

India's gift of 20 lakh vaccine doses

Govt should diligently prepare for its inoculation campaign

THE first consignment of Covishield vaccine from India arrived in Bangladesh on Thursday. India gifted Bangladesh 20 lakh doses of the Oxford University and AstraZeneca developed vaccine, and we would like to thank the Indian government for such display of graciousness. The next shipment of doses bought by Bangladesh is scheduled to arrive on January 25 and will contain 50 lakh doses.

According to the health authorities, at first 400 to 500 people will be given the shots at different hospitals during an initial observation phase. The recipients of the vaccines will be observed for seven days before the government fully rolls out its vaccination campaign. Once the countrywide inoculation begins, a total of 60 lakh people will be vaccinated in the first month and 50 lakh more in the second month. In the third month, the 60 lakh people who received the first shot in the first month would get their second shot. We hope all of this will go smoothly.

However, we must remind the government of the importance of strict monitoring and proper management when it comes to preserving and distributing the vaccines. Those who most require it, such as frontline health workers and the elderly, should receive it first and there must not be any two ways about it. The government must ensure that there is no pilferage and that no vaccines end up in the black market but that every citizen that needs the vaccine gets it through the government system.

There is also the question of safety when it comes to vaccines that have been developed so quickly in the face of a deadly pandemic. The government must monitor those who receive the vaccine particularly in the initial phase, and ensure that there is a support system for them in case of any allergic or other reaction. As we have mentioned in this column previously, the government's vaccination programme is a massive one which naturally involves complex and large-scale logistical matters. In order for it to be a success, the government must remain vigilant at all times and pre-plan every step of the way.

Biden's inauguration a win for democracy

But uniting a deeply polarised US is likely to be his greatest challenge

A MIDST speculations of unrest created by Trump supporters and worries of domestic terrorism, Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on January 20, 2021 in what, in the end, turned out to be a smooth transition of power in the latest presidential elections in the country. In his inaugural speech, President Biden spoke of how democracy had prevailed and made an impassioned call for unity in a deeply divided society, asking all Americans to stand up against extreme and intolerant beliefs and choose to build bridges instead—not only between different communities, but between groups with opposing beliefs as well.

For proponents of liberal democracy and rational thought, not just in the US but across the world, it was a relief to see the end of Donald Trump's controversial term and the right-wing and prejudiced rhetoric that regularly came out of the White House during this period, as well as the continued and dangerous denial of science and reason in the name of "free speech." Many have already spoken of how the Biden presidency heralds the beginning of a new era of liberal democracy that will be more representative of ordinary Americans. While that remains to be seen, the fact that the new US vice-president is, for the first time, a woman and a person of colour, is a symbol of hope for women and minorities all over the world (although it also begs the question: why did we have to wait till 2021 to see such "radical" change in the US?). The new president's immediate actions, which involved removing Trump's infamous Muslim ban and bringing the US back into the Paris Climate Agreement, as well as his strong denunciation of white supremacy during his inaugural speech, all point towards US democracy taking a more hopeful, inclusive and liberal turn.

The fact that we witnessed a peaceful democratic transition, despite Trump's best efforts to delegitimise election results, is also a clear marker of the functional democracy that exists in the US—an example that we should all take heed of. However, the deep-rooted polarisation of US society and the rise of domestic extremism, including anti-immigration and anti-minority sentiments, cannot be ignored. A Pandora's box of racist hatred and intolerance has been opened in the US, and Biden will have to keep his pledges to his minority voters (which include a large Bangladeshi diaspora) and ensure that their rights are protected under his watch. While there is reason to be hopeful, there is also much reason to be cautious, and President Biden's ability to reunite this deeply divided nation will ultimately be the litmus test of his presidency.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Beware of bird flu

An outbreak of the avian influenza known as bird flu is reportedly spreading across multiple districts in neighbouring India. Fortunately, our ministry of fisheries and livestock directed the authorities concerned to take precautionary measures to prevent the spread of bird flu in the country. The ministry also directed them to conduct daily drives to detect it, taking maximum caution in the border districts and intensive supervision on public-private farms.

The authorities should follow up on the overall issue regularly. Should anything happen, we must remain alert so that we can respond to any crisis effectively. Public awareness, especially in the rural regions, is a must. As poultry is part of our everyday lives, we all must remain careful.

