Frontline health workers collecting samples from a boy to get him tested for coronavirus. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon at the outdoor section of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital. Many of the employees contracted the virus, recovered and returned to the testing process over the months.

Confusion reigns over vaccine price

FROM PAGE 1

government placed firm orders for over six crore doses, according to Indian median reports.

Serum, which stockpiled 50 million doses of the vaccine in India, has signed an initial deal to sell 11 million of the shots to the Indian government for 200 rupees (\$2.72) per dose, said the Reuters report.

Serum is the world's largest vaccine producer by volume.

Following the Reuters report, Bangladesh Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal faced questions from the media about Bangladesh paying more.

"I am not aware whether the price is higher [for Bangladesh]. If India produced [the vaccine], then their production cost will understandably be less ... When they would sell it, they would add their expenditure with the profit," he said.

"We cannot expect that we will get [the vaccine] at the price same as their production cost. But we will look into at what price vaccines are being sold in the international market. We will try to control the price at which we will get the vaccines."

"Many countries, not one or two, will produce vaccines. If one country charges more, we will try to go for another country. We have that option," Mustafa Kamal said.

Following the Reuters report and the statement of the finance minister, The Daily Star contacted the health minister and the Beximco authorities.

"We will speak as per our agreement. We will get it [the vaccines] at the same price the Indian authorities purchased from Serum Institute of India. So if India gets the vaccines at prices lower than what has been fixed for us, we will also

get the vaccines at lower prices," Zahid Maleque said.

"If India buys the shots at prices lower than us, then it is a good news for us. We will then get more shots from Serum," he said.

The health minister insisted that there was no room for confusion over the prices. "Everything will be done according to the agreement. The lower the price is, the more we will get."

Asked whether the contract will be made public, he said the agreement was signed publicly and claimed that everything written on the papers had already been made public. "The agreement does not have any hidden clause."

The tripartite agreement between the government, Serum and Beximco was signed on November 5 last year to purchase three crore shots of Oxford vaccine from Serum at \$4 per shot.

The government has recently said the first instalment of 50 lakh doses would arrive on January 25 and the vaccination would start in the first week of next month.

Each jab, however, will cost the government \$5 as it will have to pay Beximco in service charges and for transporting the vaccines to the government vaccination centres.

Contacted, Nazmul Hassan Papon said Bangladesh government would get the vaccine at the same price India is paying and that there was no reason to be worried.

"Bangladesh is purchasing the vaccine at \$4 per shot, but it's a tentative price. But if India purchases the vaccine at a lower price, Serum will also reduce the price accordingly for us."

"As per the agreement, there is a guarantee that Serum will give us the

vaccine at the same price it sells to India. There is no room for deviation [from it]."

"We will not pay a single cent more [than India]," Papon said.

"Since we are yet to receive the first instalment of vaccines, it would be too early to make any comment on what would be the final price. Because India bought each shot at 200 rupees in the first phase and it might go up to 250 rupees," he added.

Earlier in the month, the health minister, the health secretary and the Beximco MD insisted that Bangladesh would get the vaccine at the same price as Indian government.

BEXIMCO TO SELL VACCINES AT PRIVATE MARKET

The drug-maker will import 10 lakh doses from SII for private distribution. Beximco is buying each dose at \$8 from SII.

"Among the doses, various pharmaceuticals companies have already ordered for eight lakh doses," Papon told this newspaper.

He said they would sell the vaccine after the commencement of government's mass vaccination programme.

Beximco Chief Operating Officer Rabbur Reza said the price of the vaccine in the private market was yet to be decided.

After arrival of the vaccine, the Directorate General of Drug Administration will fix the price, he said.

He also said Beximco had already sent a proposal to Serum for purchasing another 20 lakh doses.

Contacted, DGDA Director General Maj Gen Md Mahbubur Rahman said the price of the vaccine to be sold in the private market would be finalised under government regulation.

Govt mulls allowing human trial

FROM PAGE 1

Medical Research Council (BMRC) a proposal for conducting first-stage human trial of its vaccine candidate, say officials of the firm.

3 VACCINE CANDIDATES
The icddr,b has applied to the BMRC for permission to run third-stage clinical trial of "COVAXIN" developed by Bharat Biotech.

Contacted, BMRC Director Dr Mahmood-uz-jahan declined to comment on the issue.

"It is not ethically right to comment on such research-related issue. You will know when it will be made public."

Meanwhile, the authorities of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) and Anhui Zhifei Longcom Biologic Pharmacy are working to finalise a plan to run last-stage human trial of the Chinese firm's vaccine candidate. The two sides last week agreed to run the trial.

Prof Kanak Kanti Barua, vice chancellor of the BSMMU, told The Daily Star recently, "We have replied to them [Anhui Zhifei]. We will run the trial... It will require time to complete the procedures."

Besides, the Institute of Medical Biology Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences is planning to run last-stage human trial through a private research organisation in Bangladesh, a health official told this newspaper, seeking anonymity.

Bangladesh has so far confirmed purchase of Covid vaccines from two sources. Three crore doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines will come from Serum Institute of India (SII) and another 6.8 crore shots from global

initiative called COVAX.

Recently, the COVAX, co-led by WHO, GAVI, CEPI, offered four lakh doses of Pfizer vaccine to Bangladesh to vaccinate its frontline workers. The Pfizer vaccine needs to be stored at minus 70 degrees Celsius while the SII vaccine can be kept at 2-8 degrees Celsius.

Talking to this newspaper yesterday, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said, "We will take Pfizer vaccine. We have enough storage capacity for that."

Earlier on Monday, Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said the government was exploring the existing storage capacity to that end.

According to health ministry officials, the government is also thinking about allowing private companies to import Covid vaccines to sell those in the domestic market.

