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Your Right to Know

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"We have achieved success in curbing militancy but there is no room for complacency..."

INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE BENAZIR AHMED



"I will never lose the passion for football, but I have had moments that I did want to stop playing."

BRAZIL AND PSG FOOTBALLER NEYMAR IN AN INTERVIEW WITH GAFFER MAGAZINE



"We have got encouraging and satisfactory feedback results on the first day. This vaccine will indeed be a 'Sanjeevani' (life saver)" in the fight against the virus."

INDIAN HEALTH MINISTER HARSH VARDHAN ON FIRST DAY OF VACCINATION DRIVE

COTTAGE INDUSTRY, SMEs

Tk 2,700cr fresh stimulus unveiled

Package also aims to help ultra poor

REJAUJ KARIM BYRON and WASIM BIN HABIB

With small businesses still struggling to recover from the pandemic-induced economic slowdown, the government has rolled out two fresh stimulus packages involving Tk 2,700 crore to boost the cottage industry and SMEs and expand the social security scheme for the elderly and widows in poverty-stricken areas.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday approved the new schemes also aimed at improving the living standards of rural marginalised people, according to a finance ministry statement.

"The implementation of the new packages will begin soon," it reads.

With these two, the government has so far rolled out 23 bailout packages announced at different times since March last year to absorb the economic shock from the coronavirus pandemic.

The total amount of financial assistance now stands at Tk 124,053 crore, 4.44 percent of the country's GDP.

The approval of the new schemes comes following recommendations from various stakeholders during a series of dialogue organised recently by the finance ministry

on overall aspects of the stimulus packages.

At the discussions, business leaders, government officials and representatives from banks, development partners and agencies suggested expanding the credit coverage through government and semi-government agencies related to the cottage industry and small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

They also recommended steps to improve the living standards of marginal people and expand the social safety coverage for the poor, added the finance ministry statement.

PACKAGE FOR SMES, COTTAGE INDUSTRY

Under the first package involving Tk 1,500 crore, the government will give loans to micro and cottage entrepreneurs through various government and semi-government agencies like the SME Foundation, the BSCIC and Bangladesh NGO Foundation to infuse dynamism into the rural economy amid the pandemic.

Of the amount, Tk 300 crore will be provided to the SME Foundation for expanding its operations for the cottage industry and SMEs alongside helping the

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A boy stands atop a mound of discarded car batteries in Chattogram's Chandanaish upazila. The batteries are collected here and sent to Dhaka where they are sold at Tk 120-122 per kg to be recycled. Handling such discarded batteries carries risk of exposure to hazardous materials like acids, but usually children are tasked with the work without any protective equipment. The photo was taken on Saturday. PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

MC COLLEGE RAPE Charges framed against eight BCL activists

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A Sylhet court yesterday framed charges against all eight accused of a case filed over the gang rape of a woman at Murari Chand (MC) College hostel on September 25 last year.

Sylhet Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal Judge Md Mohitul Haque framed charges against the eight Chhatra League activists, said Rashida Syda Khanom, public prosecutor of the tribunal.

The trial of the case will start on January 24 with recording testimonies of witnesses, the prosecutor said, adding that there are 52 witnesses in the case.

Meanwhile, the tribunal denied bail to accused Arjun Lasker and Mahbubur Rahman Rony and dismissed appeals seeking acquittal of Saifur Rahman, Mahbubur Rahman Rony and Rabiul Islam of the case.

On December 3, Sub-inspector Indranil Bhattacharya, also investigation officer

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Dhaka to have 330 vaccination points

Around 50 hospitals being prepared to start the job in the first week of Feb

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Officials are likely to inoculate Dhaka city residents against Covid-19 at around 330 points in at least 50 hospitals.

Officials said they have trained the vaccinators and procured syringes and safety boxes necessary for the programme.

Officials of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said Dhaka city dwellers will be vaccinated at between 320 and 330 points.

"But inoculation will not begin at every vaccination point on the same day. It will start gradually," a senior official involved with the plans told The Daily Star yesterday.

There will be vaccination points at four government medical college hospitals, 30 private medical college hospitals, and around 20 specialised hospitals and



institutes.

Outside the capital, people will be inoculated at government hospitals and specialised hospitals.