Amin Dewan, Dhaka



DIPIKA ROY PRAPTI

picture of the uncertain life of fishermen. Rivers and fish have always been an inseparable part of our existence. A Bengali is nothing if not one enamoured with fish and rice, as the old adage goes. The plight of the fishermen, however, has diminished with the change of time. We are now on the verge of producing smart fishermen in a country undergoing a rapid digital transformation, where it's hard to find someone who neither uses nor is within the reach of a smart mobile phone. It is undeniable that the last two decades have seen a radical shift in this nation's technology industry and how it connects with other industries and even ordinary people. There are more than 161 million mobile phone subscribers in Bangladesh, of whom around 92 million reportedly have access to internet.

The countrywide optical backbone network and connectivity coverage are helping Bangladesh move forward faster. We also have Bangabandhu Satellite-1,

As for digital marketing of fisheries, use of various social media sites such as Facebook has already become popular. The use of mobile apps has attracted the attention of many as well.

Aquaculture 4.0 and the Bangladesh perspective

which is strong enough to reach even adverse, otherwise unavailable and distant corners. Mobile internet, wireless broadband, and fixed broadband are the three forms of internet access empowering approximately 92 million people, 94 percent of whom reportedly rely on mobile networks. And since 2018, Bangladesh has introduced the 5th-generation experimental transmission following the 4th generation, the advantages of which may not take long

upward movement of the fisheries sector in Bangladesh, aided, among other things, by the deft use of information technology.

With the help of technology, field-level scientific and social problems related to fishponds such as lack of oxygen, increase in ammonia, oversupply of food, theft of fish, poisoning of water, etc. can be solved, sitting at home, simply by using real-time and need-based information. Technology can be a real boon to fish

related to fish farming through the use of Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence, machine learning, etc. A digital pathway can modernise and diversify aquaculture production and bring in sizeable profits for all stakeholders.

Among the direct consequences of using technology in fish farming are: increasing fish production, reducing production costs, increasing exports, maintaining fish quality, controlling overfishing in wildlife, and saving endangered species. The entry of related technology can help create new jobs in the market on the one hand, and open the door to new areas of research on the other. But timely planning and decision making are essential in areas such as fish production, conservation of mother Hilsa, raising awareness, etc. Research by home-grown scientists are already advancing the fisheries sector by an average of 5.26 percent per annum (Fisheries Statistics 2016-17). As a result, the Department of Fisheries under the administrative control of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock expects to increase the fish production target from 4.2 to 4.5 million metric tons in 2020-21.

According to Statista 2020, more than 21 billion IoT-connected devices are going to be included in the world by 2025. This will benefit every sector that relies on technology. To keep pace with the transformation, the inclusion of technology in various fields and sectors began in the country since 2009, and we are now on the threshold of reaching the Digital Bangladesh goals. The Covid-19 epidemic has made it clear, once again, how difficult it is to move forward in this day and age without proper use of digital technology.

To advance the fisheries sector in Bangladesh, we need to prepare for what can be called the 4th Fisheries Revolution (or Aquaculture 4.0) in line with the 4th Industrial Revolution. Some existing gaps such as lack of seamless network coverage and proper technological knowledge can be bridged if everyone works with the same spirit from their own position. This would be feasible if experts from various fields such as information technologists, fishermen, ecologists, policymakers and above all the marginal fish farmers work in collaboration.

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Bangladesh is the third leading inland fisheries producer in the world, behind China and India.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

to reach everyone. Once they do, anyone in Bangladesh, sitting anywhere in the country, can easily hope to compete shoulder-to-shoulder with their rivals in the developed world.

The concept of smart agriculture may already be familiar to many thanks to "e-Village", a project of the Centre for Research and Information (CRI). This is the first smart-agriculture innovator in Bangladesh developed by indigenous scientists, where farmers can instantly know the state of their field, sitting at home. Equally, the concept of smart fishing is fast gaining ground, too.

There was a time when people would be surprised by the talk of fish farming or aquaculture in ponds. Today, Bangladesh is the third leading inland fisheries producer in the world, behind only China and India, according to a report of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). This is indicative of the steady

cultivators and fishpond operators. It can also eliminate the need for waiting for so long to find out a solution through laboratory testing of water samples and so on.