'SELECT RIGHT VACCINE'
Experts have called for prompt exploration of sources of those vaccines, which will give the Bangladeshi population herd immunity for a long time and are cost-effective and compatible with the country's cold chain infrastructure.

At a recent discussion, a number of experts said it is uncertain how long the vaccines approved so far will give immunity. Besides, if the novel coronavirus mutates regularly like the influenza virus, there may be a need for regular vaccination.

There should be two vaccination goals -- one is to reduce mortality and morbidity, and the other is to gain herd immunity, they said.

US military leaders issue

FROM PAGE 1

While a number of Trump's cabinet members including acting Defense Secretary Chris Miller condemned the storming of the top US general, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley, was silent until now.

"The violent riot in Washington DC on January 6, 2021 was a direct assault on the US Congress, the Capitol building, and our Constitutional process," the seven generals and one admiral said in an internal memo to troops, adding that the military remained committed to protecting and defending the Constitution.

"The rights of freedom of speech and assembly do not give anyone the right to resort to violence, sedition and insurrection," the memo, seen by Reuters, said.

The military leaders said that

President-elect Joe Biden would be inaugurated on Jan. 20 and become their commander in chief.

"Any act to disrupt the Constitutional process is not only against our traditions, values, and oath; it is against the law."

US officials said Milley had not commented on last week's events because he wanted to stay out of politics.

The silence was in sharp contrast to June, when Milley made a controversial walk to a church with Trump after law enforcement officers backed by National Guard troops used tear-inducing chemicals and rubber bullets to clear the area of peaceful protesters.

Some service members have privately expressed concern that senior leaders did not provide direction in the aftermath of the attack on American democracy on Wednesday.

On Twitter, the head of US forces in South Korea said that what happened occurred in Washington DC on Wednesday was an "attempted insurrection."

"If you are serving in uniform and think it was something else, I would encourage (you) to sit down and read the constitution that you swore an oath to support and defend," General Robert Abrams said.

There has also been a renewed focus on extremism within the US military after the Capitol storming.

The Army told Reuters on Tuesday that it was working with the FBI to see if any attackers were current service members and with the Secret Service to see if any of the nearly 10,000 National Guard troops securing Biden's inauguration would need additional screening.

14 more die, 890 get Covid

UNB, Dhaka

With 890 new Covid-19 patients detected in the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday, the total number of infections in the country rose to 524,910.

As per the latest data, the daily infection rate dropped to 5.66 percent. The country recorded 8.29 percent infection rate on January 10, 7.52 percent on January 4, and 8.18 percent on January 1.

The country's fatality number rose to 7,833 with 14 deaths in the 24 hours. The death rate stands at 1.49 percent.

So far, 3,40,1506 tests, including 16,338 new ones, have been carried out.

The overall infection rate stood at 15.43 percent, the Directorate General of Health Services said.

However, 469,522 patients - 89.45 percent - have recovered so far.

The country's infection number reached the 500,000-mark on December 20. The first cases were reported on March 8. The death toll exceeded 7,000 on December 12.

CASE UNDER DSA

Baul singer Rita Dewan granted ad interim bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka tribunal yesterday granted ad interim bail to Baul singer Rita Dewan in connection with a case filed for "hurting religious sentiment" under the Digital Security Act.

Dhaka Cyber Tribunal Judge Mohammad Ash Sams Joglul Hossain granted bail to Rita till January 27 after she was produced before the court, seeking bail in the case, Shamim Al Mamun, bench assistant of the tribunal, told The Daily Star.

The tribunal on December 2 last year issued arrest warrants against Rita, Shahjahan Kabir and Iqbal Hossain, accepting the probe report of the case. The report was filed by the Police Bureau of Investigation.

Shahjahan is now behind bars, while Iqbal is on the run, the prosecution said.

On February 2 last year, lawyer Imrul Hasan filed the case against Rita with the cyber tribunal. There were three other cases filed against Rita in Dhaka, Chattogram and Jhenidah, said Rita's lawyer Abdullah Al Noman.

The Jhenidah case was dismissed by the district court, but the Dhaka court accepted the case filed by Imrul and issued an arrest warrant on December 2.

A hearing for the other DSA case filed in Dhaka's Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court will be held tomorrow, and the court will decide whether or not to accept the case, her lawyer said.

This means even though Rita received ad interim bail in one case yesterday, she will still need to get bail in two other cases.

The probe report details that Rita was doing a "Pala Gaan" session with fellow artiste Shah Alam Sarkar, where the topic being debated was "Living Beings versus The Greatest". The event was held on the night of December 10, 2019, at Shahjahan's house in Tangail's Kalihati upazila.

Shahjahan and Iqbal had uploaded Rita's songs to their YouTube channels, according to the case documents.

On February 1 last year, complainant Imrul was at home when he came across the video on social media.

"The complainant was extremely angry and hurt," said the PBI report. "And upon finding no way out, the complainant went to Kadamtai Police Station to file the case."

The complainant alleged that Rita was making "derogatory comments" about religion.

The PBI report "investigated the matter" and wrote in their report, "Upon investigating videos of Rita's songs, we have found evidence of the crime. The words she chose to debate this issue hurt the religious sentiment of the audience."

Following the filing of the lawsuit, Rita, along with her two daughters, had posted another video on social media apologising for "causing hurt".

France court probes minister for conflict of interest

AFP, Paris

A French court has launched an investigation into Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti for alleged conflict of interest relating to his time as a lawyer, prosecutors told AFP yesterday.

The Court of the Republic, which deals with cases involving suspected misconduct by sitting cabinet members, launched the probe following complaints by Anticor, an anti-corruption association, and three magistrates' unions.