A total of 7,344 teams will be deployed across the country to carry out the campaign. There will be

two vaccinators and four volunteers in each team that will inoculate around 150 people a day. The vaccinators will include nurses, said officials with knowledge of the plans.

The DGHS will hold regular briefings to prevent the spread of rumours, and security measures will be in place during transportation and vaccination.

Shamsul Haque Mridha, member secretary of the National Covid-19 Vaccination Plan, said the number of vaccination points would be finalised in a meeting on Tuesday.

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Number of new Covid cases on decline

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh is seeing a sharp decline in the number of new Covid-19 cases over the past week.

The health authorities announced the detection of 569 new cases in 24 hours until yesterday morning.

During this time, 23 more coronavirus deaths were recorded, pushing up the country's death tally to 7,906.

The mortality rate now stands at 1.5 percent, according to a handout from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With the new cases, the caseload now stands at 527,632. So far, 472,437 of the patients (89.5 percent) have recovered including 681 in those 24 hours.

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REMITTANCE INFLOW

Proactive steps can fetch \$30b a year

Say speakers at a webinar, urge more govt incentives for remitting money through formal channels

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country could receive as much as \$30 billion in remittance annually if proactive steps are taken by the government and other stakeholders, including the banking sector, speakers said at a dialogue yesterday.

They said the use of formal channels to remit money home was still not at the level. The channel also lacked the required "speed" to encourage more remitters to use it and the speakers suggested that further government incentives could encourage them to use the formal channel.

Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, organised the virtual dialogue titled "Recent Expatriate Income or Remittance Inflow: Where is the money coming from?"

Bangladeshi expatriates sent home \$21.75 billion in remittance last year, according to Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training data, which cites Bangladesh Bank statistics.

The amount is a record high and it also defied predictions made at the onset of the global economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.

Addressing the dialogue, Anisul Islam Mahmud, chairman of the parliamentary committee on expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry, said it is possible that the country will receive \$30 billion in

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BANGAVAX VACCINE Permission sought for clinical trial

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Clinical Research Organization has asked for permission to launch a clinical trial of Covid-19 vaccine Bangavax, developed by Globe Biotech Ltd of Bangladesh.

The organisation, in an application submitted to the Bangladesh Medical Research Council (BMRC) yesterday, sought to hold first and second phase clinical trials, said chief investigator of the trial Prof Mamun Al Mahtab.

Globe Biotech got permission on January 6 from the Directorate General of Drug Administration to manufacture the doses needed in a clinical trial.

If permitted, a team of 57 researchers will decide the dosage in the first phase and examine safety and efficacy in the second.

"If it's approved, we will need another permission from the drug administration. We will be able to start the trial in 7-10

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A young boy reaches out for help as he embarks on a balancing act to cross the deep trench by walking across on two narrow planks tied together to form a makeshift, flimsy footbridge. The Dhaka Power Distribution Company dug the trench along the road from the capital's Mohammadpur bus stand towards Bosila in order to lay high voltage power lines. The photo was taken at noon yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

MUNICIPALITY POLLS

AL candidates sweep second phase too

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League candidates clinched sweeping victories in the second phase of the municipality elections. AL men won 46 out of 60 municipalities that went to polls on Saturday, according to the unofficial results announced by the returning officers.

AL mayor candidates in four municipalities -- Kazipur of Sirajganj, Bhangura of Pabna, Pirojpur Sadar and Tarabo of Narayanganj -- were elected unopposed.

Forty-two other AL men were victorious in the polls, marred by stray incidents of violence and irregularities.

AL's arch-rival BNP contenders gained victory in four municipalities and independent candidates in eight. One candidate each from the Jatiya Party and the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal won the elections.

During the first phase of polls on December 28, AL contenders achieved success in 18 municipalities out of 24, BNP candidates in two municipalities and independent candidates in three.

The Election Commission has been holding the municipal polls in four phases due to the pandemic.

Meanwhile, bringing allegations of election manipulation, Kazi Khan, BNP candidate in Gazipur's Sreepur municipality, rejected the results and demanded re-election, reports our Gazipur correspondent.

At a press conference in his main election office in the municipality, he alleged that his polling agents were driven out from the polling centres. "AL men forcibly cast votes by pressing button for boat symbol."

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