

**BANGLADESH UPDATE**



**656**

New cases in 24hrs



**5,29,687**

Total cases



**7,950**

Deaths



**4,74,472**

Recoveries



**2,072,000**

Deaths



**96,845,758**

Total cases

## Include those aged 50

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list, in which frontline health and social-care workers, along with different other professionals, have been included. The list also includes people aged 64 and above, and those under 65 with comorbidity.

Officials of Directorate General of Health Services said they prepared the priority list in line with guidelines from the World Health Organisation and a Scientific Advisory Group of Experts and also taking the current context of the country into consideration.

But experts said people aged between 50 and 63, especially in the Covid-19 red zone districts, should also be vaccinated in the first phase, considering the current Covid-19 situation. They said it would save lives.

DGHS data show more than 80 percent of those who died after contracting the virus in the country were aged over 50, and more than half of the deceased lived in Dhaka, Chattogram, Narayanganj and Gazipur.

Among the 7,950 dead so far, more than 25 percent or 1,994 people were aged between 51 and 60. Of the total 529,687 Covid positive cases, 11 percent belonged to the 51-60 age group, shows the IEDCR website, which contains data of till January 18.

"The existing vaccination plan of the government is good. But maximizing the outcome should be the key. For doing so, the government should include those aged 50 and above in the priority list," Prof Sayedur Rahman Khasru, chairman of pharmacology at the BSMMU, told The Daily Star.

"If we can administer a single dose on those from the most vulnerable age groups in the risky zones, it will protect them, resulting in fewer deaths and infections," he said.

Dr Mushtuq Hussain, a consultant at the IEDCR, said the vaccination plan could be modified considering the availability of vaccines. "The WHO's scientific conference [on Friday] advised the authorities to vaccinate the people with higher risks and in the infection-intensive areas if the number of vaccine doses are limited."

He also said with fewer vaccine shots in hand, the government should be open to inoculating people who came in contact with any positive cases.

"This is called ring vaccination which was applied during the smallpox inoculation campaign," said Mushtuq.

Infectious disease expert Prof Ridwanur Rahman also opined that the people from 50 years of age can be included in the priority list. "People

aged 50 and above can be included in the priority list, if there are necessary supplies. If supplies are limited, the people with comorbidity should get priority," he told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

Health minister Zahid Maleque told reporters on Thursday that the government had decided to increase the minimum age limit for the vaccination to 50 in the priority list.

But a DGHS official, preferring not to be named, said the minister actually asked to include people from the 50-63 age group in vaccination campaign, subject to the availability of eight lakh Pfizer vaccines from the Covax.

Bangladesh is supposed to get 6.8 crore vaccine shots from Covax, a global vaccine alliance. But the authorities have said the country's existing cold chain system cannot support the ultra-sub-zero vaccines like Pfizer, which needed to be stored at temperatures below -70 degrees Celsius.

Dr Shamsul Haque Mridha, line director of Maternal Neonatal Child and Adolescent Health at the DGHS, said they were still not considering to include people aged between 50 and 63 in the priority list for the first phase. "They are not included in the first list of 1.5 crore people," he said.

Shamsul, however, said everything would depend on the availability of the vaccines. "We cannot say right now how many doses we will get apart from those from Serum."

He said a total of 50 lakh people -- drawn from 18 professional and age categories -- would get the first dose of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine in the first month and the second dose eight weeks after the first shot.

Prof Sayedur Rahman, however, recommended increasing the gap to 12 weeks or more from eight weeks. "We will get only 3 crore doses of vaccine in the next six months. If we go for the single-dose policy, we can protect more people. The UK has extended the interval between two doses to 12 weeks. It means they want to give protection to more people -- even if it is for a few months."

Financial Times newspaper of England has also reported that extending the interval could give better immunity in case of Oxford vaccines.

Data from the Oxford/AstraZeneca trials also showed that antibody levels were nearly three times higher in participants who had waited 12 weeks between doses, compared with those where the gap had been under 6 weeks.



A woman counting the money she received as allowance for the elderly people in the capital's Tejgaon yesterday. She said she had to wait for four hours in the queue to receive the money.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## 20 lakh vaccine doses arrive today

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The secretary said refrigerated trucks of the Expanded Programme on Immunization would carry the vaccine to a storage facility in the capital's Tejgaon.

At first, between 400 and 500 people will be given the shots at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Kurmitola General Hospital, Mugda Medical College Hospital and Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital.

"We will observe the recipients for seven days," Mannan said.

Before that, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will virtually inaugurate the vaccination campaign. The date has yet to be fixed, the secretary said.