As for digital marketing of fisheries, use of various social media sites such as Facebook has already become popular. The use of mobile apps has attracted the attention of many as well. Several government and private mobile apps such as Chingri, BD Fishpedia, Rupali, Fish Bangla, Bangla Fishing Baits, etc. are helping the fish farmers. Besides, some foreign companies, such as XpertSea, which is a Canada-based company, are reportedly going to start experimental technology testing on shrimp farms in Bangladesh soon. The most promising thing in this aspect is that not only foreign firms and researchers, but indigenous researchers are also making progress to solve different concerns

PROJECT SYNDICATE

How to tackle vulnerable countries' triple crisis

World leaders must step up by investing more, investing early, and investing locally

MANISH BAPNA and MUHAMMAD MUSA

THE year 2020 changed everything. The world now faces interconnected health, economic, and climate crises that have no historical parallel. These converging threats affect everyone, but are especially devastating for vulnerable developing countries.

The tragedy is that these countries receive relatively little direct public support to build resilience to climate change, and development assistance is being cut rather than expanded. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres noted at the recent UN Climate Ambition Summit, developed countries are not on track to meet their commitment to provide USD 100 billion per year to support developing countries' climate efforts.

The international community must now show solidarity and help vulnerable countries withstand the multiple threats they face. Doing so is in everyone's interest, because the effects of climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, and economic shocks know no borders.

In 2020 alone, more than 50 million people were affected by climate-driven disasters while also facing the pandemic and economic crisis. From typhoons and cyclones battering Southeast Asian cities to severe droughts devastating African farmers, the consequences were severe. By the end of 2021, the pandemic could drive an additional 150 million people globally into extreme poverty.

Research by the Global Commission on Adaptation shows that every dollar invested in resilience generates up to USD 10 in net economic benefits. Such spending can give vulnerable countries an urgent economic boost during the Covid-19 crisis and improve people's livelihoods.

Many of these states, from Bangladesh to Fiji, are already building resilience to climate threats—but they need more international support to meet the full scale of the challenge. World leaders must, therefore, step up by investing more, investing early, and investing locally.

Although policymakers have so far

mobilised USD 13 trillion for economic recovery, only a very small share of this amount has been spent by low-income developing countries. These economies have been able to allocate just 2 percent of their GDP to Covid-19 response and recovery measures, while wealthier economies have spent 8.8 percent of GDP on average.

Meanwhile, the cost of helping developing countries adapt to climate change will reach an estimated USD 140-300 billion per year by 2030—a fraction of what has been spent on global Covid-19 recovery efforts.



Bangladesh has seen firsthand the benefits of early action to build resilience to climate change.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

This is not the time for rich countries to be stingy. History has shown that when crises hit, governments can provide more resources without fuelling inflation. After the 2008 financial crisis, for example, countries that intentionally ran large budget deficits, such as the United States and China, fared better than those that cut spending. Many studies confirm this positive economic effect.

Moreover, the sooner the international community acts, the better off we will

be. As the Covid-19 pandemic has made crystal clear, it's better and less expensive to invest in preparation today than to wait for the next crisis to erupt. Investments in resilience can mitigate future losses from storms, floods, and droughts, while also creating economic opportunities and boosting social welfare.

For example, making infrastructure more climate-resilient can increase the upfront costs of a project by about 3 percent, but returns four times as much. Likewise, investing in early-warning systems can save countless lives and assets. Spending USD 800 million on

magnitude, hit Bangladesh in May 2020, the death toll was in the dozens.

Finally, when implementing these investments, governments must ensure that funding gets to the local level. Local communities are on the front lines of both the Covid-19 and climate crises, but rarely have a voice in the interventions that most affect them. Direct funding to local and national actors accounted for just 2.1 percent of total international humanitarian assistance in 2019.

Like other resilience measures, investing in local communities delivers multiple benefits beyond just addressing climate risks. In Kenya, a government programme aimed at empowering local governments and communities to strengthen climate resilience has given households greater access to water, higher incomes, and improved food security.

Many solutions exist to get funding to the local level. In 2019, BRAC established the Climate Bridge Fund in Bangladesh to help local nonprofits in communities affected by climate change gain greater access to funding. The programme helps realise locally led climate resilience projects—like upgrading infrastructure in city slums to withstand storms and floods—that might otherwise be overlooked in favour of higher-profile initiatives.

The world can emerge stronger from the interconnected health, economic, and climate crises, but success will require bold, urgent, and far-sighted action. The upcoming Climate Adaptation Summit and November's COP26 climate conference in Glasgow will serve as important checkpoints for the international community. But we cannot wait until then to advance adaptation measures. World leaders must act today to ensure a durable, equitable recovery that supports the most vulnerable populations.

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