Some 20-25 health workers or other frontline workers, freedom fighters, and civil society members will be inoculated during the inauguration.

Beximco will deliver the purchased

doses to the EPI storage facilities in districts across the country, the secretary said.

The shots will then be taken to certain upazila-level hospitals using EPI vehicles.

Countrywide inoculation will be launched after the inauguration and the seven-day observation.

"A total of 60 lakh people will be vaccinated in the first month and 50 lakh in the second month. In the third month, the 60 lakh people who received the first shot in the first month would get the second shot," the health secretary said.

**MINOR SIDE-EFFECTS**  
Each vaccine recipient will be kept under observation for 10-15 minutes and if they show any adverse effect, they will be treated at the hospital where they were inoculated.

Director General Prof ABM Khurshid Alam of the Directorate

General Health Services said the Oxford vaccine had only minor side-effects like rash, mild pain and fever.

"In case of any vaccination, there is a risk of anaphylactic shock [a serious allergic reaction]. But we have not heard about this effect in the case of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine," he said.

The health secretary said each vaccine recipient would be followed up via the telemedicine number: 16263.

N M Ziaul Alam, senior secretary at the ICT Division, demonstrated the registration process for the vaccination on a mobile app called "Shuroksha".

Asked whether it would be possible to report adverse effects using the app, Ziaul said the option would be included by the end of this month.

He didn't say when the app would be available to the public.

## Project directors hardly

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Thirteen projects have seen progress less than 25 percent while there was zero implementation in six.

One of the projects is the development of the highway between Rajapur and Patharghata undertaken by the roads and highways department. The project was undertaken in July 2017 and is supposed to be completed by June this year.

The initial cost was estimated to be Tk 35 crore. Later, it was revised twice and the cost escalated to Tk 114.4 crore.

But only 53.09 percent of the work has been done.

Another project was undertaken to develop and widen highways in Barishal. The project was also revised twice and the cost had escalated to Tk 667.34 crore from Tk 75 crore. The project duration was between January 2018 and June 2021.

IMED found that roads were widened without removing electric

poles in some places.

On the other hand, roads were damaged at many places due to excavation of soil from roadsides.

To save Tojumuddin upazila of Bhola from erosion of River Meghna, a project was undertaken in July 2016 by the Water Development Board. The initial cost was Tk 99 crore but it later escalated to Tk 609.38 crore after revision for twice.

So far, 91.81 percent work has been done.

In its visit, the IMED found that low-quality yellow stone chips were used to build blocks to create the embankment.

It has advised that the quality of concrete blocks and geo bags be maintained.

"To make the project successful, it is necessary to ensure dumping of geo bags and blocks in the right quantities at the right places, according to the project plan. Otherwise, there will be no benefit," recommends IMED.

## Tigers return in style

FROM PAGE 1

President Nazmul Hassan. Both sides then showed solidarity with the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, with every player kneeling with one clenched fist raised.

Back to the match, the lack of experience in the West Indies side -- who fielded six debutants -- meant that they had little wherewithal to stage a fightback after suffering early setbacks.

It was left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman who started brilliantly with the new ball and gave the early breakthrough for Bangladesh. The Fizz picked up his first wicket with a beautiful in-swinging delivery to trap Sunil Ambris leg-before on nine. He then dismissed the other opening batsman, debutant Joshua Da Silva, who was caught brilliantly at gully by Liton Das.

Shakib then joined the party, picking up Andre McCarthy and registering the record of taking 150 ODI wickets at home. The left-arm spinner kept hurting the West Indies batting line-up and went on to pick three more wickets at a miserly economy rate with his beguiling mixture of spin and arm balls.

Young pacer Mahmud, after a wicket-less first spell, came back strong in his second spell and removed Powell with a beautiful length delivery to get the outside edge through to the keeper.

Mahmud then followed it up with another wicket in the very next ball to dismiss Raymon Reifer and was on a hat-trick. He went on to take his third wicket, that of Akeal Hosein and ended up with figures of three for 28 from his six overs.

There was a short opening ceremony to mark the 50th year of Bangladesh's independence and both teams lined up together to pay their respects, which was followed by a speech from Bangladesh Cricket Board

President Nazmul Hassan. Both sides then showed solidarity with the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, with every player kneeling with one clenched fist raised.

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## Govt now looking for alternatives

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the [Bangladesh] embassies in this regard. In the present situation, it is not possible to send labourers temporarily to South East Asian countries, including South Korea and Singapore. However, sending workers to Middle Eastern countries has started at the desired level," she told parliament while replying to a query from Jatiya Party MP Shameem Haider Patwari.

About alternative labour markets, the PM said 50 Bangladeshi workers obtained Romanian work visas in October last year and availing of another 260 work visas was under process by the Romanian government.

Hasina said 240 skilled workers were sent to Uzbekistan for the first time on November 7 last year. They are working at a project under an engineering company in Qarshi, Uzbekistan.

"Besides, another 648 Bangladeshi workers will be sent to Uzbekistan. Efforts are underway to export manpower to that country in other sectors."

The leader of the House said there are bright prospects for Bangladesh's labour markets in Africa, specially in Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania and Libya.

She said the government has taken various measures to send back the Bangladeshi expatriates who lost their jobs abroad during the pandemic and could not return to their workplace after getting stuck at home. The

government is making it happen through creating new employment opportunities for the expatriates.

In this connection, Hasina said the government was communicating with foreign ministers of different manpower recruiting countries.

"Importance is being given on three issues -- ensuring minimum food and health facilities for the sacked expatriates, sending them home after paying six month's salaries and allowances and other benefits, and requesting the destination countries to set up Covid-19 recovery and respond fund to create employment and small industries in those countries," she added.

**FINANCIAL SETBACK AVOIDED**

Responding to another query, Hasina said special measures taken by her government in view of the pandemic to protect people's lives and tackle the economic crisis arising from it have helped Bangladesh avoid the global financial setback.

"The government's special measures for tackling the crisis have kept the country's economy normal," she added.

The PM said Bangladesh would be the 25th largest economy in the world by 2035 if its present economic evolution continues, according to the Economic League Table of the British economic research organisation, "Centre for Economics and Business Research".

Hasina said Bangladesh last year registered a 5.24 percent GDP growth

rate. The previous year, the figure was 8.15 percent, which was the highest in the country's history.

She said the government since the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak handled the situation cautiously and that is why Bangladesh has witnessed more success than many others countries in terms of number of infected people, death rate and economic losses.

Talking about coronavirus vaccine, the PM said the vaccine procurement process was underway and the vaccination would start soon in the country.

**FISH PRODUCTION**

Responding to a query from Awami League MP Ali Azam, the premier said Bangladesh has attained self-sufficiency in fish production by boosting up the production by over 50 percent in the last 11 years due to effective and timely measures taken by her successive governments.

"Bangladesh produced 43.84 lakh tonnes of fish in 2019-20 fiscal year which was 62.31 percent higher than that of fiscal 2008-09 [27.01 lakh tonnes]."

Hasina said Bangladesh has improved its ranking to the second place in the world in terms of producing fresh water fish as per the report of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

Now, each person in the country takes 62.25gm of fish daily against the demand of 60gm, she added.

## Biden takes oath as 46th US president

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economic downturn, climate change and racial inequality. He has promised immediate action, including a raft of executive orders on his first day in office.

The ceremony yesterday unfolded in front of a heavily fortified US Capitol, where a mob of Trump supporters stormed the building two weeks ago, enraged by his false claims that the election was stolen with millions of fraudulent votes.

The violence prompted the Democratic-controlled US House of Representatives to impeach Trump last week for an unprecedented second time.

Thousands of National Guard troops were called into the city after the siege, which left five people dead and briefly forced lawmakers into hiding. Instead of a throng of supporters, the National Mall on Wednesday was covered by nearly 200,000 flags and 56 pillars of light meant to represent people from US states and territories.

**'SOUL OF AMERICA'**

Biden, who has vowed to "restore the soul of America," will call for American unity at a time of crisis in his inaugural address, according to advisers.

His inauguration is the zenith of a five-decade career in public service that included more than three decades in the US Senate and two terms as vice president under former President Barack Obama.

But he faces calamities that would challenge even the most experienced politician.

The pandemic in the United States reached a pair of grim milestones on Trump's final full day in office on Tuesday, reaching 400,000 US deaths and 24 million infections -- the highest of any country. Millions of Americans are out of work because of pandemic-related shutdowns and restrictions.

Biden has vowed to bring the full weight of the federal government to bear on the crisis. His top priority is a \$1.9 trillion plan that would enhance jobless benefits and provide direct cash payments to households.

But it will require approval from a deeply divided Congress, where Democrats hold slim advantages in both the House and Senate. Harris was scheduled to swear in three new Democratic senators late on Wednesday, creating a 50-50 split in the chamber with herself as the tie-breaking vote.

Biden will waste little time trying

to turn the page on the Trump era, advisers said, signing 15 executive actions yesterday on issues ranging from the pandemic to the economy to climate change. The orders will include mandating masks on federal property, rejoining the Paris climate accord and ending Trump's travel ban on some Muslim-majority countries.

Although Biden has laid out a packed agenda for his first 100 days, including delivering 100 million COVID-19 vaccinations, the Senate could be consumed by Trump's upcoming impeachment trial, which will move ahead even though he has left office.

The trial could serve as an early test of Biden's promise to foster a renewed sense of bipartisanship in Washington.

Trump issued more than 140 pardons and commutations in his final hours in office, including a pardon for his former political adviser, Steve Bannon, who has pleaded not guilty to charges that he swindled Trump supporters as part of an effort to raise private funds for a Mexico border wall.

But Trump did not issue preemptive pardons for himself or members of his family, after speculation that he might do so.

## 8 more die, 656 infected with Covid in a day

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh saw a daily infection rate of 4.26 percent with 656 new cases reported until early yesterday.

The country recorded a daily infection rate of 5.49 percent on January 18, 8.29 percent on January 14, 8.29 percent on January 10, 7.52 percent on January 4, and 8.18 percent on January 1.

Bangladesh has recorded 529,687 cases so far. And the country's fatality number rose to 7,950 and death rate to 1.50 percent, with eight Covid-19 deaths in those 24 hours, since the first fatality was reported on March 18.

So far, 3,500,667 tests, including 15,410 new ones, have been carried out. The overall infection rate stood at 15.13 percent, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said.

However, 474,472 patients -- 89.58 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.

## HC summons

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ministries, and the office of inspector general of police.

In the complaint, the magistrate mentioned that during the election, he received reports that a group of people were trying to manipulate voters at the centre in the school.

When went there around 10:00am, he saw some people sitting with the polling agents on a long bench inside a polling booth.

He was asking the presiding officer who those people were when the policemen appeared.

The SP approached Mohsin and said, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" according to the complaint that described the SP as "aggressive and rude".

The complaint also said the SP's conduct was a violation of rules.

Mohsin told our correspondent he was advised by the authorities to lodge the complaint.

Contacted, SP Arafat said he would not talk to reporters about the matter.

## BCL men to get

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chancellors and the proctor to the VC's residence on January 11.

They started demonstrations following spreading of news that one administrative official was appointed to the university, defying the government's order that postponed all kinds of appointments to RU until further notice.

On December 10, the government issued the order, following a University Grants Commission probe found that the vice-chancellor and other RU officials relaxed the recruitment rules to appoint the VC's daughter and son-in-law as teachers.

Confined VC Prof Sobhan came to talk to the protesting BCL leaders around 2:00am on January 12.

"You have done enough [protest]. I think people who need to understand got your message," Sobhan said.

"I cannot make everything public, there is a problem if I say everything. But InshAllah I will give the highest priorities on your matter [jobs]. Wait and see," Prof Sobhan was saying during the conversation.

Pointing to BCL activists' opinions that the government cannot halt appointment as RU is autonomous in line with the Rajshahi University-1973 Act, Prof Sobhan said, "We all expect jobs. This is your main demand. You have brought the issue of university act tactfully."

At one point, some of the BCL men shouted how long they will have to wait for jobs.

In reply, Prof Sobhan said he had talked to the official concerned at the Prime Minister's Office about the postponement withdrawal.

"Wait for two or four days. You can wage a movement after that," he said, adding that "you will not miss jobs".

"This is not right I have assured anyone of jobs," Sobhan said when this newspaper contacted with him over phone.

"I have asked them to leave the place and stop the movement and it is not possible to give appointment due to the government's postponement. We are working on how this postponement can be withdrawn," he said.

When this correspondent said The Daily Star has an audio clip of his conversation, Prof Sobhan said, "They [BCL activists] were waging a movement. We say many things so that they call off their movement."

About the assurance of jobs, the RU VC said all the protestors were jobseekers. Everybody gives hope to jobseekers. There were some people who were not BCL men, he said.

Elias Hossain, a former BCL leader and a demonstrator, said, "We did not have any such conversations with the VC."

Meanwhile, Dablu Sarkar, general secretary of Rajshahi city Awami League, held a meeting with VC Prof Sobhan on January 13.

After the meeting, Dablu said the dedicated BCL activists were protesting for jobs after completing their studies.

"Besides the VC, we all, Rajshahi mayor and MPs, will work so that the postponement on recruitment is withdraw ... Once it is done, the door to jobs will be opened for the demonstrators," he added.